

Fall 2008

## Case Study of an Urban Elementary School's Transition from Failing to Distinguished School Status

Carla Brice Ross

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A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S TRANSITION FROM  
FAILING TO DISTINGUISHED SCHOOL STATUS

by

CARLA BRICE ROSS

(Under the Direction of Dan W. Rea)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study seeks to understand how the multidimensional functioning of an urban high-poverty high-minority elementary school changed as it moved from failing school status to distinguished school status and to determine how school change promoted the organizational well-being of the school using a case study methodology. The multidimensional lenses used to view changes at Eagle included school purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions. Using these lenses to view changes provides an explanation of not only how Eagle transitioned from failing school status to distinguished school status, but more importantly, how it has been able to sustain its success over a five year period and beyond.

This case study provides essential elements that emerged to provide a clear picture of how one high-poverty, high-minority urban elementary school bridged the achievement gap between failing and distinguished school status. Findings from the study add to the body of literature about successful educational change in high-poverty high-minority schools. This study has theoretical significance in that it embraces the concepts of educational change theory to understand organizational dynamics that may result in

failing school status and positive school change. The study's holistic approach to examining educational change and school improvement suggests that schools serve a broader purpose than the cognitive focused demands of standardized tests.

INDEX WORDS: Educational change, Change frames, High-poverty elementary schools, High-minority elementary schools, Urban elementary schools

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2008

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## DEDICATION

This retrospective is dedicated to those adults who went the extra mile every day working on the work from bell to bell and to the children, our greatest resource, who benefited from their efforts. Continue to go as far as you can see, making your own trail; following your visions and dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the patience, expertise and guidance of each member of my committee. My committee chair, Dr. Dan W. Rea's professional and intellectual support and his gentle leadership and attention to detail have made this a product that we are all proud of.

I am especially appreciative of research giants Michael Fullan, Andy Hargeaves, Dean Fink, and Deborah Schussler for their willingness to answer my questions and serve as informational resources during this process.

The participants in my research, the administration, teachers, parents and staff of this elementary school all have a very special place in my heart. Telling your story was an honor and a privilege. Thank you for your cooperation, support and time.

I would also like to thank Georgia Southern University and the Department of Curriculum Studies for establishing the MRP (Modified Residency Program). I am a member of MRP-1. Without the MRP, this dissertation might never have been written.

My family and friends deserve medals of valor for their undying patience, unwavering support and willingness to listen as I endlessly chronicled my efforts during this dissertation process. There is no way to thank you or put a value on your belief in me and in what I was trying to do. Your confidence in me and pride in my labors is something for which I will always be appreciative, and grateful. You were and are the wind beneath my wings.



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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## Change Gon' Come

Lyrics by Sam Cooke

I was born by the river in a little tent  
 Oh and just like the river I been a runnin' ever since  
 It's been a long, a long time coming but I know  
 A change gon' come oh yes it will  
 It's been too hard living but I'm afraid to die  
 Cuz I don't know what's up there beyond the sky  
 It's been a long, a long time coming but I know  
 A change gon' come oh yes it will  
 I go to the movie, and I go downtown  
 Somebody keep telling me "don't hang around"  
 It's been a long, a long time coming, but I know  
 A change gon' come oh yes it will  
 Then I go to my brother  
 And I say "brother, help me please"  
 But he winds up knocking me  
 Back down on my knees  
 There been times that I thought I wouldn't last for long  
 Now think I'm able to carry on  
 It's been a long, a long time coming but I know  
 A change gon' come, oh yes it will  
 (www.lyricsondemand.com. Retrieved February 5, 2005).

This study is in keeping with contemporary research that seeks committed praxis and a vision of positive school change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000; Trejos, 2004; Akhaven, 2005). Continued emphasis on what is going wrong in schools overshadows the positive progress being made. A shift in perspective that seeks out positive changes and examines how they occurred brings with it the potential to create positive organizational and personal well-being in schools. "A change gon' come, oh yes it will" (Sam Cooke, n.d.).

There is a growing body of research literature (Carter, 1999; Carter, 2001; Davenport & Anderson, 2002), which dispels the myth that high-minority, high-poverty

schools are necessarily characterized by low achievement. This myth has been perpetuated by low expectations (NCREL, 2003; The Education Trust, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Winfield, 1986) negative stereotypes (Steele, 1997; Osborne, 1999) and cultural assimilation (LaFramboise, 1993; Osborne, 1999), which undermines the achievement of students of color and poverty. Consistent with this literature, the story of one urban high-poverty, high-minority elementary school's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status is told through the voices of those who participated and are still participating in the evolution of its successful learning environment.

Historically, gaps in the academic achievement of African American students, other minority populations and poor students have long been a focus in the education community (Haycock, 2001; Williams, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). Recently, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2002, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) nationalized goals of raising achievement and closing achievement gaps between all school populations (US Department of Education, 2002). The current rapid educational change modus operandi is prompted by the NCLB legislation and the social awareness of the need to close the achievement gaps. Additionally, there is growing awareness that school success is not limited to achievement test scores but includes both academic and social improvements such as purpose, structure, school cultures, leadership roles, relationships between persons in schools, organizational and professional learning and social and emotional development (McNeil, 2000; Fink, 2000; Fullan, 1993, 1999, 2001; Hargreaves, 1997). This is the backdrop associated with systemic changes that play themselves out on the stage called Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym of the school under study) and other schools like it

and the impetus for my study. I am compelled to share what I, Eagle's Guidance Counselor, have learned while experiencing and analyzing the educational change Eagle encountered during its transition from failing school status to distinguished school status.

The importance of this study rests on the multi-dimensional analysis of systemic changes that contributed to sustained academic success and supportive relationships from the 2000-2001 school year through 2004-2005. The school year 2000-2001 is significant since Eagle Elementary was on the failing schools list during the 1998-2000 school years. Eagle was one of the lowest performing schools in the state and in its school system.

Since that time the building has been completely renovated and modernized. Eagle is esthetically pleasing, bright, clean, inviting and well maintained. Student quality work is on display and gives evidence of students who are enthusiastic about learning. Staff members are animated and passionate about their work and interactions with students. They are eagerly engaged in collaborative planning with the purpose of developing their students and themselves. They willingly encourage parents to be active participants in their children's education. Children are engaged in the learning process and anxious to participate in assemblies that showcase their achievements. They implore teachers to include them in spelling bees, Math Fairs, Science Fairs, Social Studies Fairs, Literacy Fairs, Terrific Test Taker assemblies, Math Bowls, Art Fairs, and Choral performances. The culture of achievement success is pervasive throughout the Eagle community. A family or team atmosphere is evidenced in the positive relationships that exist between students and students, staff and staff, and staff and students.

Eagle is constantly receiving visits from educators enthusiastic about the changes that have taken place. Today it is one of the state's distinguished schools. Observations



are made with the intent of attempting replication of these changes in other schools. Students and parents love the school and feel comfortable there. When the public housing complexes closed and families were forced to move, a large number of families incur personal expense for transportation to continue to send their children to Eagle. Students are courteous, motivated, well disciplined and work well together.

I have adopted the change frames criteria for analyzing Eagle's multi-dimensional change. Identifying variables or change frames for studying and framing school change is well documented in the literature as important components of the educational change process (Schussler 2001, Fink 2000; Fullan, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2001, Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, and Hargreaves & Fink 1997). A complex systems theory of explaining educational change (Fullan, 1993, 1999, 2001; Fink, 2000; Hargreaves, 1997) was used to identify key problematic variables/frames in this organizational system that existed at the time the school was labeled a failing school.

The advantage of this multi-dimensional approach is that most other approaches to studying educational change are one-dimensional models that only focus on the cognitive dimension. "Educational reformers want more than improved achievement results. They want deep, powerful, high-performance learning for understanding that prepares young people to participate in today's society" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000, p. 30). A multi-dimensional approach focuses on insightful and mindful learning thereby moving away from centering attention on externally mandated performance results. Sustained educational change necessitates ways to predict and rise above obstacles to maintain change over time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000). Taking a multi-dimensional

approach to change broadens perspective and provides multiple lenses through which schools are able to analyze and cope with change.

For the purpose of this study, I relied on the research of Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink to analyze Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status and to ascertain its organizational well-being. Fullan, Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, is an international authority on educational reform (Fullan, 2003). Hargreaves, editor in chief of the *Journal of Educational Change* is a professor of education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and the author and editor of numerous books on educational change (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, et al, 2001). Dean Fink is an international educational development consultant, former superintendent and principal in Ontario, Canada. He has published numerous books, book chapters and articles on school effectiveness, leadership and change in schools (Dean Fink, personal communication 7-25-05). These three researchers have collaborated with each other and with others in order to investigate the multi-dimensional aspects of educational change.

The study of educational change has been grounded in practical applications since it began in the 1960s. These inquiries have examined the complexity of the change process and suggested the need for an ongoing problem solving approach. Educational change theory provides simplicity and insights for accepting and coping with the apparently intractable problems of educational reform. It shows why a new mindset is necessary for contending with the actual difficulty of dynamic and continuous change (Fullan, 1993).

Fullan (1993) suggests making “the educational system a learning organization” (p. 4), while acknowledging, “that education has a moral purpose to make a difference in the lives of students” (p. 4). Teachers in these learning organizations become researchers and learners. Learning organizations are places that encourage and sustain teachers in making changes for themselves and for their relationships with students. This is an essential underpinning for learning (Hargreaves, 1997). Principals become enablers of shared purpose, shared vision and shared values. Shared purpose gives rise to teamwork and collaboration which encourages individualism and collectivism as essential components for organizational learning. Each individual becomes a skilled change agent with the ability to contend successfully with the forces of change (Fullan, 1993). Educational change theory takes a comprehensive look at the multi-dimensional aspects of change and does not focus solely on cognitive or structural aspects as some theories of educational reform such as the school effectiveness model. “Productive educational change at its core, is not the capacity to implement the latest policy, but rather the ability to survive the vicissitudes of planned and unplanned change while growing and developing” (Fullan, 1993, p. 5).

This approach is relevant to my study and will guide my study in view of the fact that, as a school counselor, I am concerned with the well-being of school individuals and also, just as importantly for the study, with the well-being of the school organization as it deals with educational changes. I am not merely concerned with the average academic achievement of the school organization even though I recognize its importance. I am concerned with the overall development of the school organization as a caring learning community and with its capacity to coordinate meaningful educational change. My

support for and attempts to understand the developmental well-being of my school organization is my value-adding contributions to my school. My holistic perspective is not limited to academic achievement but is concerned with the overall healthy functioning of the school. I work with administrators and teachers to bring about changes in structure and programs, provide staff development, manage resources and provide direct services to students.

For this school achieving against the odds has been an exercise in survival. The transition is rooted in the purpose, emotions, culture, structure, organizational and professional learning and leadership processes of this school. Educational change frames support such investigations. Qualitative research provides an interpretive situational perspective and allows researchers to seek to understand past and on going lived experiences. Further, qualitative research focuses largely on the actions of people and what people say that will facilitate understanding the significance of what has happened and is currently happening (Gillham, 2000).

When considering a methodology for telling the past and lived experiences of those involved in creating an environment and culture of academic achievement and success, I selected the case study methodology. Using case study as a method of evaluating educational environments has gained prominence in recent decades. Two prominent scholars in educational case study are Robert Stake and Jan Nesper.

Case studies occur in natural settings and examine processes. “Yin (1994, p.9) suggests that for “how” and “why” questions the case study has a distinct advantage” (Merriam, 1998, p. 32). Case studies allow researchers the opportunity to view the case from the inside out, to see the situation from the point of view of those involved. Case

studies are the preferred stratagem when the investigator has minimal power over events and when the spotlight is on a recent occurrence (Yin, 2003).

When doing case studies researchers generally gain information from an extensive list of sources of evidence. This study used documentation (school level written reports, school achievement plans, achievement data, and system level school reports), archival records (lists of faculty, organizational records, and service records indicating the number of students served during the transition years), interviews, direct researcher observations, and retrospective researcher reflections (Yin, 2003) as its sources of evidence. The use of several sources of substantiation is a major strength of the case study methodology.

The strengths and benefits of the aforementioned sources of evidence include the fact that they can be examined repetitively; they are unobtrusive, precise and provide broad coverage over time. Interviews focus on the case study topic and provided interviewee's perceived causal inferences. I interviewed two parents, four teachers, an instructional specialist, an assistant principal, and two principals. The parents and teachers were involved at during the "failing school" years and were participants in the transition years. All but two of these individuals continue to render service to the children of Eagle Elementary. The instructional specialist, assistant principal and one principal, now retired, were a part of the transition team. One principal is in his second year as part of the "distinguished school" team.

My motivation in this endeavor is to give power to the voices of the site subjects as they interpret their lived experiences. I have chosen "a single-case study on the grounds of its revelatory nature" (Yin, 2003, p. 42). This method is used to provide a thorough, detailed grasp of Eagle Elementary School's culture and what that culture

means to student achievement and its multi-dimensional organizational functioning. “Here, the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation” (Yin, 2003, p. 41). The ability to inspect various sources of evidence relative to the purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning and emotions of Eagle Elementary during the transition through the collective memories of interviewees and various forms of documentation will serve as strength in this research. Case study methods make this possible.

My intent was to discover how the change process evolved and how change occurred. Most change literature has focused on school restructuring that can be relevant to the majority of schools. Schools having severe difficulty or schools that have been designated as failing, like Eagle, require a specific mindset and a specific set of strategies (Hargreaves, 1997). The use of a case study methodology makes it possible to identify problematic characteristics and active pathologies peculiar to Eagle.

Case studies are descriptive, interpretive, investigative and explanatory. As the researcher I am “...interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28-29). My focus is to provide a holistic, complete description and clarification of the transition process as the end product of my case study. “Case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon” (Yin, 2003, p. 29). The phenomenon under study is how this single educational entity transitioned from failing status to distinguished status. This form of inquiry facilitates understanding and explains the social phenomena of the transition with no disturbance of the current multi-dimensional organizational functioning or well-being of Eagle Elementary (Merriam, 1998).

Human interaction and “human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change—personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 3). My presence as researcher was neither intrusive nor disruptive. I function as a full participant “...who goes about ordinary life in a role or set of roles constructed in the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 79).

### Statement of the Problem

Initially, my concern and inquiry were centered solely on the achievement gap. The achievement gap was defined as the gap over the last five years between Eagle’s failing school and distinguished school status. However, achievement is only one dimension of a complex multi-dimensional problem of how a school changes. The problem requiring investigation, simply stated, is the need to understand how the multi-dimensional organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary appears to have changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status. This case study historically and ethnographically documents how the school purpose, emotions, culture, structure, organizational and professional learning, and leadership changed over a five-year period. Using these lenses to view changes at Eagle explains not only how Eagle got off the failing schools list, but more importantly, how it has been able to sustain its success over a five-year period. There are very few in-depth studies of how elementary schools change over time, especially studies of how schools recover from academic failure and sustain academic success. Previous studies of educational reform have primarily focused on cognitive and structural factors of educational change and have not comprehensively included cultural and social factors (Carter, 1999, 2001; Davenport & Anderson, 2002; Kilgore, 2005; Osborne, 1999).

### Purpose of Study

In 1999, The Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., identified seven high-poverty, high-minority schools whose populations excel academically, irrespective of socio-economic status, race and family conditions. All of these schools “score at or above the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile on nationally norm-referenced exams even though 75% or more of their students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch” (Carter, 1999, p. 12). The Heritage Foundation continues its efforts to advocate for the improved education of the underprivileged. In 2001, an additional twenty-one high-performing, high-poverty schools were identified.

Similar to the research goal of the Heritage Foundation study, my intention is to give a clear picture of how over the past five years one high-poverty high-minority school has bridged the achievement gap between failing and distinguished school status. In contrast to the Heritage Foundation’s broad study of multiple schools at different educational levels, my study provides an in-depth historical case study of a single elementary school. Moreover, the Heritage Foundation study tended to focus narrowly on cognitive and structural school characteristics related to the effective school model (Carter, 1999) while my study focuses comprehensively on the systemic functioning of a singular elementary school. I investigate multi-dimensional school change using the theoretical perspective of educational change as explained by Fullan, Hargreaves and Fink.

This research chronicles and “elucidate(s) a shifting identity, embody(ies) a theme, express(es) a dilemma and establish(ed) a move for change” (He, 2003, p. xxi). The school’s identity has shifted from low achieving to high achieving, from failing to



distinguished. The school's theme and focus is to work as a team to achieve success for all—children and adults. The dilemma is how this shift occurred. The shift concerns changing dysfunctional systems and relationships to well functioning systems and relationships.

“There is an increasingly rich change literature that analyses the complexities of change...There are very few in-depth studies of how schools develop and change over time” (Fink, 1999, p. 270). My interest is not just how school change may have led to higher test scores and Eagle being removed from the failing schools list, but more importantly I am interested in how school change may have promoted the multi-dimensional organizational well-being of Eagle Elementary School including but not limited to its sustained academic success. As a school counselor I am concerned with the meaningful development of school individuals and the meaningful development of the school organization. To that end I looked at well-being as it relates to a sense of meaningful growth and development which includes affective development, cognitive achievements and volitional purpose.

#### Research Goals and Question

The overarching research goal of this study is to understand how the multi-dimensional organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary School changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status. One question drives this search for understanding. This question will provide the springboard for my inquiry.

During the five-year transitional period from failing to distinguished school status, what positive changes in and among the following six areas--purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and

emotional climate—contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School?

This research question focuses on faculty and parents' perceptions of how school changes, in and among the six areas, contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School. It allows the investigation of interconnected pathways of positive school change among the six areas and leaves open the possibility of other relevant areas of positive change. It permits the study of how the pathways of positive school change were initiated and sustained during the five-year period.

In this era of accountability and the pursuit of academic achievement success, Eagle's transition in that direction must be the cover story of the case study. However, I posit, a counter story that requires telling, as well. This is the story of Eagle Elementary rising, like the Phoenix, from the ashes of systemic dysfunction and low achievement. Change occurred with Eagle rising on the strength of relationships built out of the struggle and evolving toward shared vision, identity, and purpose.

High-test scores are not the only way to measure the success of a learning environment. Relatively high achievement and the "getting there" experience appear to have given birth to a community. Community and strong relationships are measures of success. Bridging the gap between disconnected people and formation of the Eagle Elementary School family is a valuable measure of success. As an affective educator, that is a value-adding piece that I find worthy of investigation.

#### Definition of Terms

Academic achievement: Academic achievement is the method used to measure realization of specific educational objectives and outcomes. For the purposes of this study

academic achievement is expressed in terms of school performance on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). The CRCT assesses mastery of the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): To meet AYP Georgia schools must test 95% of all students. Schools must meet or exceed Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) percentages relative to student proficiency on state assessment instruments in Reading, English/Language Arts and Mathematics. Schools must meet attendance targets. The State sets the minimal student performance levels of improvement (Retrieved April 2, 2005, Web site: [http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/support/plan/nclb/ayp\\_faq.asp](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/support/plan/nclb/ayp_faq.asp)).

Achievement Gap: For the purposes of this study the achievement gap is defined as the gap over the last five years between failing school status and distinguished school status.

Distinguished School Status: Recognition is based on the number of consecutive years a school makes AYP after meeting AYP requirements for three consecutive years. Schools receive recognition certificates; grant funds that range between \$40, 000 and \$51, 615, and invitations to the Georgia Department of Education Schools of Excellence Celebrations. Schools are eligible to make application for Georgia School of Excellence status.

Change Frames: Conceptual criteria for analyzing school change (Fink 2000 & Hargreaves & Fink 1997). This study will use six change frames for viewing school change: structure (utilization of time and space in schools and methods of defining responsibilities and roles), culture (shared sense of direction and responsibility, source of unity, how things are done), emotions (how people feel), purpose (clear well defined and

accepted mission), organizational & professional learning (how school personnel learn to deal with changes being implemented), and leadership (“...the formal and informal leaders who must foster organizational development and learning, and also preserve and encourage the kinds of relationships within a school that promote the capacity to respond to change” (Fink, 2000, p. 8).

Failing School Status: Distinction based on Eagle meeting three of nine top priority student performance goals for the 1998-2000 school years as documented in the 1999-2000 school report published by Eagle’s system Department of Research, Planning and Accountability. See Appendix A.

Organizational Well-Being: The balanced and synergistic interaction of the multiple dimensions of an organization such as task achievement, emotional climate, and moral purpose.

Individual Well-Being: The balance and integration of the multiple aspects of personal being such as cognition, emotion, and volition.

Student Performance Goals: State of Georgia goals for student performance are as follows: to decrease the percent of students not meeting standard in Reading and Mathematics on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, to increase the percent of students exceeding standard in Reading and Mathematics on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, and to decrease the percent of students absent 15 days or more during a school year.

### Significance

In an area lacking in-depth research studies, this study makes a contribution to understanding how an elementary school may transition from failing to achieving.

Moreover, this study has theoretical significance in that it embraces the concepts of educational change theory to understand organizational problems that may have resulted in the initial failing school status of this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school. A change frames approach offers a multidimensional lens that makes examining and analyzing change possible.

This study's holistic approach to examining educational change and school improvement suggests that schools serve a broader purpose than the limited cognitive product focused demands of standardized tests. This broader process focused purpose includes personal goal setting, development of social skills, development of life-long learners and achievers, and development of citizens. The foundation for future academic success is built in schools as are learning dispositions.

Data reveals that barriers and/or positive facilitators to high student achievement rest in how this school designs curriculum and instruction, assigns instructional time, expresses levels of expectation, provides support for struggling students, holds all stakeholders (teachers, administrators, students parents, local educational agencies, community agencies) accountable and uses assessment as a diagnostic tool to guide and inform instruction. Failure to achieve goals can be costly and may require reframing policy discussions and future curricular development.

One quality core curriculum standard for Guidance Counselors in Georgia schools requires that counselor activity be value adding to the students' understanding of the benefits of educational achievement. This study proves significant for practice as it provides data to better define the role of Counselor leadership in the area of social support as that support relates to student achievement. This role may enhance the overall

development of students and school personnel. The role of the Guidance Counselor is changing. We are becoming educational leaders, team builders, facilitators, advocates, collaborators and users of assessment data. The need to be more value adding to the success of the total school program requires us to be more than just certified caring, nice people. Counseling programs must be connected to the new mission of schools. This mission is to educate all students to high standards.

The significance for practice extends to building administrators and teachers as well. The study suggests that leadership is not just for administrators. “The concept of instructional leader is critical to the principalship, but cannot be fully enacted by one individual” (Flood, 2004, p. 56). A principal whose focus is ensuring meaningful learning for teachers and students contributes to the evolution of a high functioning learning environment. School faculties inclined to share responsibility, decision making and authority have the capacity to develop learning collaboratives. Collaborative teams of teachers who nurture each other’s professional growth have the capacity to share leadership. This synergistic approach provides support for the growth of a professional learning community as well as a learning community for student development.

This historical case study proves significant for social issues and action in that it may motivate stakeholders to recognize and revisit school reform as well as develop appropriate praxis toward social reform both inside and outside schools. Data validates supporting multidimensional development for all persons in schools as a way of designing positive educational change. This inquiry addresses systemic educational change that may have created life long adult and student learners and achievers as Eagle transitioned from failing to distinguished school status.

### Researcher's Prospective

I am a counselor by training as well as vocation. Becoming a qualitative researcher was as natural, for me, as a bird taking flight, “since qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne, 1999, p. 1). Counselors seek to assist their storytellers in making sense of their lived experiences in order to make positive, healthy decisions and choices regarding those experiences. Counseling is filled with ambiguity, an occasional lack of structure, the need for sensitivity, and a developed ability to be perceptive as is qualitative research. As a counselor, I must go where situations, information and contexts take me.

I have been an educator since the 1971-1972 school year. I have served Georgia's children as teacher, administrator and counselor. I have rendered guidance and counseling services to Georgia's children since the 1988-1989 school year. Prior to 1988-1989, my experiences were in school systems with few or no minority children. I have on several occasions been one of two or three minority educators in a school. Since the 1998-1999 school year, I have served the children, families and staff at my present research site. I have interacted with these persons and established viable relationships with them. I have been a part of the reality of this high-minority, high-poverty school.

I have seen my research site transition from the governor's list of failing schools in 1998-2000 to a school where the staff has received bonus checks three out of the last four years for providing quality instruction that resulted in meeting our superintendent's achievement targets. We are meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards each year and the school has been tagged a “distinguished school” in Georgia. I chartered a Junior Beta Club, the first scholastic service honor society children can be a member of,

for high-achieving 5<sup>th</sup> graders and volunteered to be the gifted eligibility team chair when I noticed limited efforts to encourage children to aspire beyond in-house academic recognition initiatives. I began inducting worthy students in the Junior Beta Club and overseeing, encouraging and soliciting referrals of children to Program Challenge, our systems gifted program.

As an advocate for children, my perspectives about the ability of Eagle's children to meet and exceed standards may have skewed my vision. As a counselor and not a classroom teacher, I have been sheltered from the day-to-day difficult tasks associated with the need to directly assist students in meeting mandated academic achievement standards. I can focus on providing children with transformational experiences, personal growth experiences and mindful learning experiences. I am not limited to concerns about cognitive development. I can also be in relation with students, staff, parents and school system administrators without typical limitations. I am seen as a support to the total program and never an advisory seeking to evaluate or judge. I am seen as an established insider with understanding of what Eagle is about. I am a part of the foundation that began the positive educational change process.

Being in the eye of the storm can cloud ones vision by shielding ones perceptions away from possible negatives. My closeness to the situation makes me biased. I am admittedly a subjective researcher. In his discussing of learning qualitative inquiry, Wolcott (1994), asserts that "the social nature of fieldwork fosters involvement (p.405)." My inquiry takes place in a setting where involvement came first. As a qualitative researcher I endeavor to draw meaning out of the personal narratives and lived experiences of research participants in this setting, the change process in the setting and



the ways and places in which they intersect. This qualitative dissertation is in part a “personal narrative of my connections to the research” (Glesne, 1999, p. 1). It is, in fact, based on my investment in the qualitative research process.

I am passionate about student achievement particularly in high-poverty, high-minority schools because, 50 years after *Brown vs. Board of Education* children, are still being cheated as they experience unequal education and are ignored as they succeed against the odds. I am passionate about meaningful relationships between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers, support staff and teachers and students, building administrators and parents. Consistent with the aforementioned relationships is an atmosphere of trust that produces a culture of justice and caring. In such an atmosphere change is possible.

As a school counselor, I am concerned with the meaningful development of school individuals and the meaningful development of the school organization. An important part of this meaningful development is the development of the capacity to deal meaningfully with change. Change and demands for reform can be overwhelming and frustrating at the individual and organizational levels. School individuals may not be able or willing to cope with the demands for change. A school organization may be dysfunctional because it is not meaningfully coordinating the multiple dimensions of change; the multiple change frames may be working against each other and undermining meaningful change. A healthy, well-functioning organization coordinates the change frames in mutually supportive ways to develop the capacity for meaningful change. A well-functioning organization does not merely change or recover from failure; it is able to sustain and deepen meaningful change; it is able to develop further the capacity for

change; it is able to learn how to deal with change and to find a meaningful purpose for change.

As I interpret it, competence is our cognitive capacity, relatedness is our emotional/social capacity, and autonomy is our volitional capacity. When all three capacities are fully functioning and meaningfully coordinated, well-being is experienced. In a social organization such as a school, organizational well-being is experienced when the collective capacities for achieving tasks, connecting emotionally, and making purposeful decisions are fully functional and mutually supportive of meaningful growth and development.

#### Outline of Chapters

This endeavor consists of five chapters: an introduction, a review of the relevant literature, an explanation of the methodology, a presentation of the collected data, and an summary of the findings which will include discussion and recommendations. Chapter I provides personal experiences that give rise to a passion that makes this research significant for me. Second, Chapter I explains the need to understand how Eagle Elementary School may have changed its multidimensional organizational functioning as it transitioned from failing to distinguished school status. Finally, Chapter I validates the need to address systemic educational change that leads to organizational school well-being including but not limited to school achievement. Chapter II provides a theoretical perspective of educational change, explains and operationally defines the multidimensionality of educational change and explains the historical development of educational reform and changing conceptions of educational change. Chapter III lays out the theoretical framework and the method of inquiry for this research. The chapter

includes a site description, outlines how participants were selected, profiles interviewed participants, and explains the types of collected data. Chapter IV presents the data collected from participant interviews, archival documents, school achievement plans and my personal journal reflections in retrospect. Chapter V will reveal and thrash out implications, discussion and recommendations resulting from the research.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

An obvious limitation of this study is my connection to and relationship with interviewees. In an effort to please me and help with my endeavor they may have been disposed to make comments in the taped interviews that they thought I wanted to hear. Since all the interviewers are different I may have been limited in making a connection between the interviewee's perspectives and mine. Each of these is beyond my ability to control. As a licensed professional counselor, I am acutely aware of and sensitive to interactions and relationships helping professionals can develop with people. Consequently, these relationships do not limit my ability to interact professionally with interviewees in a way that contributes to the authenticity of the research process, interview data collection and the completion of this dissertation effort.

The role of the qualitative researcher is sometimes interpreted as that of a "translator of culture" (Glesne, 1999, p. 156). "To the contrary, qualitative researchers are interpreters who draw on their own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions and collected data to present their understanding of the other's world" (p. 157). I draw from my lived experience in the setting, my knowledge of the setting, and the results of the data collection to layout my understanding of the world known as Eagle Elementary. My role, as a qualitative researcher, is that of a maker of meaning as my lived

experiences and the data collected interact with the lived experiences of the research participants.

There are a variety of methods for measuring student achievement; however this study is limited to results of the Georgia Criterion-Reference Competency Tests given to fourth graders in the state of Georgia. Measures of academic achievement are not available for other grade levels. The study is limited to one high-poverty, high-minority elementary school.

This study is limited to the documents, archival records, and information provided by building administrators, the school district, teachers, staff and selected parents, as well as information garnered during classroom observations. Data can only be understood within the context of the study. The design of the study maximizes understanding of a singular elementary school.

This study is delimited to a selected subgroup of the staff of an urban elementary school that have been staff members since the 1999-2000 school year or who have been on staff since the school attained distinguished status.

### Summary

The overarching research goal of this study is to understand how the multidimensional organizational functioning of Eagle elementary School changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status. The focus is to determine what has worked in this elementary school over the past five years to close the achievement gap between a failing school and a distinguished school and to determine how school change has promoted the organizational well-being of the Eagle Elementary School family. Sam Cooke's (Cooke, S. (n.d.) ([www.lyricsondemand.com](http://www.lyricsondemand.com). Retrieved February 5, 2005),

words of “Change gon’ come” ring true; my challenge was to explain how. The study uses an historical case study methodology supported by educational change theory to identify problems that created a context of low-academic achievement and failure and subsequently the evolution of a distinguished school.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The evolution of what is known about contemporary educational change spans approximately forty years. Our perception and understanding of change in multifaceted organizations, in general, and in schools, specifically, has developed into rather refined models that look at change from multiple dimensions (Senge, 1990). This chapter grounds and provides insight for the present study of a high-poverty, high-minority elementary school that transitioned from failing school status to distinguished school status. This chapter has five main sections. First it explains the historical development of educational reform and changing concepts of education change since the 1960s. Second, it addresses the meaning and underpinnings of educational change by discussing collective theoretical perspectives developed by Michael Fullan (1993, 1994, 2001, 2003), Andy Hargreaves (1999, 2000, 2004), Dean Fink (1999, 2000) and Fink & Retallick, (2002). Third, it examines literature relevant to the multidimensional aspects of educational change. I clarify and operationally define six educational change frames: school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions. Fourth, the chapter examines some comprehensive school reform models that are relevant to the present study. Fifth, the chapter reviews qualitative studies of high-poverty, high-minority elementary schools that have attained high academic achievement.

#### Historical Perspective of Educational Change

This literature review segment provides a broad chronology of the challenging nature and remarkable potential of educational change (Fullan, 1993). The history of

American education has changed tremendously since its inception during the seventeenth century. Education for all Americans has been challenging. The paradigm shifts responsible for these changes are displayed throughout America's history books. Events in history impact societal change and societal changes impact education. Schools are microcosms of society. Historical and social events have resulted in a myriad of changes in schooling and its impact on the lives of children and greater society.

Experimental inquiry emphasizing change in American education began with studies conducted at Teachers College in New York between 1930 and 1950 (Mort, 1963). Pre-Sputnik, educators engaged in educational changes that were infrequent and periodic. These changes addressed how subjects were structured, which grade levels would be grouped into different school types or how children would be grouped in schools. The groupings were according to race, ability and/or gender (Fullan, 2005).

Recent educational change history has its roots in the reaction of the United States to the launching of Sputnik by the then Soviet Union in the late 1950s. Public schools were blamed for the nation's inability to be the first to enter outer space (Bernard & Mondale, 2001). "Congress responded to *Sputnik* by passing the National Education Defense Act in 1958 which provided federal funding for graduate students of mathematics, sciences, and foreign languages, as well as money for new school construction" (p. 69). This legislation placed growing emphasis and importance on education. The federal government backed and supported projects for curriculum development and teacher training. "...The U. S. federal government launched a large-scale national curriculum reform series of initiatives in the late 1950s and through the 1960s" (Fullan, 2001, p. 5). With this emphasis on technical excellence in mathematics

and science came the development of bigger schools. “How else could we offer physics, advanced math and several foreign languages and still be financially and intellectually responsible? Further, an expanding population required new and larger facilities” (Noddings, 1992, p. 3). Teaching was driven by behavioral objectives.

Fullan (1991) noted that each decade seems to have a new approach or perspective on the way to manage changes. During the sixties, there were changes in the economy, and schools place growing importance on technology. Schools continued to be sites for selection and training individuals for specific career areas, also known as tracking or sorting. School-related research became goal oriented with school functioning as the end product (Murphy & Louis, 1999).

“Another major force for reform around the Western world in the 1960s was the various forms of civil rights movements, pin pointing scores of inequities” (Fullan, 2001, p. 6). The crusade for equal education and the need for access to national, economic and social life gave rise to the Civil Rights Movement. One such related civil rights event impacting educational change in the 1960s and 1970s was the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* decision rendered by the U. S. Supreme Court which stated: “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 138). This was the first blow to segregation in the United States and its schools. “The education system was thought to be one of the major societal vehicles for reducing social inequality” (Fullan, 2001, p. 6).

President Lyndon B. Johnson, a former schoolteacher, championed the cause of impoverished children. “Johnson believed that an equal chance at education meant an equal chance at life” (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 146). President Johnson sought to



provide an equal education to all children when he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act prohibited racial discrimination in all programs receiving federal funding, including schools. Discrimination and/or segregation in schools would result in a loss of federal funds.

This Act also included the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provided grants to K-12 schools that served children in low-income families. This Act also provided specific aid to disadvantaged children. His actions resulted in 91% of southern Black children attending integrated schools by 1972 (Mondale & Patton, 2001). Later, Dean Fink suggested this as an opportunity for society, but particularly, educators to experience and develop the capacity to cope with change. This attempt to change education for the benefit of children in the sixties did not lead to large-scale improvement in schools. “The single most positive result of the change efforts of the sixties is that we learned that we don’t know how to change educational institutions” (Wilson, 1973, p. 5).

The 1970s implementation of change that grew out of the legislation of 1964 brought limited change. Change did not make its way into the classroom itself. Reform was failing (Fullan, 2001). “Putting ideas into practice was a far more complex process than people realized” (Fullan, 2001, p. 5). Some ideas were unrealistic and unwise to implement. Others were inappropriate and unsuitable in some communities (Fullan, 2001). “Policymakers who try to change schools without considering the dynamics of change within schools, and the unique contexts of schools, are wasting a lot of peoples’ time and energy...” (Fink, 2000, p. 3). The 1970s concluded with a sense of disappointment about the prospect of improvement in schools (Murphy & Louis, 1999).

The 1980s concept of the educational change process was uncomplicated--the watchword became accountability. President Reagan suggested that the Johnsonian era's attempt at civil rights enforcement had hurt basic education with its efforts to make schools the vehicle for correcting our nation's historic injustices (Bernard & Mondale, 2001). The release of *A Nation at Risk* by the U.S. Department of Education in 1983 ...blamed public schools for America's difficulties in competing with Japan and West Germany in world markets. The allegedly poor academic quality of American public schools was seen as the cause of lower rates of productivity ...as well as the declining of the United States in technological development. (Spring, 2001, p. 431)

The actions of the Reagan administration kept education alive as a national issue. "As power over education shifted back and forth between state and federal agencies, the power of local school boards over education declined" (p. 431). Emphasis on educational change was being forced from the outside, "...through changes in social consensus about what schools "should look like," rather than generated from within, through organizational decision processes" (Murphy & Louis, 1999, p. 253). This paradigm shift resulted in the business community's involvement in the goal setting aspect of education in the United States.

The effective schools movement originated as a quest to distinguish successful schools from those that were not successful. Studies of high-flying schools focused on variables that contributed to the academic productivity of high-poverty, high-minority schools. Edmonds (1979), credited with being the "father of effective school research" (Gibbs, 1989, p. 5), defined an effective school as one which poor and minority students

score as high as middle-class students on basic skills tests. Effective schools are acknowledged as schools with strong direction, frequent monitoring of students' progress, high expectations and requirements for all students; and a focus on teaching essential skills to all students (Edmonds, 1982). The effective school model focuses on cognitive aspects of educational reform and has been used to give details regarding the development of learning communities (Schussler, 2003).

In Schussler's 2003 discussion of schools as learning communities she identifies the multidimensional nature of learning communities and criticizes the single dimensional nature of the effective schools model. "The main problem is that an effective school was defined by one fixed dimension, academic achievement" (p. 129). Declining achievement and failing schools are multifaceted problems that cannot be examined through the single dimension of standardized test results. There are additional dimensions that impact what schools actually do and how, which necessitate investigating educational reform from a multidimensional perspective. "The learning community perspective scrutinizes not only the outcomes of these dimensions, but also the processes through which these dimensions are made manifest" (p. 130). Similarly, educational change frames identify lenses through which educational change can be viewed and the processes of change are made manifest.

"The late 1980s and early 1990s saw increasing interest in examining schools as caring institutions; democratic communities; and communities of learners, leaders, and professionals" (Kratzer, 1997, p. 347). Kratzer (1997), Noddings (1988, 1992), Scheurich (1998), and Hargreaves (1997) see nurturing and developing children as important component of schooling. They challenge schools to provide students, parents,

teachers and school administrators with a sense of purpose and belonging. Additionally, they suggest that a universal quality of caring can positively impact decision-making and direction in schools. Policymakers, in contrast, argue that efficiency and effectiveness develop as a result of tight controls, high standards, and competition (Kratzer, 1997).

Historically, learning communities appear to be the latest model of educational change and are consistent with Fullan's Theory of Educational Change. The conceptual model of learning communities acknowledges and allows researchers to investigate the multidimensional nature of schools (Schussler, 2003). As conceptualized, learning communities support student development not just cognitively, but affectively and ideologically (Schussler, 2003). A fully functioning learning community offers students a challenging curriculum (cognitive dimension), a supportive social climate (affective dimension), and a common school identity (ideological dimension).

The cognitive dimension of a learning community reveals how and to what extent a curriculum is rigorous and learning is challenging. In a fully functioning learning community rigor accentuates individual student learning and how the process of learning occurs. Every student has an opportunity to achieve his or her highest potential. Concern with how students learn creates a constant need for differentiated instruction. "Changing the education environment to one that sets high expectations for all students, rather than providing remediation, is key to diminishing vulnerability" (Hummel & Steele, 1996, p. 28). Teaching and learning are treated as highly personal and social processes" (Schussler, 2003, p. 507). Teaching and learning are adaptable and continuously changing.

The affective dimension of a learning community reveals how and to what extent a learning community is socially supportive. According to Schussler (2003), “The learning community construct proposes two affective dimensions that a good school encompasses: interpersonal relationships and caring. One of the themes that characterizes a group as a community is its distinctive patterns of activity and interaction” (p. 510). Meaningful relationships between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers, support staff and teachers and students, building administrators and all stakeholders makes it possible to set up a positive learning environment. Consistent with the aforementioned relationships is an atmosphere of trust that provides student support and a culture of justice and caring. Such an atmosphere sets up opportunities for academic success. This is particularly significant in elementary schools where students spend the lion’s share of their day with one teacher. The foundation for future academic success is built here as are learning dispositions.

The ideological dimension of a learning community reveals how and to what extent a school shares a common identity and purpose. Schussler (2003) suggests that in order, “to foster academic rigor and beneficial relationships marked by caring, the school must be structured in such a way as to incorporate those goals into their values, vision and purpose” (p. 514). The vision and shared purpose of a school must be clear for all stakeholders. Knowing what the school stands for, where it is going, and how it plans to get there impacts buy in. This is the area of most difficulty in terms of establishing learning communities. School systems are bureaucratic and are often full of constraints. What the community of learners, educational professionals, and surrounding community come to value, as processes of schooling will be the ties that bind. “One of the most

important characteristics for the viability of a learning community is a clear sense of values that defines the group”(p. 516). Students must feel valued and accepted. They need to feel as if they bring something to the table and that the contribution is of value. “We should do everything possible to make school a welcomed part of growing up” (Goodlad, 1984, p. 328).

Being mindful of the purpose of schools and schooling and emphasizing the need for development of personal agency for all students helps in the development of a “...more holistic view of schools, defining a good school not just by the cognitive dimension of academic achievement, but also through ideological and affective dimensions” (Schussler, 2003, p. 411). Schools become dynamic and not static when students are disposed to make connections to content, to adults and peers who work with them in learning content and the aims and purposes of the school.

The 1990s brought a movement toward wide-ranging school improvement efforts known as the Comprehensive School Reform Movement (CSR). This initiative wanted to establish and sponsor groups that could design strategies and materials that would create high-performing schools.

President William Clinton signed the Goals 2000: The Educate America Act in March 1994. This act was designed to assist states and communities with their efforts to improve education and guarantee that all children reach high academic standards. States and school districts were encouraged to plan purposefully for school change in that direction. This act resulted in the “results-focused comprehensive effort known as standards-based education reform. Standards-based reform drives institutional changes toward improved teaching and learning and high student performance by connecting

otherwise fragmented systems” (U.S. Department of Education, April 30, 1998). Interestingly, there was no consensus on what students needed to achieve. States and school districts had to define the target information children should know and what they ought to be able to do, thereby providing the focus or target of educational efforts and systemic structures.

George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law in 2002. NCLB reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 to continue to provide supplemental resources to schools serving low-income students. The intent was to provide quality education to all children. NCLB states, “The themes of accountability, choice, and scientifically based research drastically change the roles and responsibilities of the education system at the state, district and school levels to enable educators to meet the needs of all children” (Overview Document, compiled by K. Wong, A. Nicotera and J. Manning, September 2002.). The heart of the NCLB legislation is that every child in every school must achieve at grade level in basic subjects, particularly reading and mathematics.

James Kim and Gail Sunderman (2005) have determined that the accountability provisions of NCLB bring educational equity into question. They register concern around the fact that reliance on mean proficiency scores places high-minority, high-poverty schools at a disadvantage. Furthermore, NCLB also requires that all subgroups meet identical goals. President Bush and Congress have championed the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements. Doing this mandates that “AYP requirements would be the central mechanism for improving school performance and the academic achievement of different subgroups of students” (Kim & Sunderman, 2005, p. 3).

The Brown decision and Johnson's ESEA in 1964 were attempts to help low-achieving, high-poverty; high-minority schools close achievement gaps. NCLB is a reauthorization of Johnson's ESEA. NCLB provisions were intended to close achievement gaps between disadvantaged high poverty minority students and their more advantaged non-minority peers.

Ken Meyer, a George W. Bush appointee to the U. S. Department of Education acknowledged, "The achievement gap has not closed and is not closing." Meyer works closely with state education officials across the country on the implementation of NCLB at the state level. Meyer explained that reauthorization of the 1965 version of the Elementary and Secondary Act occurs every seven years. Clinton reauthorized in 1994. In 2001 Bush decided to reconstruct the bill. Meyers denied the one size fits all notion and lack of flexibility of NCLB and cites *Brown v Board of Education* as the precursor to the 2002 Act. He insisted that there has been a 68% increase in federal dollars to Georgia to fund NCLB and vehemently denied the under funding allegations made by Congressman Collins and Congressman Scott.

David Marshak's 2003 Phi Delta Kappan article titled *No Child Left Behind: A Foolish Race Into the Past* upholds the skepticism. According to him the NCLB Act, does not prepare all students for the future, it merely returns to the practices of the Industrial Age when curriculum was limited and children were sorted through the use of standardized testing. Jerry Aldridge (2003) criticizes NCLB for holding schools accountable before holding parents accountable. He describes NCLB as a "crazy horse galloping full speed toward a cliff" ( p. 44).



How are the needs of all children met when Milton Schwebel (2003) clearly identifies three distinct school systems in America? Each system has a distinct proposed design to maintain the status quo and keep the current Anglo-American canon intact. “The different purposes of the three school systems--the first produces leaders, the second reliable workers and the third a marginalized population--are reflected in the characteristics of schools” (Schwebel, 2003, p. 45).

NCLB upholds and to an extent legitimizes the three systems, calling them levels of achievement, and in my estimation allows them to continue through 2015. I posit that NCLB lacks consideration for children with learning or physical disabilities. NCLB requires no accountability for parents and places unrealistic emphasis on test scores. My work with marginalized high-poverty, high-minority populations makes this stance totally unacceptable. The information sought about change frames in a high-poverty, high-minority elementary school that has transitioned from failing school status to distinguished school status can add to the body of knowledge about sustained positive educational change.

#### Theoretical Perspective of Educational Change

Michael Fullan (1993) tells us that solving the problem of change is impossible. He suggests that what is required is that we proactively and purposefully coexist with change. This perspective impacts how we react to and think about educational change. According to his (1993) theory of educational change, change is a socially complex process and cannot be reduced to a checklist; it is an emergent, interactive, multi-dimensional process. A discussion of educational change theory is essential to my

research as it supports the multi-dimensional approach this study uses to examine Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status.

“Educators have always had to engage with educational changes.... But other than the last three decades or so these changes were infrequent and episodic and they never...affected or ...addressed the core of how teachers taught” (Cuban, 1984 in Fullan, 2005, p. vii). The study of educational change has been grounded in practical applications since it began in the 1960s. These inquiries have examined the complexity of the change process and suggested the need for an ongoing problem-solving approach Educational change theory takes a comprehensive look at the multidimensional aspects of change and does not focus solely on cognitive or structural aspects of change as does the effective schools model. Change frames provide conceptual criteria for analyzing school change (Fink, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, 1997). Educational change theory provides simplicity and insights for accepting and coping with the apparently intractable problems of educational reform. It shows why a new mindset is necessary for contending with the actual difficulty of dynamic and continuous change (Fullan, 1993).

Fullan (1993) suggests, “The educational system is a learning organization” (p. 4), while acknowledging, “that education has a moral purpose to make a difference in the lives of students” (p. 4). Teachers in these learning organizations become researchers and learners. Learning organizations are places that encourage and sustain teachers in making changes for themselves and for their relationships with students. This is an essential underpinning for learning (Hargreaves, 1997). Principals become enablers of shared purpose, shared vision and shared values. Shared purpose gives rise to teamwork and collaboration, which encourages individualism and collectivism as essential components

for organizational learning. Each individual becomes a skilled change agent with the ability to contend successfully with the forces of change (Fullan, 1993).

In spite of a generation of educational policy development and inquiry, most contemporary educational change efforts fall short in understanding the power, range and intricacy of what professionals in schools do. These change efforts seldom recognize that what ought to be changed is an interrelated, decidedly complex system, which forms and restricts equally the hard work of teaching and efforts to transform it. "Educational change efforts are always underpinned by particular theories or assumptions about what teaching is like and what principles or activities comprise it" (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000, p. 4). The most powerful impetus and triggers of change in schools are changes in society. Theories about teaching are frequently investigated during times of rapid societal change. Societal change gives rise to pressure for educational practice to provide positive change (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Spring, 2001; Mondale & Patton, 2001).

Based on the belief that comprehension of the change process is essential in order for successful reform to occur, Fullan and Miles (1992) propose making use of basic change information to promote school improvement. They argue that a problem with getting reform right is that schools try to apply a new and different strategy to every new reform that comes their way. Their identified reasons for failure include lack of guidance for change, problems beyond the control of the school, quick-fix solutions, not understanding the human reaction to change, and lack of viable information regarding the change process as a whole. In addition, they discuss successful reform through seven basic propositions that should be thought about in relation to each other. Successful reform propositions include accepting that change is continuous learning, realizing that

change is a journey and not a static blueprint, comprehending that problems are opportunities in disguise, knowing that the provision of adequate resources is necessary for successful change to occur, coming to terms with the fact that change requires ongoing management, understanding that change is systemic, and accepting that change begins with local implementation of innovations.

Fullan (1993) points out that school change processes must be met proactively and productively, and not with fear and apprehension. Change is a societal constant; consequently contemporary schools must produce problem solvers much like early nineteenth century schools were charged with producing persons competent to cope with the rapid industrial demands of that era. Generations of Americans have endeavored to shape society through public education. This imperative to shape society is seen by Fullan as a moral purpose.

This moral purpose is “to make a difference in the lives of students regardless of background, and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies” (Fullan, 1993, p. 4). By examining the variables of vision, strategic planning, site-based management, strong leadership, accountability and assessment strategies, collegiality and stakeholder involvement, Fullan takes a closer look at the change process. He suggests that those working with school change need to learn how to live with the change process, rather than try to solve the problems associated with change, thereby working toward becoming effective change agents. Additionally, Fullan points out that the ability of teachers to embrace and learn from change and their ability in assisting students in this process are important factors in the development and well-being of future societies.

Best-selling author, Spencer Johnson, asserts in *Who Moved My Cheese* (1998), that unexpected change can be successfully managed once people deal with the fear and inevitability of change. Letting go of “old cheese” such as old beliefs, ideas, ways of being and doing things opens the mind and doors to finding “new cheese.” Johnson, like Fullan, Hargreaves and Fink agree that change happens. We must anticipate change. Change needs monitoring. People and organizations must adapt to change quickly. “Nothing gets better until *you* change” (p.71). Change is an adventure that can be enjoyed. Change is a constant (1998).

Fullan (1999) focuses on moral purpose and extends several concepts established in the original *Change Forces*, particularly the need to positively impact the lives of students and the complexities of change. He advocates for a strong public school system and argues that it is “the key to social, political and economic renewal in society” (Fullan, 1999, p. 1). Understanding that involvement is intrinsic in any form of change, he advocates that although the seven original lessons of the new paradigm on the complexity of change still hold, there are new lessons derived from years of deepening our understanding of change.

The eight new complex change lessons are delineated as follows: 1. Moral purpose is complex and problematic. “Moral purpose is education’s contribution to societal development and democracy” (p. 1). The tenor of the times, differences of opinion as to what direction our moral purpose should take and the chaos that it creates makes consensus problematic. “Figuring out moral purpose, getting and staying committed to it and making progress in achieving it are enormously difficult” (p. 1) Being mindful about the change process and accepting responsibility for making a

positive difference in the lives of people is the essence of productive educational change (Fullan, 1993). “Moral purpose...is worth striving for as a value in itself, and because it may eventually be a higher form of evolutionary benefit to humankind” (Fullan, 1999, p. 11).

2. Theories of change and theories of education need each other. The relationship between theories of change and theories of education create a move from theory to practice. “It is the task of change theorists and practitioners to accumulate their wisdom and experience about how the change process works” (Fullan, 1999, p. 21).

3. Conflict and diversity are our friends. Resistance is a key component and element of improvement, movement and progress. “Conflict...is positively associated with creative breakthroughs under complex, turbulent conditions” (p. 22). Dealing with diverse personalities, ideas, values, ideals and skill sets early on can enhance problem-solving skills as the movement of change develops. This process is an effective means of establishing relationships based on the ability to agree to disagree without being disagreeable. “Working through the discomfort of each other’s presence, learning from dissonance, and forging new more complex agreements and capacities is a new requirement for living on the edge of chaos” (p. 23).

4. Understand the meaning of operating on the edge of chaos. The edge of chaos consists of undefined boundaries, limits and structure. “Elements of structure include the guidance of moral purpose, a small number of key priorities and a focus on knowledge and data arising from shared problem-solving and assessment of results” (p. 24). Operating on the edge of chaos requires open communication and continuous

interaction within the organization as the change process evolves. Moreover, it requires trusting the process.

5. Emotional intelligence is anxiety provoking and anxiety containing.

“Complexity creates change. Change means facing the unknown. Facing the unknown means anxiety” (p. 25). What we fear, our worries and anxieties guide our day-to-day actions. Living with change requires emotional intelligence, which is essential to effective teaching and learning (Goleman, 1994)

6. Collaborative cultures are anxiety provoking and anxiety containing.

“Collaborative cultures are innovative not just because they provide support, but also because they recognize the value of dissonance inside and outside the organization” (Fullan, 1999, p. 27). Collaborative problem solving can over time diminish initial anxieties.

7. Attack incoherence: Connectedness and knowledge creation are critical.

Purposeful meaning making combats confusion. New ideas are examined to determine whether they are connected to the shared vision and current movement toward the organizational vision. “Shared meaning and organizational connectedness are the long-term assets of high performing systems” (p. 27).

8. There is no single solution: Craft your own theories and actions by being a

critical consumer, present a deeper and more consistent foundation for understanding, coping, and performing in multidimensional change situations (Fullan, 1999, p. 18).

Fullan asserts that these lessons only have influence and power when used in combination. Independently, they provide no guidance for effective functioning in the midst of multidimensional and chaotic change (1999).

### Multidimensional Aspects of Educational Change

Based on the educational change research of Fink (1999), I have adopted the change frames criteria for analyzing Eagle's multidimensional change. Identifying variables or change frames for studying school change is well-documented in the literature as important components of the educational change process (Schussler, 2001; Fink, 2000; Fullan, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, and Hargreaves & Fink, 1997). Historically, concerns with changes in schools have emphasized single dimensional change in the cognitive functioning of students as measured by high stakes test results (Murnane & Levy, 2001; Huggins & Celio, 2002; Jerald, 2001).

Declining achievement and failing schools are multifaceted problems that cannot be examined through the single dimension of standardized test results. There are other variables that impact what schools actually do and how, which necessitate investigating educational change from a multidimensional systems perspective. The change frames I have selected will allow Eagle Elementary to be investigated from a multidimensional perspective which includes the following: school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions. The six selected change frames will describe the organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary; thereby, providing a vehicle for seeing interrelationships and patterns of complex change. Each of the following constructs will provide a foundation for viewing Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status.

#### School Purpose

Fullan (1993) begins his discussion about educational change by suggesting that managing moral purpose is at the center of educational change. Fink (2000) argues that



change, not grounded in a shared educational meaning or purpose, results in unfocused efforts toward educational improvement. Identifying the “why” of change provides stakeholders with a moral compass that guides support, resistance or outright opposition. The humanist identifies school purpose as preparation for citizenship. Students are guided toward an understanding of “Western, Eurocentric” (Fink, 2000, p. 61) values and traditions, the liberal arts, the basics of oral and written communication, and sufficient knowledge to grasp current issues and vote. In contrast, social meliorist see the humanist approach as constricted, conventional, elitist, excessively Eurocentric and perpetuating the status quo. For them the purpose of school is to establish a more just society. Schools are to be about the business of helping disadvantaged children, providing children with resources to ensure their success. Furthermore, schools establish the understanding of multiculturalism, appreciation for diverse cultures and ethnic heritages and encourage development of unbiased, open-minded, liberal adults (Fink, 2000).

Developmentalist thinking is similar to humanist thought; however, a developmentalistic curriculum is not concerned with forms and precision. The curriculum focuses on developing problem solving skills, personal agency, communication and collaboration skills, and self-motivation. Students are tooled to be lifelong learners able to meet the challenges of adult life. (Fink, 2000)

“To those who advocate *social efficiency*, the purpose of schools is to prepare students for jobs and for contributing to the economic well-being of society as a whole” (p. 61). Schools emphasize the basics and focus on vocational education. Student employability is critical to this purpose. Positive, effective educational change requires those involved to know where they are going, be in agreement on where they are going

and resolved to work collaboratively to get there (Fullan, 1999; Fink, 2000; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001). Fullan (1991) recognizes that change is not an event, but a process. The process begins when a common sense of urgency develops or a critical incident occurs.

### School Culture

Recent studies of educational change have identified organizational culture as highly significant to the successful improvement of teaching and learning (Fullan, 1998; Fink, 2000; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Barth, 2001). “Visible outcomes of school improvement are often the result of deep-seated changes in school culture” (Strahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas, & Ware, 2003, p. 205). Fullan (1993) suggests that change efforts require reculturing. “Changing formal structure is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs” (p. 49). He (2001) further asserts that reculturing will ultimately make the difference in educational reform because approaches that only change structures and leave culture in tact are doomed. Barth (2001) asserts that developing a culture in schools that supports and promotes risk-taking, creativity, initiative, and innovation is a critical prerequisite for establishing a community of leaders and learners.

Culture “...defines reality for those who work in a social organization; it also provides support and identity” (Fink, 2000, p. 111). The core of a school’s culture converges at its purpose and mission. “Mission and purpose instill the intangible forces that motivate teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and community to have confidence in their school” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 24). A powerful culture provides identity and helps stakeholders grow and come together around a common purpose. Parents and guardians send their children to school with the hope that

they will “enter an environment that was both compassionate and challenging, a culture in which students were valued as individuals and stretched to achieve their full potential” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. v).

### School Structure

“Structure and culture are inextricably intertwined and successful changes in both tend to be concurrent” (Fink, 2000, p.9). Structure is defined as the utilization of time and space and methods of defining responsibilities and roles in schools. Current change efforts emphasize extending the school day or school year, varying the timetable of schools, creating charter schools or altering the tasks and role description of principals, teachers, support personnel and others who work with children in schools (Fink, 2000).

The ineffective use of time is an area often criticized. The time allotted for “student learning does not translate into students’ time-on-task. ...Time-on-task does not necessarily mean academic learning time, that is, the time in which students are actually learning” (Berliner, 1990, in Fink, 2000, p. 95). Systems have attempted to impact change by altering time by extending school days and the school year. Altering time alone has had little to no impact on what happens in classrooms because it tends to create more of the same (Fink, 2000).

The design and use of space in schools can support or inhibit change. Traditionally, utilization of space has promoted teacher isolation. “Open space, comprehensive schools, vocational schools, staff-development schools, work experience, and co-operative education are examples of alterations in space designed to promote different behaviors on the parts of teachers and students” (p. 96).

Roles and responsibilities of school-based personnel are impacted by shared vision. “Teaching is about a complex set of interactions, intellectual development and social responsibilities” (Michie, 2005, p. xiii). Teachers assume an array of roles and responsibilities functioning as “instructors, advisors, confidantes, advocates, tutors, facilitators, mediators, and surrogate family” (Ancess, 2003, p. 80). They play essential roles in school organization and administration, governance, policy planing and leadership (Ancess, 2003).

School counselors may play a value-adding role in school improvement and reform by working collaboratively with administrators and teachers to initiate changes in structure and programs. “Targeting at-risk students offers several benefits to the entire educational community. It supports school reform. It creates opportunity to bridge the achievement gap” (Sparks, Johnson, & Lewis, 2005, p. 12). Counselors can contribute to improved test scores; improved achievement, better attendance, decreases inappropriate student behavior, the enhancement of the overall well-being of schools. “School counselors are expected to fit into the process of school reform and the re-designed schools that result” (p. 13).

#### School Leadership

“Efforts to effect change suggest that effective leadership is a key determinant in deciding whether anything positive happens in a school or a school system” (Fullan, 1993 in Fink, 2000, p. 8). The leadership frame’s focus is the official and unofficial leaders within a school who must cultivate organizational improvement and learning, and furthermore maintain and encourage the types of relationships that support the capacity to act positively in response to change. In the current climate of change in schools,

leadership needs to incorporate the search for common goals, empowerment, a collaborative culture, professional development and problem solving. Simply put “leadership is getting people to follow you” (Boylan, 1995, p. 3).

Pamela Flood’s 2004 article, titled *Instructional Leadership: It’s Not Just for Principals Anymore* suggests that the idea and function of instructional leader cannot be enacted or fulfilled by one person. Her article makes it clear that demands on educators, administrators, and other stakeholders are constantly growing. The need for a cadre of individuals to address the various demands of educating students is a necessity. “Teachers have become decision makers too, and principals would be wise to involve them in every way possible in resolving the issues they face daily” (Rooney, 2004, p. 84).

According to Boylan (1995), leaders talk about four things: (1) What’s important around here? (2) Where are we headed? (3) What we stand for; and (4) Falling in love with risk, thinking and acting outside the box. When leaders talk, they motivate by selling their vision and benefits of working toward that vision (1995).

In schools, grade-level chairpersons, department chairpersons, leadership teams, and design teams serve as cadres of organizational leaders. These cadres maintain fidelity to the purpose and mission of schools. They create viable methods of executing school achievement plans. The collaborative groupings are successful when they believe they make a difference, are contributing, are recognized for their efforts and their needs are met (1995).

### Organizational and Professional Learning

“The first step in reforming the learning experience of young people is to reform the learning experiences of the adults responsible for young people’s education” (Barth,

2001, p. 75). The culture of a school that is hospitable to learning predisposes students and teachers to become lifelong learners (p.75). Senge (1990) cautions us to recognize that “organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (p. 139).

I assert that schools that encourage lifelong learning, continuous learning and improvement experience success as an organization. Staff development is a natural vehicle for facilitating organizational and professional learning. “Learning in setting where you work, or learning in context, is the learning with the greatest payoff because it is more specific (customized to the situation) and because it is social (involves the group)” (Fullan, 2001, p. 126). Learning in the environment that the new knowledge will impact improves the environment and develops leadership in that environment. This type of learning changes both individuals and the organization. “For staff development to be effective, it must be an integral part of a deliberately continuous improvement effort” (Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004, p. 5). Organizations change, transform, and or improve when they develop and establish internal systematic methods for learning in vivo.

According to Fullan (1992), for the past fifteen years staff development has been linked with successful improvement and innovation in schools. “Staff development is conceived broadly to include any activity or process intended to improve skills, attitudes, understandings, or performance in present or future roles” (p. 97). Improvement is a result of “learning to do the right thing in the setting where you work”(Fullan, 2001, p. 125).” All the talk of reforming schooling must never lose sight of the ultimate goal: to create institutions where students can learn through interactions with teachers who are themselves always learning” (Shulman, 2004, p. 331). Effective schools are schools that are educative settings for teachers and consequently environments where students learn.

## Teacher Emotions

Hargreaves (2004) states “Change and emotion are inseparable. Each implicates the other. Both involve movement. There is no human change without emotion and there is no emotion that does not embody a momentary or momentous process of change” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 287).

Teaching and the demands inherent in it require immense emotional engagement. “The road to student growth and achievement runs through the teacher-student relationship” (Gerzon-Kessler, 2006, p. 253). The emotional nature of education, the constant change in school environments, curricula, relationships and societal pressures impact school operation and change. “The theory and practice of educational change need to probe deeper into the heart of what teaching is and into what moves teachers to do their work well” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 52).

Research (Damasio, 1994; & Oatley & Jenkins, 1996) and awareness of the role of emotions are wiping out once accepted conjecture that emotions negatively impact logic. Damasio (1994) suggests that emotions are crucial to logical decision-making contrary to the opinion that emotions ought to be kept out of schools. Teaching is emotionally charged. This is a positive and a negative.

Highly qualified teachers are passionate about their chosen career field, enough so that they are willing to go the extra mile to credential themselves. “Good teachers are passionate about their ideas and field of knowledge; about social issues, locally and worldwide; and about the children and youth they seek to inspire” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 53). Zealous, passionate and caring teachers and other educators are prone to set

goals, to set an appropriate course and to stay with those goals and that course even in the face of constant change and the loss of public confidence in education.

Negative emotion in teaching surfaces with external, consistent, shifting demands for change, public criticism, fear of failure to meet a new set of standards and poor student academic achievement. Teachers become fatigued, discouraged, battle weary and cynical. These occurrences negatively impact teaching and student learning.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggest that absent attempts to delve into the emotions of teaching, vis a vis educational change, workplaces will fail to promote positive, passionate relationships between improvement and teaching and learning. Making workplaces open to collaboration, facilitating authentic relationships between teachers and students and between teachers and their professional colleagues promotes positive feelings toward teaching. “It is the responsibility of all those who work with teachers and affect their lives--to inspire the love of learning, to keep the heart in teaching, and to make their own partnerships with teachers emotionally enriching ones” (p. 56).

In an effort to capture the essence of Eagle’s transition from failing to distinguished school status I realized that it was not sufficient to simply report improved standardized test scores. It is more significant to consider factors that impact this school’s capacity to deal with changes that resulted in improved standardized test scores. “The idea of framing change enables change agents to understand the multidimensionality and therefore the complexity of change in schools” (Fink, 2000, p. 6).

When considering factors/dimensions I originally identified five change frames (school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, and organizational



and professional learning) as my conceptual framework. In a conversation with Dean Fink on July 25, 2005 it became clear that the teacher emotions construct was equally vital in understanding the impact of change at Eagle Elementary. Change evokes an emotional response and Fink suggested that most sustained change can be accounted for based on how people feel. These change frames were broad enough and specific enough to analyze the perceived organizational change and transition/transformation of Eagle.

### School Reform Models

“Schoolwide programs form the centerpiece of the ESEA’s new vision and are among the most promising changes brought about by the Improving America’s Schools Act” (USEOE Archived Information: Schoolwide Programs Title I, Part A Policy Guidance, 1995). Whole school reform models create consistency throughout a school system while focusing on the needs of individual schools. The intent is to enhance student achievement particularly in reading and mathematics. Over time educators have learned that piecemeal reform efforts seldom work. Reform models need to consider “instructional content and methods, scheduling requirements, school culture, and staffing needs” (Kilgore, 2005, p. 45). Comprehensive school reform models have been successful in promoting positive achievement in high-poverty, high-minority, and urban schools.

Modern Red Schoolhouse is a reform effort designed to facilitate standards based reform. The goal of this approach is to assist schools in setting high academic achievement standards that cover a rigorous curriculum and are in line with state and school system assessment standards. Strengths are enhanced and specific weaknesses are addressed. School achievement plans are developed to monitor improvement. Modern

Red Schoolhouse is sponsored by the national New American Schools initiative that has been responsible for the development of several school wide reform programs. The research-based initiative was developed around the idea of rallying school personnel around a common purpose.

Success for All (SFA) is a research-based whole-school reform model. “Success for All is used (as of fall, 1999) in more than 1,500 schools in 48 states, plus schools in five foreign countries” (Slavin & Madden, 2001, p. 2). Most SFA schools are Title I schools in large urban school systems, with high percentages of students qualifying for free lunch (p. 2).

SFA is comprised of several components which include: a reading program, eight-week reading assessments, reading tutors, a preschool and kindergarten reading readiness and language development piece, and a Family Support Team that focuses on parent involvement in the education process, parenting skills training opportunities and a team approach to problem solving and identification of resources for family and student needs. Additionally, SFA provides a program facilitator to oversee all aspects of the model, consistent teacher training and coaching throughout the school year, an advisory committee that regularly reviews the progress of the program and engages in problem solving as the need arises, inclusion of special needs students, a math program called MathWings and a social studies and science program called WorldLab (Slavin & Madden, 2001).

Comer School Development Program (SDP) is a K-12 process that creates a collaborative schema that mobilizes adults to focus on the development of the whole child. This focus supports student learning and overall growth and development. The

framework that undergirds the Comer Process looks nothing like a traditional school organizational format. James Comer, a child psychiatrist out of Yale University, created the model. “According to research on the Comer Process in high poverty and high minority urban settings, the strategy has been very effective at improving student achievement when implemented conscientiously and consistently over a period of five years or more” (Hedrick Smith productions: Comer School Development Program Yale Study Center, 2005).

The Comer Process is made up of three collaborative components: Each component/team serves a specific function in the process. The teams focus on these guiding principles as they work: problem resolution, harmonious decision-making, and collaboration.

The School Planning and Management Team, which creates an all-inclusive school plan, establishes goals and coordinates school activities and staff development programs. With teaching and learning as its focus this team uses ongoing monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the school plan to identify necessary adjustments and opportunities to support the school plan (Datnow, 2005). The Student and Staff Support Team promotes social relationships, organizes in-house student services, and functions much like the Family Support Team of the SFA reform model in that it, too, focuses on a team approach to problem solving and identification of resources for family and student needs. The Parent Team promotes parental involvement, which empowers parents to support the school’s vision for social and academic programs. The Parent Team facilitates parental involvement by developing activities that bring parents into schools. Parent presence enhances and supports positive academic and social programs. Parent

involvement facilitates the mobilization of community efforts to support student academic success.

These teams operate with a problem solving agenda, dialogue to gain consensus during decision-making and are collaborative in nature. This student focused process works to make effective decisions based on student needs. All stakeholders share the responsibility of meeting the developmental needs of the students. Comer asserts “nothing is more important to success in schools than the quality of relationships between and among students, staff and parents” (Comer, 2005, p. 1).

“The term ‘Direct Instruction’ refers to a rigorously developed, highly scripted method for teaching that is fast-paced and provides constant interaction between students and teachers” (Lindsay, 2001, p. 1). The process was developed in 1968 by Siegfried Engelmann a professor at the University of Oregon. DI has been successful with high poverty, high minority children as well as children of other socio-economic levels.

DI is a teacher directed instructional program designed to accelerate learning by providing efficient curriculum and instruction. The standardization of instructional delivery through scripting is a key component of DI. Rapid and consistent gains have been noted in the 1970s Project Follow Through study which supports the use of DI. Children experienced increased reading, math, and language arts skills when taught using this method (Lindsay, 2001).

Co-nect/Pearson Achievement Solutions Program has developed a rigorous, data-driven professional development methodology that is consistent and provides the technology, content and resources that school systems need to manage align and integrate professional development across their schools (personal communication 3-19-07, Raquel

Ettrick, Pearson Achievement). Co-nect focuses on standards-based curriculum alignment, project-based learning and faculty collaboration.

### School Studies of Educational Change

There is a growing body of educational reform documentation that has produced evidence of high-minority, high-poverty elementary schools that have taken charge of positive change (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). These schools have been involved with educational change, its challenges, its improvements, and its successes. Each of the following schools is unique in its approach to educational change. What is not unique is the existence of such schools and on-going evidence that the myth that high-poverty, high-minority schools are necessarily characterized by low achievement is being dispelled. The Eagle Elementary School case study expands on the positive change efforts in these schools by examining the multidimensionality of educational change. It looks beyond the conventional school improvement schema, which solely emphasizes student achievement.

#### Norman S. Weir Elementary School

During the 1991-1995 school years, Norman S. Weir Elementary School was among the lowest performing schools in Paterson, New Jersey. Since that time the school has become one of the highest achieving schools. “The leadership of the principal, combined with the commitment of highly professional and caring staff, transformed Norman S. Weir into an excellent academic and social development learning community” (Emmons, Efimba & Hagopian, 1998, p. 39).

Initially, Weir served a predominantly special education student population. The IDEA originated in 1975 to insure that children with disabilities had the opportunity to

obtain a free and appropriate public education, like all other children. IDEA at that time was called Public Law 94-142. The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (IDEA) in 1997 by President Clinton resulted in the desegregation of special education populations. Weir was impacted because of its predominant special education population. Some Weir students were transferred to other schools and likewise other schools transferred students to Weir. By 1998 only one-third of students attending Weir were special education students (Emmons, Efimba & Hagopain, 1998).

Weir's pre-transformation description almost mirror's Eagle pre-transition. Both schools were low achieving high-minority, high-poverty schools with 83% or higher students receiving free or reduced lunch, students were unmotivated and frequently engaged in inappropriate, disruptive behavior, staff morale was low, the buildings were in disrepair. Weir's minority population includes 40% African American students and 40% Hispanic students. One major difference, however, is that Weir included Grades 1 through 8, whereas, Eagle includes Grades K through 5.

The changes at Weir were mandated by the school system's decision to restructure the four lowest performing schools in Patterson, New Jersey, in an effort to improve student achievement. The restructuring was to take form by implementing the Comer School Development Program. This program was intended to improve school experiences for high-poverty, high-minority children. The program builds staff collaboration and parent involvement as a means of promoting high expectations and creating support systems for students and schools. The goal is developing and promoting a positive school climate.

School change was and is difficult. The implementation of the Comer School Development Program at Weir was used to help bring about comprehensive positive change. Change at Weir is ongoing. The supportive involvement of parents and the community in the change process aids in sustaining positive change. Focus continues to be on the development, achievement and well-being of Weir students (Emmons, Efimba, & Hagopian, 1998).

#### Alton Elementary School

Alton Elementary is a K-4 high-poverty school, serving 693 students, in Memphis, Tennessee whose population is 100% African-American. This school is unique because “the majority of students live in non-traditional family situations (only twenty-five percent live with both parents)” (McNeil, 1998, p. 1). Alton became a school wide Title I school during the 1994-1995 school year. The Title I program was set up to provide funds through provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). These funds are provided to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged children, thereby creating better schools for these high-poverty, high-minority students (Research-Based Strategies to Achieve High Standards: a Guidebook on School-wide improvements, 1999).

Alton was slated as a school in need of comprehensive reform and selected the Co-NECT design. Co-NECT’s non-traditional strategies and methods develop high level thinking skills. This reform model integrates technology into the curriculum to develop technological literacy. The school established a vision designed to train students for responsible, productive citizenship, and life-long learning. Project-based learning allowed

students to develop a tangible end product at the end of each successful learning experience.

Positive changes began with a focus on organizational and professional learning, active learning, collegiality, teamwork and literacy. These changes occurred in the framework of Alton's past, its culture and its resources. During the four years that followed Alton improved curriculum and instruction thereby improving and increasing student achievement. This improvement resulted in several awards and distinctions.

Three distinctions stand out. Alton was lauded for becoming a participant/developer for principal/teacher involvement in the national Science, Engineering, and Mathematics Collaborative. The school received the 1998 Co-NECT Star Search Award for Improved Achievement and the implementation of the Co-NECT Design. Alton was selected by the State of Tennessee as one of the original fourteen 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom Schools. This program assists teachers in infusing technology into the curriculum.

#### Harriet Tubman Learning Center (formerly, P.S. 154)

Harriet Tubman Learning Center is an urban, high-poverty, high-minority school that was established in 1996 when P.S. 154 was reconstituted. Tubman serves a population that is 81% African American and 17% Hispanic. Reconstitution is a collaborative effort to redesign low-performing schools. New York City created the Chancellor's District to provide low-performing schools with more prescriptive and directed assistance. The schools receive special intervention and technical assistance until the district determines that they have the capacity and commitment to support the redesign plan that the district helped create.



Tubman was assigned a liaison from the district. This liaison was charged to conduct an internal audit that included examining curriculum and instruction, organizational and professional learning, school climate, school culture, and parent involvement. The district then provided the requisite technical assistance to create a plan for the school's redesign. Out of the redesign efforts in 1996, Tubman emerged as a learning center with a shared mission, a sense of unity, collaboration, and collegiality.

Tubman has boosted student academic success in reading, math, language arts and writing. Tubman had decreased suspensions, increased parent participation and improved staff morale. The school has strong leadership on site. Curriculum implementation is supported with appropriate staff development. The school's principal says, "We focused our energy on instruction, we reestablished priorities, and we worked smarter...but it requires absolute, consistent, undying support" (Researched-based strategies to achieve high standards: A guidebook on school-wide improvement. Profiles of successful schools, 1999, p. 2).

One strong support mechanism was the school's decision to place Success for All (SFA) at the center of their instructional curriculum. "With Success for All as the backbone of the school's instructional program, school and district staffs have integrated several extended-day programs to assist students with diverse learning needs" (p. 3). Tubman continues to be hyper-vigilant about maintaining focus on instruction and paying attention to student achievement. The school continues to make improvements, positive changes, and maintains its existing reform efforts. The district has determined that Tubman has the capacity to sustain its redesign plan on its own and to continue to raise its standards.

## Roscoe Elementary School

Roscoe Elementary School is the subject of a single-site case study conducted by Cindy Kratzer (1997) over the course of the 1995-1996 school year. The study was initiated in an effort to determine whether a relationship existed between student achievement and school culture. The study examined how this high-minority, high-poverty urban elementary school exhibited characteristics of a caring community. Roscoe is a part of the Los Angeles Unified School district in California. Over 92% of the school's student population is Hispanic. African American and Filipino students make up the remainder of the student population.

During the study Roscoe was undergoing reform and restructuring. Roscoe's large student population required a structural adaptation which divided the school into three attendance tracks, operating on a year round schedule. Each track attended school on staggered two months in school one month out of school basis. Only two of the groupings were in attendance at a time. This schedule also required lengthening the school day.

Data was collected through a four-pronged process. Prong one included: Observations of classrooms, school activities, staff meetings, parent meetings and governance meetings. Prong two included: Audio taped interviews with school stakeholders: administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The focus of these interviews was to ascertain interviewee perceptions of "school climate, culture and ethos" (Kratzer, 1997, p. 349). Prong three included: A historical and social perspective established by collecting school and classroom documents. The documents were not identified. Prong four: Kratzer combined the aforementioned data with field notes and applied the "constant comparative method of analysis" (p. 349).

Three characteristics of a caring culture were revealed. (1) A climate of mutual respect and trust existed. (2) Relationships and informal interactions eclipsed formal roles and structures. "...Teachers and administrators interacted beyond the stated requirements of their roles in ways that centered around an ethic of caring. ...This dynamic was not limited to teacher-student relationships, but was evident between and among all stakeholder groups" (p. 354). (3) All stakeholders exhibited a collective and personal sense of responsibility and ownership for the school. These stakeholders exhibited a responsibility to see that everyone involved had their needs met.

Restructuring at Roscoe impacted the development of a caring community. Site-based management allowed the school to control such things as a budget, hiring and termination of staff (within the constraints imposed by local and state regulations) calendar, school day schedules, grant solicitation, business partnership acquisition, textbook purchases, adoption of curricula and professional development. This collective decision-making enhanced ownership of the school.

The reculturing of Roscoe resulted in a transformation based on collaborative leadership. The principal supported and believed in his staff. The staff consequently was willing to go the extra mile and continue to strive for positive improvement. The prevailing attitude of all adults in the building was impacted by what was best to provide a quality education for Roscoe's students. There was awareness that good and right things were happening, but there is more work to do, if we want to get better. These educators provided interventions at all levels to make sure that the needs of all students were met. What was done resulted in an effective school and a caring community.

### Archer Elementary School

Archer is a K-5 urban high-poverty, high-minority elementary school with 600 plus students. Seventy percent of the students are African American, 20% of the students are English Language Learners and 66% are on free or reduced lunch. Prior to 1997 Archer was a failing school. Since 1997 Archer's administration and staff have created a more supportive climate. During this transition period mandated achievement test scores have consistently improved (Strahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas, & Ware, 2003). This transition resulted in Archer being included in the North Carolina Lighthouse Schools project. The project was initiated in 1999 attempting to identify characteristics of successful schools so that educators across North Carolina could study and learn about school improvement.

This case study used school culture as conceptual criteria for analyzing school reform. My on-going case study looks at culture and five other change frames to analyze school change. This case study explains a two-year investigation of three major changes in the culture of this North Carolina school.

Recent studies of educational change have identified organizational culture as highly significant to the successful improvement of teaching and learning (Fullan, 1998; Fink, 2000; Deal & Peterson, 1999, Peterson & Deal, 2002). Fullan (1993) suggests that change efforts require reculturing. The core of a school's culture converges at its purpose and mission. A powerful culture provides identity and helps stakeholders grow and come together around a common purpose. The common purpose for Archer was the development of a shared responsibility for successful and productive learning for students and staff (Strahan, Carlone, et al., 2003).

Teachers and administrators shaped a more encouraging school climate and culture by linking values and beliefs into a collective sense of accountability and responsibility. “This shared stance has strengthened instructional norms that emphasize more active student engagement, infusing lessons with higher levels of cooperation and student involvement” (p. 204). Values, beliefs and norms are essential to the development of a positive culture. Peterson and Deal (2002) assert that culture is critical to productivity.

Three changes in the culture of Archer Elementary are (1) teachers and administrators developed a shared stance toward learning, (2) instructional norms that emphasize active student engagement and (3) stronger procedures for promoting data driven dialogue regarding school improvement. Teachers and administrators evaluate their accomplishments based on student learning. Teaching is centered on student performance, commitment to student learning, engaging and appealing instruction, and continuing curriculum articulation.

Archer has fashioned a culture where teaching meets the needs of students, teachers and students believe that all students can learn, teachers and students are collectively responsible for student learning, and instructional norms are active and collaborative. These elements support a climate that can sustain consistent intensification, growth, and development at Archer. The data was collected during two years of observations and interviews.

#### Burgess Elementary School

Burgess Elementary School is a K-5 school in the Atlanta Public School District of Atlanta, Georgia. The student population is 99% African American and 81% of these

students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The school is located in a low-income, highly mobile working class neighborhood.

Academic improvement began at Burgess when the instructional leadership changed during the 1993-1994 school year. The new principal had served as an instructional specialist/assistant principal and a special education teacher before assuming the leadership position at Burgess. Dr. Carter “described the school...as teacher-focused. She said, “it was known as an excellent place for teachers to work” (Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Burgess Elementary School, 1999, p. 3). However, there was neither parent nor community participation nor general support for the school.

The change process at Burgess began with improvements to the physical environment of the school. Dr. Carter began laying the foundation for the development of a child-centered learning community that focused on providing opportunities that enhanced student development and success. Attempts were made to meet the needs of all of the student population. “At Burgess, this child-centered orientation is demonstrated through efforts that attend to the material, emotional, and developmental needs of all students” (Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Burgess Elementary School, 1999, p. 4).

The principal and staff recognized emotional well-being as an essential element for improved learning. Improving student well-being and self-esteem became a focal point for improving the overall climate of the school. Values education became central to their change process.

Relationship building became a key component of the effort to develop a community within the school. Staff was in need of cohesion building, as well. Staff

dinners and social gatherings were held in order to build relationships among staff. Staff development sessions on team building aided in solidifying the staff. There were no community-based enrichment programs in the neighborhood therefore, Dr. Carter and her staff developed clubs and activities for students after school.

Burgess reorganized its instructional plan by providing extended hours of instruction two days per week. This effort was made possible by using Title I funds to pay staff. Students received additional instruction in math, reading and test taking strategies. Regular classroom instructional activities were aligned with the objectives of standardized tests. This effort was supported by staff development sessions on working with test objectives.

Saturday School functioned from January through March to prepare students and their parents for spring high stakes testing. This initiative resulted in increased parent and community participation. Parent workshops were also a feature of the Saturday School offering. These workshops provided parents with skills to support and interact with their children.

The change process is a slow one. In 1995 only 29 percent of students were scoring above the national norm in reading and only 34 percent were above the national norm in mathematics. Reform efforts at Burgess didn't show results until the 1997-1998 school year. Data for 1998 show that 64 percent of the students in grades 1-5 performed above the national norm in reading, while 72 percent of the students scored above the national norm in mathematics (Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Burgess Elementary School, 1999, Table 6, p. 2). Burgess continues to move toward its goal of high student achievement and excellence.

### Goodale Elementary School

During the 1997-1998 school year, Goodale Elementary served 1171 African American, high poverty K-5 students near downtown Detroit. Eighty-seven percent of these students received free or reduced lunches. The neighborhood was comprised of old single-family dwellings, rundown motels and badly maintained liquor stores. The outside environment did not thwart the progress being made inside Goodale. The steady increases in academic achievement as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the development of a tight knit learning community were the result of a decade of hard work and a well-developed vision.

During this ten year period Goodale's principal based most of his new hires on "...the extent to which candidates exhibited a commitment and passion to improving achievement and the well-rounded development of all students...We need people who share our vision"(Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Goodale Elementary School, December 1999, p. 3). There were vacancies that remained open, on some occasions; because interviewees did not share the Goodale vision and could not help the school meet its goals. The principal was hyper vigilant in his selection of new faculty and staff.

The transition required a change in the school climate. The transition required dedication to the academic and personal growth and development of the student population at Goodale. Changes in the school climate were necessary because of the number of suspensions, fights and disagreements between individuals and classes. A peer mediation program was developed to assist with this concern. This enhanced problem solving skills, critical thinking skills and the ability to take responsibility for ones



decisions and behavior (Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Goodale Elementary School, December 1999).

The well-being of the student body and concerns about student growth as people as well as their academic growth lead to a tutorial program where 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade poor readers were assigned to help 1<sup>st</sup> graders improve their reading skills. These older children were empowered by helping others and received recognition for doing so. This program provided these tutors opportunities to sharpen their reading skills in a way that did not diminish them in the eyes of their peers.

The Efficacy Program established an attitude of self-awareness, confidence, respect for self and others, positive personal and academic goal setting in staff and students. The efficacy training for staff took a number of years and positively influenced the way teachers taught and behaved. The overarching goal of improving student achievement and personal development permeated every facet of Goodale Elementary.

Changes in instruction came in the form of elevating the professional standards teachers adhered to in providing effective, quality instruction. Collaboration among staff members to improve instruction became the norm. Administration created an atmosphere of support for innovation, meeting high professional expectations, increasing communication, and collaboration.

Part of the effort to increase communication and collaboration revolved around developing positive relationships with parents and the community around Goodale. Staff initiated “Snack and Chat” sessions to promote fruitful relationships between staff and parents. Parent buy in to the Goodale vision was critical. Positive relations between

parents and staff breed collaboration and trust which translate into coordinated efforts to move a school in positive directions.

The organizational structure of Goodale was changed such that all staff is currently involved in improving learning. The use of data to drive instruction and organizational decisions has become a part of Goodale's success efforts. The ten year move toward improvement has not created an atmosphere of complacency at Goodale. Staff and students are aware of how far the school has come, but are constantly aware of the need to do more and to strive for greater success.

#### Case study of six high-performing schools in Tennessee

Like Archer Elementary, one of the North Carolina Lighthouse Schools, the six schools in this 2005 study in Tennessee were examined in order to categorize common characteristics of these high-performing schools. Edvantia, Inc. a nonprofit education research and Development Corporation conducted research. The six schools included two elementary, two middle and two high schools. The participating schools were selected based on achievement scores.

The effort to categorize characteristics was driven by the need to determine whether the identified characteristics were consistent with characteristics identified in other studies of high-performing schools. This study is different from the study of Eagle Elementary in that only cognitive indicators of high-performance were identified. This study was high stakes test results data driven and relied heavily on alignment of curriculum to state standards.

Research data was collected using structured, on-site interviews framed to identify components of schools with a track record of continuous and consistent

improvement. All six principals were interviewed and a total of 195 teachers. Interviews were voluntary. Edvantia also used five survey instruments to collect data from certificated professional school staff members, parents and non-parent community members for each school. The instruments were designed to measure the schools' continuous improvement, capacity for improvement, and school culture.

Documents that provided insight into school operations, school policies and procedures were examined. Documents included student, parent and teacher handbooks, teacher and master instructional schedules, policy and procedures manuals, school plans, newsletters and things of that sort.

This study identified five things that low-performing schools might want to consider in their attempts to improve student academic achievement. The five things include: “(1) Emphasize high expectations for student behavior and learning. (2) Emphasize high expectations for teachers. (3) Work hard. (4) Focus on effective teaching. (5). Involve the parents” (Craig, Butler, Cairo III, et al., 2005, p. vii). The researchers established that these five things coupled with establishing a teaching and learning focused culture would result in high performing schools.

The study's results validated the hypothesis that high performance was established by developing a supportive learning culture, making the home, school, community connection, providing effective teaching, creating shared leadership and decision-making, and developing a student driven mission with learning goals and curriculum that were aligned with state standards that drive instruction. Additionally, frequent meaningful assessment provided data for planning instruction and enhancing curriculum beyond the minimum required by state standards.

### Summary

The complex systems view of educational change focuses on the complexity of change, the nonlinear nature of change (i.e., the implementation of change and the continuation of change are interactive). Every person in the school is a potential change agent. Change is both bottom-up and top-down. School structure and school culture interact to generate school change, not just trying to implement specific school improvements but also developing the school's capacity to deal with change in general. The interactive change frames support understanding and development of a school's capacity to deal with change. They are the lenses for viewing educational change.

Educational change theory provides a representation of the postulated relationships among school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions. School studies of educational change provide evidence that academically successful and effective schools are distinguished by relationships between and among the various change frames.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present a plan for the execution of my research. This is a qualitative case study of how Eagle Elementary School, a high-poverty, high-minority urban school, transitioned from its failing status to the distinguished school status it currently maintains. The theoretical framework for this case study is Fullan's (1993) theory of systemic change and Fink's (2000) conceptual change frames.

The importance of this study was explained in the first chapter. The retrospective nature of the study and the nature of the research questions shaped my choice of methodology. This chapter will revisit the research goals and questions of the study, discuss the theoretical framework that provides the lenses through which we can view Eagle's transition, provide a detailed description of the case study site and lay out the procedures that will be used to gather and analyze data.

#### Theoretical Framework

Education is about change, transition, and transformation, which make it a journey of development, awareness, nurturing, determination, empowerment and love. "A theory "tells" us that there are certain variables and that they interact in particular ways or have certain relationships to other variables; it does not indicate why certain variables are important nor why they are interrelated" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 176). Change frames are important components of the educational change process. "...Researchers are looking beyond the traditional school-improvement agenda to consider the variables that affect a school's capacity to deal with change" (Fink, 2000, p. 2).

This qualitative study uses educational change theory to examine a school's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status. The change process can be viewed and analyzed using a variety of change forces and/or frames of reference. This study will use six change frames for viewing Eagle's transition: structure (utilization of time and space and methods of defining staff responsibilities and roles), culture (the shared sense of direction and responsibility, source of unity, how things are done), emotions (how people feel), purpose (clear well defined and accepted mission), organizational & professional learning (how school personnel learn to deal with changes being implemented), and leadership ("...the formal and informal leaders who must foster organizational development and learning, and also preserve and encourage the kinds of relationships within a school that promote the capacity to respond to change" (Fink, 2000, p. 8). The overall findings will be presented in terms of the aforementioned change frames that individually and collectively have provided direction and continue to lead to substantial positive changes of direction in this research site.

The complex systems view of educational change focuses on the complexity of change and the nonlinear nature of change (the implementation of change and the continuation of change are interactive). Every person in the school is a potential change agent. Change is both bottom-up and top-down. School structure and school culture interact to generate school change, not just trying to implement specific school improvements, but also developing the school's capacity to deal with change in general. The interactive change frames generate understanding and enhance the development of the school's capacity to deal with change.

### Research Goals and Question

As stated in chapter one, the overarching research goal of this study was to understand how the multidimensional organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary School changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status and how its distinguished status has been sustained over time. One question drives this search for understanding: During the five-year transitional period from failing to distinguished school status, what positive changes in and among the following six areas—purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions—contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School?

This research question focuses on faculty and parents' perceptions of how school changes, in and among the six areas, contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School. It allows the investigation of interconnected pathways of positive school change among the six areas. It permits the study of how the pathways of positive school change were initiated and sustained during the five-year period. This question is site specific because of the uniqueness of Eagle's transition and organizational change. As a final point, this question constrains and focuses the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

### Qualitative Design

This qualitative study inquires into the lived experiences of the learning organization in this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school. This type research is informed by educational change theory, however, does not attempt to test the theory. The research is naturalistic and takes place in the setting of Eagle's transition from failing to distinguished school status. "Human actions are significantly influenced by

the setting in which they occur; thus, one should study that behavior in real-life situations. The social and physical settings...are crucial aspects of the environment” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 56).

“Qualitative research genres have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences and applied fields such as education” (p. 1). This research is pragmatic in its use of various techniques to explore Eagle’s transition. Characteristic of qualitative research, it is grounded in the lived experiences of the Eagle Elementary School family, therefore exploratory, and in the interpretation of these experiences.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology. Case studies are descriptive, interpretive, investigative and explanatory. This methodology is prevalent in educational research in view of the fact that it can provide intensive analysis of a phenomena and or social unit (Merriam, 1998). This methodology is expected to capture the intricacies of a single case. “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). The important circumstance for Eagle is its transition from failing to distinguished status.

As the researcher I am “...interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-29). My focus is to provide a holistic, complete description and clarification of the transition process as the end product of my case study. “Case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon” (Yin, 2003, p.29). The phenomenon under study is how this single



educational entity transitioned from failing status to distinguished status. This form of inquiry will facilitate a retrospective understanding and explanation of the social phenomena of the transition without interfering with the current functioning of the school (Merriam, 1998).

Case study methodology is viable when the intent is to investigate contextual conditions that might be highly relevant to a study. It is viable when the research must rely on numerous sources of evidence in order to provide an accurate picture and explanation of a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). It “seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to research questions” (Gillham, 2000, pp. 1-2). Its “unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (Yin, 2003, p. 8).

The goal of this study is to understand how the multidimensional organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary appears to have changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status and how its distinguished status has been sustained over time. Most change literature has focused on school restructuring, which is relevant to the majority of schools. However, schools having severe difficulty or schools that have been designated as failing, like Eagle, require a specific mindset and a specific set of strategies (Hargreaves, 1997). The use of a case study methodology makes it possible to identify problematic characteristics peculiar to Eagle. When planning this study and attempting to identify an appropriate methodology, I drew ideas and specific activities from the writings of Robert Stake, 1995; Sharan Merriam, 1998;

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman, 1999; Bill Gillham, 2000 and Robert Yin, 2003. Each is a recognized leader in this line of inquiry.

#### Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this line of inquiry is that of primary research instrument for data collection and analysis. "Participant observation...is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data-gathering method. Participant observation is to some degree an essential element of all qualitative studies" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 106). Data is sifted through "this human instrument, the researcher; rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Immersion in the research site enhances the researcher's ability to capitalize on opportunities for gathering and generating significant data.

"Because qualitative research requires personal rather than detached engagement in context, it requires multiple, simultaneous actions and reactions from the human being who is the research instrument" (Meloy, 2002, p. 145). In the role of primary research instrument, the researcher must be conscious of personal biases and their potential impact on the investigation. "Traditional qualitative research assumes that (a) knowledge is subjective rather than being the objective Truth, (b) that the researcher learns from participants to understand the meaning of their lives but should maintain a certain stance of neutrality" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.4).

I am a career educator completing my thirty-fourth year rendering service to the children of the state where Eagle Elementary is located. During this 34 year period I have served as a teacher at the elementary and middle school levels. I rendered service as an assistant principal and currently am serving as a guidance counselor. I have been

employed by Eagle's school system, as a guidance counselor, since the 1989-1990 school year. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in French with a minor in Education. I hold one Master of Education in Elementary Education and one in School Counseling. I hold an Education Specialist degree in Counseling. I am a licensed professional counselor, a national certified counselor, a national certified school counselor, a certified forensic counselor specializing in child custody evaluation and a certified mediator. The education and experience attached to these credentials serve as an advantage in that I am very aware of educational processes, change processes and strategies, educational policies and procedures and the inner workings of schools and school systems. Additionally, I relate well to people, I am well received by people and am not perceived as a threat when entering a school setting.

By experience I am naturally inquisitive, prone to quality record keeping and good with organization of facts and documentation of facts. I am a skilled affective educator, interviewer, listener, leader and follower. People are comfortable with me and talk with me willingly. "Interviewers should have superb listening skills and be skilled at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 110). My training and experience as a licensed professional counselor and national certified school counselor have provided me with the aforementioned skill set. I am an established member of the Eagle family and collaborative leadership/design team.

I have rendered guidance and counseling services at Eagle Elementary on a fulltime and part time basis since the 1996-1997 school year. Fulltime-service is defined as five days per week. Part-time service is defined as three days, two and one

half days or two days per week. Persons on part time status service more than one school. The length of my association with this school has potential to be an advantage as well as a problem.

My bias is a belief in the fact that all children can and do learn when exposed to an environment where high achievement expectations coupled with a caring, nurturing culture and community are present. I am concerned when I read or hear it said that children raised in poverty are destined to fail no matter what their schools provide. I have a strong belief in the determination and resiliency of minority and poor children. These children live up to high expectations once they know someone cares and is proud of their accomplishments. I am passionate about dispelling the still thriving myth that high-poverty, high-minority schools are incapable of bridging the achievement gap. Finally, I acknowledge bias due to my active role in the research site. By its very nature, qualitative investigation and inquiry is subjective. "Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding." (Stake, 1995, p. 45) As a qualitative researcher I seek to understand interrelationships and interconnections from my personal perspective.

#### Research Setting

The site of the proposed study is Eagle Elementary (pseudonym), which is located in one of Georgia's large urban areas. Its history is unique in that it started as a middle class, all-white school that was built on the site of a Civil War hospital and served the children of the soldiers who fought in that war. The school opened in 1880. At 126 years old, it is the oldest elementary school in its school system.

The building has been renovated in the past ten years. There are three floors. The ground floor houses the Pre-K teaching area and its operational offices, the gym, media and learning center, the cafeteria, computer lab, the operational space of the literacy coach, and thirteen classrooms. The main floor consists of the administrative offices, the clinic, the instructional music area, the art room, the auditorium/stage, teacher work area, the counselor's office, the school psychologist's office, a conference room, the operational spaces of the Success for All facilitator and the certified teacher tutor, the operational space of the speech pathologist and program for exceptional children's central staffing team person, and six classrooms. The third floor houses the parent center, the band room, the instructional specialist's office, the teacher's lounge, a book and supply storage room, and ten classrooms. It is a pleasant, child friendly, aesthetically pleasing facility that is conducive to teaching and learning.

The school met the selection criteria essential to the purposes of this study. It met the Georgia Public Policy Foundation's standard for poverty rate and minority rate. At the end of the 2003-2004 school year, the school had a poverty level of 97%. 98% of the schools 362 students were African American, 1% White and 1% Hispanic. 337 or 93.3% were receiving free or reduced lunch. The average household is headed by a female with an average of three children under the age of 18 with a median income of \$15,000. Many of the students come from homes with high dropout rates or have family members with a history of unsuccessful school experiences. The number of children being raised by great grandparents, grandparents, other relatives, and foster parents continues to increase.

The Eagle administrative and support staff consists of a Black male, third-year principal, a Black female instructional specialist, a Black female counselor, and a Black female social worker. The secretary, office assistant and parent liaison are Black females, the instructional technologist is a Black female, the media specialist is a Black female and the nurse is a Black female. Eagle's kindergarten team is comprised of five Black female teachers and five Black female paraprofessionals. A Black female, a White female and a Black male maintain the computer lab. Their services are partially supported by a community partnership. The first grade team has six Black female teachers. The second grade team has one White female and three Black female teachers. The third grade team mirrors the second grade team. The fourth grade team has three Black female teachers and one Black male teacher. The fifth grade team mirrors the fourth grade team. Teachers in the program for exceptional children include one Black male, two Black females and one White female, two Black female paraprofessionals and one Black male paraprofessional. Eagle has itinerant teachers and special program staff that include eight Black females, two White females, one White male and five Black males. There are four Black females on the Pre-K staff and seven Black females on the cafeteria staff. The custodial staff is composed of two Black females and two Black males. The eighty-two person staff at Eagle has a total of fourteen males. Thirteen males are Black and one is White. Six of the seven White staff members are female. Eagle provides educational opportunities to 377 children in Pre-K thru fifth grade. The student body is comprised of twenty Pre-K students. Grades kindergarten thru five contains 357 students. Eagle renders service to 166 female students and 191 male students.

## Research Participants

Previous study and research has left me with the desire to better understand the achievement gap literature and the phenomenon of multidimensional educational change. Studies of academic achievement among high-minority, high-poverty school populations have been fraught with negativity about these populations. My disposition as a counselor causes me to seek positivism. The selection of this site was not due to convenience, but due to my exposure to this site since the 1996-1997 school year and the school's transformation right before my eyes. The site was selected purposefully. "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance" (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). Positive educational change is an issue of central importance.

The research site is a part of a school system that encourages meaningful research and offers the services of the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability to facilitate the efforts of researchers in conducting approved studies. I submitted a copy of chapter one of my prospectus and a statement of the proposed methodology along with written evidence of the approval of the research proposal from the Department of Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University to the screening committee. Once the screening committee approved the study, I secured permission of Eagle's principal to conduct the study. Interview participants were identified and asked for their voluntary participation.

Just as the site was selected purposefully, purposeful nonprobability sampling was the method of choice in participant selection. The sample was selected based on the research question and the desire to "discover, understand, and gain insight" (Merriam,

1998, p. 61) into Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status. These persons are in the position to provide the most information.

This endeavor is retrospective in nature; therefore, five participants were selected based on their ability to provide recollections of Eagle during the failing school status. They participated in the transition years and the distinguished school years. Interviewees included two parents, four teachers, one instructional specialist, one assistant principal and two principals. The principals, assistant principal and instructional specialist interviewed were selected since they provided formal leadership during the transition from failing school status to distinguished school status and/or during the sustained distinguished school periods.

Four of the interviewees have retired; however, they still reside within thirty to forty-five minutes of the school. They represent a collective total of approximately 135 years of experience as educators. Three are still viable, contributing members of the Eagle staff and one is principal of another school. They are identified using letters and numbers, for example: T-1 thru T-4 identifies the teachers. Participants designated T-1 thru T-4 are all female. Parents are identified as P-1 and P-2. Participant P-1 is a female parent who still has children in school while P-2 is a female grandparent raising grandchildren. She has four grandchildren still in Eagle's school system. The principals, assistant principal and instructional specialist are identified as A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-4, "A" meaning administrator. The administrators include two females and two males. One of the females is now retired. These ten participants' recollections coupled with the substantiating hard document data provided sufficient information to provide a rich weighty picture of Eagle's transition and current status.



### Participant Profiles

T-1 is a 50+ retired female who has 34 years of dedicated service as an educator. Her experience includes four years outside the classroom coordinating special programs and facilitating a reading reform initiative and 30 years as a classroom teacher. She spent 28 years at Eagle Elementary. She was a part of the transition team and retired two years after the distinguished school status accomplishment. T-2 is a female falling in the age range of 30-40. She has 5 years teaching experience before arriving at Eagle where she has taught for 8 years. She is a part of Eagle's distinguished school maintenance team. T-3 is a 50+ retired female who has 40 years of outstanding classroom teaching experience, 21 of those years were at Eagle. She was a part of the transition team and retired one year after the distinguished school status accomplishment. T-4 is a 50+ retired female with 31 years of dedicated service as an educator. She spent 22 years in the classroom and 9 years outside the classroom as a reading instructor, and coordinator of special programs. She rendered service at Eagle for 9 years. She was a part of the transition team and retired two years after the distinguished school status accomplishment.

P-1 is a single mother of four children who falls in the 40-50 age range. Her affiliation with Eagle began when her children enrolled at Eagle in 1991. She currently has no children in school at Eagle; however, two of her children are still students in Eagle's school district. Her two youngest children were at Eagle during the failing school years and the beginning of the transition years. P-2 is a 50+ grandparent raising grandchildren. Three of her grandchildren have attended Eagle. All three were at Eagle during the failing years and one was in attendance during the beginning of the transition.

A-1 is a 50+ retired female, she took the reigns at the beginning of the third year of Eagle's official failing school status and served as principal for 4 years. She is a 33 year career educator who taught in public schools for 21 years and at the college level for 4 years. She provided educational leadership as an assistant principal for 4 years and her tenure as principal of Eagle spanned 4 years. Eagle came off the failing schools list and attained distinguished school status under her leadership. She retired at the end of her 4 years at Eagle. A-2 is a male between 30-40 with 7 years teaching experience and 7 years as an educator outside the classroom, 4 of those years have been as principal of Eagle. He began his tenure after the initial transition from failing to distinguished school status and has been a part of Eagle's distinguished school maintenance team. He is Eagle's current principal. A-3 is a 50+ male with 10 years teaching experience. He has 11 years outside the classroom, three of those years he served as Assistant Principal at Eagle Elementary. His tenure at Eagle began at the beginning of Eagle's third year on the failing schools list. He was a part of A-1's transition team. He has a total of 24 years experience as an educator and is currently the principal of a K-8 charter school. A-4 is a female in the 30-40 age range. Her tenure at Eagle began at the beginning of Eagle's third year on the failing schools list as a part of A-1's transition team. She has been at Eagle 8 years providing service as the school's Instructional Liaison Specialist and is currently a part of Eagle's distinguished school maintenance team. She has 6 years of teaching experience and a total of 15 years in education.

#### Data Collection Methods

When doing case studies researchers generally gain information from an extensive list of sources of evidence. This study used documentation (school level

written reports, school achievement plans, achievement data, and system level school reports), archival records (“the routinely gathered records of a society, community or organization” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 116)), interviews, direct researcher observations, and retrospective researcher reflections (Yin, 2003) as its sources of evidence.

As a fully functioning member of the staff at Eagle my observations as a participant are an essential element of this qualitative study. My immersion in the research setting makes it possible for me to provide a reality of the setting that is unique. I am a part of the daily life of the site and have the opportunity to learn from personal experience, recollection and reflection. This is integral to the analysis of the social unit at study.

Interviews were conducted in an effort to discover interviewee perspective on Eagle’s transition from failing to distinguished school status. Their reflections and recollections of the “getting there” experience provide large amounts of data. Interviews provide an understanding of the meaning these persons place on their daily activities. The persons interviewed were able to discuss this learning organization in-depth based on their involvement in the organization during the transition years, others provide insight into the maintenance of the distinguished status (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The interviews were conducted in quiet, private locations. I developed a set of questions designed to help organize the interviews and keep the conversations going. Some interviews were conducted in two sessions. The audio tapes were labeled by letter and number. For example P-1 indicates the interview for parent one, T-1 for teacher one,

A-1 for administrator 1 and so forth. These tapes were maintained in the privacy of my home. Transcripts were made by this researcher and stored on my computer and a jump drive until hard copies were printed to be used to complete this document. The hard copies are maintained in the privacy of my home as well. I have sole access and responsibility for this information. This information will be destroyed by the end of the year 2009.

The interviews provide a means of collecting significant amounts of information rather quickly. Each interview was a semi-structured one on one, face to face, hour long audio taped session designed to provide interviewees an opportunity to talk about “their lives, experiences or understandings” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69) of Eagle’s transition from failing to distinguished school status. These sessions took place in quiet, private locations convenient for the interviewees. I developed a set of questions designed to help organize the interviews and to keep the conversation going (Meloy, 2002). See Appendix D, E, and F for interview questions. “Interviewing is an occasion for close researcher-other interaction. Qualitative research provides many opportunities to engage feelings because it is a distance-reducing experience” (p. 93).

“Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing” (Stake, 1995, p. 68). “Public records, personal documents, and physical material are three major types of documents available to the researcher for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 113). System level annual school reports, School Achievement Plans, achievement data, adequate yearly progress (AYP) reports, design/leadership team meeting minutes, grade level meeting minutes, Reading First Grant proposal, Success For All reports and other documentation was analyzed.

The strengths and benefits of the aforementioned sources of evidence include the fact that they can be examined repetitively; they are unobtrusive, precise and provide broad coverage over time. Interviews focused on the case study topic and provide interviewee's perceived causal inferences. Direct observations cover continuation of the evolution of Eagle in historical time and in context (Yin, 2003).

My reflections and observation along with the interviews provide insight into interpersonal behavior and motives; consequently I acknowledge bias due to my active role in the site. Weaknesses included document irretrievability, and some archival records were inaccessible due to privacy concerns. Interviews were problematic due to poor recall of a couple interviewees; bias due to poorly constructed questions and interviewees saying what they believe I wanted to hear (Yin, 2003). These weaknesses, however, fail to diminish the value of the case study's ability to make use of multiple sources of evidence, "...direct the measurement or recording of individual behavior" (p. 97), and to develop "converging lines of inquiry" (p. 98). In fact, the use of several sources of substantiation is a major strength of the case study methodology.

Case studies occur in natural settings and examine processes. "Yin (1994, p. 9) suggests that for "how" and "why" questions the case study has a distinct advantage" (Merriam, 1998, p. 32). My rationale in this endeavor is to experience the voices of the site subjects as they interpret their experiences. I have chosen "a single-case study on the grounds of its revelatory nature" (Yin, 2003, p. 42). Furthermore, from time to time an insight into people's lived experiences is what is required for better understanding (Gillham, 2000). This study looks to understand the site's transition process.

### Data Management

Data collected was stored in secure locations in my research site and in my home. Documentation, archival records, observation notes and retrospective researcher reflections were stored in the research site. The audiotapes of participant interviews were stored in my home. Transcriptions were made on diskettes and saved on my personal computer. I have had sole access and responsibility for this information. This information will be destroyed by the end of the year 2009.

### Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for the current research is Eagle Elementary School. Data collection and data analysis proceeded simultaneously using the constant comparison data analysis method. This was done in an effort to focus and shape the study as I proceeded. For the purposes of this research no qualitative analysis software was used. This method of analysis is appropriate for a case study in light of the fact that I was not attempting to build theory but to communicate understanding using the data collected.

The intent was to understand behaviors, contexts, interrelationships and connections between and among the six change frames within this case. “In case studies, communicating understanding—the goal of the data analysis—is linked to the fact that data have usually been derived from interviews, field observations, and documents” (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). The analysis was based on data reduction and interpretation aimed at identifying categories, patterns and themes.

Data was classified and categorized relative to its connection to the six educational change frames: school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions. This is the

study's organizational framework. The data groups evolved into a meaningful sequential progression that contributes to my end product (Glesne, 1999). "Finally, analysis will be sufficient when the critical categories are defined, the relationships between them are established, and they are integrated into an elegant, credible interpretation" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152).

Participant interview responses were correlated with the six change frames in order to ascertain interrelationships and interconnections between and among these components' impact on the school's transition. This information is aligned with documentation, archival records, researcher reflections and researcher direct observations in order to substantiate participant recollections. Data triangulation resulted when the events and specifics of the case were substantiated and supported by more than one source of evidence. It is assumed that a synthesis of these data sets provided answers to the study's research question.

#### Verification of Analysis

The trustworthiness of qualitative research turns on the researcher's ability to keep the data, the interpretations, the reductions and the resulting conclusions closely linked to the reality from which they come. "Case studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats" (p. 159). The soundness of this research rests in my ability to accurately identify and describe the transition process. In addition to the change process soundness rests on the study's ability to describe a pattern of interaction between the six change frames.

Qualitative research is limited in transferability and generalizability since it does not look for universals that exist free of context. Qualitative research seeks results that not only are context bound, but—in fact—also describe the context. Because of human variations in both the researcher and the participants, replication of a qualitative study may not be possible.

#### Ethical Considerations

The research site's school system encourages meaningful research and offers the services of the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability to facilitate the efforts of researchers in conducting approved studies. In order to conduct my study in this school system I submitted my prospectus to the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability for approval prior to implementation of the study. I submitted written evidence of the approval of the research proposal by the curriculum studies department and my dissertation chair at Georgia Southern University before approval of the study was considered. The approval letter was printed on letterhead stationary from the university and stated that I am a student and that the research is part of an approved course of study.

Permission of the principal of the school involved in the research study was required prior to beginning research activities. The use of pseudonyms for people and schools is required in final reports or presentations outside of the school system. Teachers and other system staff members participate in research studies only on a voluntary basis.

The Research Screening Committee reviewed and approved the research study. The researcher prior to implementation of the study obtained notice of approval from



the Research Screening Committee. Such notice constituted authorization of the research and identified conditions and limitations under which the research could be conducted. The research proposal specified selection procedures in terms of the school and described in detail the methodology, research design, data collection and analysis procedures. Research questions and the significance of the study to the field of education were included. The name of the school involved in the study was included in the proposal. The Research Screening Committee reviews research proposals four times each year (August 1, October 1, February 1, and May 1). The results of the review are sent to the researcher approximately two weeks after the Research Screening Committee review date.

Of primary concern in qualitative inquiries is the protection of research participants. The persons in this study participated voluntarily and with informed consent. They were provided with ample information to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the study. There were no risks to participants (Glesne, 1999). Participants are aware of the purpose of the study and how their privacy and identity will be protected. Participants were made aware of the fact that Georgia is an “open records” state consequently, I cannot guarantee confidentiality. Documents to be analyzed are public documents that are open to anyone’s examination. “In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 213).

The burden of conducting and reporting a study in an ethical manner rests with this licensed professional counselor who understands the statement “do no harm.” I am conscious of issues of ethical concern and conducted the data collection and analysis

bearing these concerns in mind. Having satisfied the screening committee's requirements to conduct the study I was aware of what had to be done to safeguard the anonymity of the participants and the site.

### Summary of Methodology

Educational change has been investigated in terms of cognitive and structural factors. This inquiry takes a multidimensional approach to understanding educational change: the road not taken. In order to appropriately travel this road a case study methodology was the only viable approach for this researcher.

This methodology captured the intricacies of a single case. Case study methodology is practical when the research must rely on numerous sources of evidence in order to provide an accurate picture and explanation of how Eagle Elementary transitioned from failing to distinguished school status (Yin, 2003). The research questions, methodology, theoretical framework and procedures for conducting the study were offered in this chapter. The site selected for the study was described, as were the participants. The data collection and analysis processes to be used for the purpose of answering the study's research question was also described in order to give the reader a perspective on the nature of the study. The final report is presented in narrative form.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The overarching research goal of this study is to understand how the multidimensional organizational function of Eagle Elementary appears to have changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status and how its distinguished status has been sustained over time. This chapter is a report of the data collected at the case study site between December 2005 and December 2007. The synthesis of these data sets will provide answers to the study's research question.

#### Review of Research Question and Methods

One question has driven this search for understanding: During the five-year transitional period from failing to distinguished school status, what positive changes in and among the following six areas—purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions—contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School? This research question focuses on faculty perceptions of how educational change, in and among the six change frames, contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School. It allows the investigation of interconnected pathways of positive school change among the six areas and leaves open the possibility of other relevant areas of positive change. It permits the discovery and disclosure of how the pathways of educational improvement were initiated and sustained during the five-year period.

This qualitative study inquires into the recollected experiences of the learning organization in this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school. It is informed by educational change theory, however, does not attempt to test the theory. It employs a case

study methodology. Case studies are descriptive, interpretive, investigative and explanatory. This methodology captures the intricacies of a single case. The use of case study methods makes it possible to identify characteristics peculiar to Eagle.

My role, as researcher, is that of primary research instrument for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research requires multiple, simultaneous actions and reactions from the researcher. Data is sifted through the researcher. Immersion in the research site enhanced my ability to capitalize on opportunities for gathering and generating significant data. Immersion in the research setting makes it possible for me to perceive a reality of the setting that is unique.

Interviews were conducted in an effort to discover interviewee perspectives on Eagle's transition from failing to distinguished school status. Each interview was a semi-structured one-on-one, face-to-face, audio taped session designed to provide interviewees an opportunity to talk about their lives, experiences and understandings of the transition. Some interviewees were able to discuss in-depth their school experiences before and during the transitions years, while others provided insight into the maintenance of Eagle's distinguished status.

The unit of analysis is Eagle Elementary. Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. This method was appropriate for a case study in light of the fact that I am not attempting to build theory but to communicate understanding using the data collected. Data was classified and categorized relative to its connection to the six educational change frames: school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions. The soundness of this research rests on my ability to accurately identify and describe the transition process. In

addition to the change process, soundness rests on the study's ability to describe a pattern of interaction between the six change frames. A case study methodology is practical and appropriate when the research must rely on numerous sources of evidence in order to provide an accurate picture and explanation of a phenomenon.

### Comprehensive School Reform

As a part of the school district's comprehensive school reform (CRS) initiative, Eagle adopted the Success for All (SFA) Reading program as its core reading program at the end of the 1999-2000 school year, and began implementation during the 2000-2001 school year. Baseline data bore out the fact that only 24% of Eagle's students were reading at or above grade level at the end of the 1999-2000 school year. Current data shows 76% of students reading at or above grade level.

Success for All, a researched-based program, provided the necessary program pieces to focus on reading instruction with the intent of having every student reading on grade level by grade three. Training for this implementation was provided for all certified teachers and paraprofessionals. The initial training was provided by staff from the Success for All Foundation at a central location in the school district. Subsequent training was provided at school sites and annual training conventions across the country. This implementation led to consistent improvement in student achievement. The Success for All Roots and Wings reading program is being implemented in all classrooms in kindergarten through fifth grade. The program is designed to meet the specific needs of students as they develop reading competency.

Success for All is a school-wide reform program designed to ensure the academic success of all students. In order to produce a significant increase in students'

achievement, the school organization followed the model of cross-grade grouping for the purpose of establishing homogeneous groups for reading during the first ninety-minute instructional block of the day. This facilitated and supports the curriculum and instructional methods of the Success For All model.

Homogeneous grouping allows students on the same level to experience intensive instruction which allows them to develop the necessary skills to become successful readers. In cooperative learning, students work together to learn; work is not completed until all team members have learned the material being studied. This positive interdependence is an essential feature of cooperative learning. As students increase their skills within the groups, they have the opportunity to move to a higher level group that matches their newly acquired skills based on test data compiled and analyzed every eight weeks.

A higher level of inclusion is used with students in the Program for Exceptional Children (formally called special needs or special education program) during the reading block. This allows those students to be exposed to different types of text, particularly non-fiction that is found on norm-referenced and standardized tests. Additionally, they are exposed to researched-based strategies for improving reading. This differentiated instruction responds to the special needs of these students who must, because of No Child Left Behind, participate in standardized testing.

Following the Success for All class period students are grouped heterogeneously by homerooms to facilitate and promote cooperative learning activities in the content areas in an effort to increase their conceptual knowledge base and to allow them to develop and practice skills appropriate for working in a group. There are also

homogeneous groups used with students who qualify for the Early Intervention Program (EIP).

The Early Intervention Program was developed by Eagle's state to provide instructional support to students who are at risk of not reaching or maintaining consistent on level academic progress. EIP students are chronologically in the age appropriate grade but may not have reached grade level proficiency. This reduced class model is utilized in order to ensure that the needs of students are being met. A balance of large and small groupings, cooperative groupings, collaborative groupings are in place to deliver instruction. Additionally, individualized instruction is provided based on student need and accomplishment, along with the utilization of various teaching strategies, to accommodate the learning styles of individual students.

Students performing on or above grade level are given more challenging activities, such as reading and discussing trade books, engaging in research, and developing both independent and group projects. They are encouraged to participate in the Book Club that meets weekly after school for the purpose of discussing the book of the week. This effort is facilitated by the Media Specialist. Students who are referred for gifted services are provided with enrichment activities under the auspices of the counselor and the gifted teacher from the system's gifted cluster school. They are prepped on taking IQ and achievement tests and receive practice on performance assessments that prepare them to become eligible for gifted services. Additionally, the counselor (this researcher) chartered a chapter of the National Junior Beta Club for 5<sup>th</sup> grade honor students. This is the first national honor society into which students can be inducted.

Success for All coupled with Eagle's School-Wide Title I program provides assistance to all students in the development of higher-order thinking skills and in the appropriate utilization of computer technology and multimedia programs for the purpose of acquiring relevant and current information, solving problems, and communicating effectively. The school-wide program provides for remedial math and reading instruction for identified students and reduced size classrooms for more effective direct instruction in small groups.

#### Interview Responses

Interviewees were asked to discuss their impressions of school reform efforts, most specifically the Reading Reform model implemented at Eagle. That model is the Success for All Reading Program, which continues to operate at Eagle to this day.

*P-1: I think it really helped to see where your children were really at. Because, I think about my daughter \_\_\_\_\_, she found out that her reading wasn't what she thought it was. The facilitator helped her achieve what she wanted to do and she is really doing well. I think that reading program had a lot to do with that.*

*P-2: We have the Success for All reading program that is so great. It is an hour and thirty minutes every morning and I tell you, that is a great program because the more and better these kids read the more they can know. If you can read you can read through your problems. You can have \$1000.00 but if you can't read what you are spending that money on it can go from you. Reading helps you think and if you can think you can handle things. If you have never been to any place to visit a book can take you to a lot of places in the world. You can go everywhere. I used to sit on my grandmother's back porch in the swing and just read and she would be calling me and I just couldn't pull*



*away from the story. We have different organizations that come in and read to our kids and tutor them in their reading. These kids here are really getting a lot. There are people calling here asking about the programs we have in place and asking how they can get their kids in this school if they move here. They call long distance from all over the state because they have seen stuff about our school on the internet and they know that we are a school of excellence and want their kids to come here. I answer the phone in the office and the calls come every day.*

*T-1: Well, let's say that initially, there were teachers who bucked the system because they did not really understand how the reform was supposed to work or they had a problem with following a script. That's one thing. And they complained about not having any input, which was not true. If they worked it right they had input in other areas. I think it worked best when the teacher was really into it and was up for doing the program the way it was supposed to be done. There were some teachers who were not successful with delivering the program because of how they felt personally about it and this sometimes caused a problem. Once they understood that, this is our reform this is what we're being held accountable for and based on the literature and everything else if it is done correctly it will make a difference. After about the first year you could see the ones who had started in first grade and by the time they got to third grade, that was one of the goals, that by the time they got to third grade that they would be on level and we proved it could happen. It wasn't 100% but 50% of the students at first. The second year it move up maybe 10% more. By the third year there were right at 75% of our students reading on or above grade level. Before SFA we had only 26% of our students reading at grade level. So to me that improvement rate was great. More emphasis was put on that*

*K-3 group of kids, which I think has really increased the level of reading proficiency here; especially if we could keep them from kindergarten to third. Because you know how the mobility rate at our school was a buggerbear. We had some kids that had been at two or three different schools. School starts in August and in September or October they were in another school and by December they're going into another school. Sometimes that had a big impact too, especially if a child came to us from a school that was not an SFA school. That was a major problem, getting them into the mode.*

*T-2: I personally felt a lot of pressure, to be honest with you. In the beginning we had so many people in the building. That first year when we came off the failing schools list every day there was someone walking into the classroom and you felt like you were under a microscope. That first year was very difficult. Very emotional, very difficult, long nights it was almost like we were afraid to go home because we might not be prepared enough the next day. It was like we all needed to put a cot in our room and just stay here.*

*T-3: When it first came everybody was gung-ho and really like it and I think the draw back was that teachers weren't able to put forth their talents or teach with their particular style. We had to follow a format that the SFA program set up. As the years progressed, you could see the SFA program beginning to help the teacher foster some of the things they were asking you to do that were a part of best practices that we were using before. Those practices were already a part of the teacher's format or the way we taught so. SFA changed things to meet the needs of the students and the needs of the teacher, too. At first the thing was so scripted it didn't give you a chance to foster your talent, but now there is a little more leeway in that area but still has all the content and*

*meat that it always had. It could be that seven years later we have just adapted to the program and the structure at the beginning had to be there to get us to where we are now. I tell you this; it is really good for new teachers who don't know what to do. This is a good program for those persons and they turned out to be the better SFA teachers, because they were willing to learn and they didn't have any old habits to break. It took some of us older ones a little bit of time to fall in line.*

*T-4: At the beginning of the year all the students were tested to see where they fit in the SFA program and teachers got different students every 8 weeks. So if you were a first grade teacher you might have some second graders in your reading classroom, you might have some third graders who had come from another school and needed to catch up and the children would rotate. They had a change to interact with children from other classes and even other grade levels so everyone cared about and was concerned about and had discussions about all the children they taught and teacher were always talking about their SFA children or the class children and they had relationships with each other over the children and relationships with the children because they taught more than just the ones in their class. Now you not only have your children to worry about, but now you have Ms. Teacher down the hall and Ms. Teacher up the hall's children to worry about too. So you want to make sure that when they go back and she asks what did you do today in SFA the children could say we did this and we did that and everyone knew you were working to give their children a change to do well. You wanted everyone to know that you were not only concerned about their children, but you were concerned about the whole school. It's like when a big corporation's stocks go up it's not just because of one group or department, it is because of what everyone is doing, its because of the whole*

*corporation. And that is what we were trying to get everybody to see. It's not just about you in your little isolated world. It made a difference because it stopped the old isolation and the attitude of being responsible for only the kids in "my" classroom. It goes back to what I was talking about when I said it was like a community. Everybody was becoming responsible for all of the kids and this started with SFA. We started needing to know all the children and what they needed at each grade level to be successful so we became responsible for all the children in the school and that was all because of SFA. You come out of that isolation and you had no choice about it.*

*A-1: Adopting a reform initiative in reading Success for All six years ago and using Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum and Georgia Performance Standards have made a difference. SFA has numerous strategies, such as, listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, meaningful sentences, partner reading, etc. that have helped students overcome deficits in reading that may have served as a barrier to understanding and processing information. Students are also taught test-taking strategies and receive practice using various resources, printed materials as well as online resources that provide immediate feedback. We set aside 120 minutes a day for reading and language arts.*

*A-2: We know that SFA was brought here because the former educational practices/strategies were not as effective as was liked. Because of that that was the primary focus, so I think that was the primary factor in bringing that reform here. I think because of that that just shows the commitment of the former principal and the staff in realizing that something had to be done differently in terms of us meeting our goals for student achievement. I think one crossroad we are at now is to see if this program can*

*truly keep assisting us in moving to the next level. I am questioning this year if whether it's the program or the type of program that can take us to the next level or if it's being wholeheartedly taken in by the teachers. Are teachers maintaining fidelity to the program? That is where it will be very important for me to see how we perform this year as it pertains to the components that SFA factors in: reading, ELA and writing. That's why I think we are at a crossroads, but initially, and thus far the program has tied in with our main goal of improving student achievement.*

*A-3: It's important that staff members buy into any new program that they are being asked to teach. First, the pre-training was essential for teachers. Everyone was required to go to training before beginning implementation and they had full understanding of the program prior to attempting to use it. People hate change for change sake and a lot of people are afraid of change because they are fearful that they will not be successful with the new. We had to ruffle their comfort zone a little bit and I think that the timing of the training and the way it was implemented was a boon for us. Initial training took place before school started during the summer. Teachers were paid to attend and they were given an understanding of the Roots and Wings program before they actually had to use it. There was a cadre of people who would be available regularly if anyone ran into a snag to help them and that was continuous throughout the school year. The support system made it possible for them to buy into it. Also, it was a phonics based approach to learning and many teachers had a familiarity with that approach. The staff saw the benefits of it right away and it was definitely better than what they had. Staff was aware that only 20-24% of our kids were reading at or above grade level. That was incentive in itself to try something new. What they had been doing or using wasn't*

*working. Once they caught on to it and saw it work the effects were so inspiring. We could see learning taking place right before our eyes. Kids were sounding words out and actually reading for the first time. All of this contributed to a positive experience for the teachers, which in turn caused other positive changes. Teachers taught and students learned.*

*A-4: Initially, the data spoke for itself. When we first adopted the comprehensive school reform model SFA we had only 20 plus percent of our students reading at or above grade level. The data spoke for itself right away. That was definitely a selling point for the reform model. Even though the teachers may not have been able to pinpoint what was happening as far as why the kids were not performing, they knew something had to be put into place to make a difference. With the program students have been consistently making gains in reading improvement just with the consistency of the program and the instruction of the teachers. Because of this teachers have bought in and understand that fidelity to the program definitely pays dividends, makes a difference and continues to make a difference in student outcomes. To go from 20-24% of students reading at or above grade level to 74% at our last assessment, speaks volumes all by itself. Especially over a short time and five years is a very short time to make that much of a change. So we definitely knew that the practices that had been in place were not working and for that reason we had to address the needs of the kids and it was definitely through the comprehensive school reform model.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): We needed balance to be successful. Success for All provided that balance. During the failing school years most teachers closed their doors and created an instructional island in their classrooms. In this isolated

state they did the best they could alone. Their responsibility and accountability stopped at the classroom door. The balance moved staff from isolation to collegiality, from collective autonomy to collective accountability, from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and from individual accountability to collective accountability. We became and operated as a unit, we were a team. We became a no excuses school. We became determine to no longer be last. We became relentless about success.

It was clear that programs don't work if people don't. Success for All was the beginning of our working on the work from bell to bell. "The single most important factor in any change process is the people who will be most affected by the change" (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin and Hall, 1987, p. 29). There was a sense of communal pride and collective efficacy that drove unity and strength. An Efficacy Program at Goodlad Elementary in Detroit (1999) established an attitude of self-awareness, confidence, respect for self and others, positive personal and academic goal setting in staff. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) at Eagle appears to have evolved out of its reculturalization. This manifested itself in the intensity and persistence of a cooperative effort during the transition years.

### **School Purpose**

This study defines purpose as a clear, well-defined and accepted mission. **Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): After years of chaos, my vision cleared during the 2000-2001 school year and became centered on the notion that working as a team to achieve success for all was the only way out of the maze of failure, low achievement and organizational dysfunction. A new mindset is necessary for contending with the actual difficulty of dynamic and continuous change (Fullan, 1993). A new mission statement is

required. From this year forward, this shall be our mission statement: The Eagle Elementary School Family is committed to working together to create a supportive learning environment that ensures **SUCCESS FOR ALL**. We seek to serve as caring and professional facilitators, guides and collaborators who maintain high expectations for student achievement. We believe that this can be accomplished through a rigorous and challenging curriculum presented in an interesting and relevant manner. We affirm the dignity and worth of all individuals in our community and show respect for each other. We recognize the value of bridging the gap between/among school, home and community in an effort to best serve **children – our most important resources**.

#### Interview Responses

Each interviewee was asked the following question about Eagle's purpose, vision or mission: In what ways, if any did changes in the school's purpose, vision or mission contribute to the educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? Following are their candid responses.

*P-2: We have a newly renovated school now and the school is kept very clean. When you come into the school now you feel the positive atmosphere in the school. And that's a good thing, to feel positive when you walk into a building. You can feel the warmth, it's inviting and you want to come back. You have teachers who will come out of their own pockets for families. So, I am saying people in here are going beyond their responsibilities to make sure that the students' needs are being met. It has become a quiet part of the protocol here. Doing what is right for these children is important and necessary. We are all here to do right by these kids. We are all here to help each other because it takes all of us, it takes a village to help these kids. When you come into this*



*building you can feel the “us.” The parents know how staff feels and they are glad their kids are in this school. My responsibility I have is I am a parent liaison; I call myself a go between, between the parents and the school. I stand on the middle ground, because I need my teachers and my counselor to help me so that I can help the parents. Like I said, we all work together as a team. Parent liaisons help the parents feel comfortable coming into the school and if there is anything they need to know or need help with we can refer them to our counselor so that they can get the proper help and understanding of how they can go about getting the assistance they need for their children. The counselor plays a very significant role with our children and parents in the school. You gotta have a good playing field to draw the parents in so they don’t feel intimidated. If they feel intimidated they will be hesitant about coming in and working with the teachers so the counselor helps with that. She sends out all types of information and holds all kinds of workshops to help these parents and gives them the vital information that they need that they can use to work with their kids. It’s like a block builder, the counselor is like a block builder, and she’s stacking blocks everyday. I say she’s stacking somebody’s mind with information so they get better and better and better, you know, not only to get better for them but to get better for their kids. I think the administration at this school since 2000 doesn’t ask staff to do anything they are not willing to do. The two principals since 2000 roll up their sleeves and work just like the rest of us and they have supported us in our work. They have had an open door policy and we can just come in and talk. They have had a come and talk to me attitude. We are here for one goal, one purpose, to serve. We all are servants to serve these students so they can become the best that they can be.*

T-1: *Initially, it was do as I say, but after the new principal got things in order we finally had somebody put here who knew how the system ran and refused to take whatever was sent and that worked out. Little by little you could see things changing. I think after the first couple of years you could really see it. The school started to blossom. We were put on the map. People started to look at our school and say "Hey, maybe there are some really good things going on here." And that was good. If the one person who follows her would follow her lead, he would just take the school higher and higher. They would be successful and the school would continue to grow. Once you realize that there is work involved until you get things to the way they should be it may seem like a lot of things going on are unsuccessful, but in the long run it's for the good of the school and that works for the children. I think that with the new person in charge we started to look at what the school was about. We looked at goals and we involved the students, the parents, and the teachers in coming up with a new mission, a new goal. Remember when our principal would talk about all stakeholders? It was interesting to me that even the children were included and that's because she recognized that they had a part to play in order to make this school a distinguished school or to bring this school from the basement to the first floor.*

T-2: *The purpose has been the same since I have been here, I came with A-1. I think what A-2 did was he took up the mantel from A-1 and carried it on. Even when he came here, he is going into his 4<sup>th</sup> year so, since he's been here we've not lost momentum and we've not returned to the failing schools list. So I think the purpose hasn't changed. Our purpose is educating children so that they will be responsible productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And so that has not changed.*

T-3: *The mission is carried out by staff members and leadership working together, working to help each other and above all staying focused on what is best for the students. If anyone or anything was not positive then the mission, naturally, will not be accomplished. The mission has not really changed, however, the methods, procedures, and materials used to accomplish the mission have changed. There are more programs in place to support teaching and learning. The classes are smaller; there is more individual tutoring, after-school tutoring, technology, fewer retainees and more community partnerships.*

T-4: *It meant everything. You see, to me it's like a map. You had something that you could visually see so that you knew which way to go. It was like a road map. Before, there was no map! We were just wandering around in the wilderness. Everybody was kinda doing their own thing. With the new leadership everybody would have the same purpose, the same goals, the same vision and all of that. It was like the new standards they have now, you know what the end's gonna look like, we kinda knew what and how we wanted the end to look. It was like backwards mapping. For once we were ahead of everybody else with that kind of future plan.*

A-1: *The mission prior to the 2000 school year was a jumbled mess of educational jargon that was understood by educators alone. During the 2000 school year, the mission changed so that it was simply stated in language that both educators and the laity could understand. The latest brochure and website information reveals that it has remained constant. We pulled together with the same vision, mission, and goals that had to be kept before us at all times so that we could not lose focus. Additionally, professional development was a relevant part of the equation because I wanted us to*

*grow professionally. The school has an achievement plan. The School Achievement Plan is the blueprint by which the school functions. It is not just a document that was developed for show, but one that was designed based on relevant data that clearly shows the needs of the school and a clearly-crafted plan for meeting those needs.*

*A-2: I think just having consistent improvement in our overall achievement based on school data. And what has happened is that since 2000-2001 Eagle has made consistent, incremental gains across the board in all just about all content subject area, in all content subject areas. And just realizing that in this accountability age it's just, it seems that it's just never enough. Because of that our expectations have to be raised, and our level of commitment as well as our focus on continuing to improve in all facets as it pertains to student achievement and student data.*

*A-3: As I recall we were all there to work together and that was essential because we knew that the school had been officially on the failing schools list for the previous two years.*

*A-4: Everything that we do is connected to the purposes of teaching and learning. Every single thing that takes place in this building is for the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning. Everything.*

#### School Achievement Plans

School Achievement Plans for the 2000-2001 school year and the 2002-2003 thru the 2005-2006 school years were examined. School Achievement Plans are a team generated document. Persons on the writing team include but are not limited to the principal, teachers representing all grade levels and specialty areas, at least two business/community partners, one or two paraprofessionals, the media specialist, the

instructional liaison specialist, a representative from the program for exceptional children, the school counselor, and at least two parents. These team members are charged with developing the plan and assisting in monitoring the plan's implementation. Each team member signed the document attesting to their involvement in developing the plan and the approximate percent of the total numbers of hours spent working on the plan. Additional resource staff was available to assist the team in writing and maximizing the development of School Achievement Plans. These additional resources include but are not limited to research, planning and accountability staff, professional development staff, transportation staff, facilities staff, instructional technology staff and youth services staff. Eagle's school district began requiring School Achievement Plans following the 1999-2000 school year.

School Achievement Plans provide strategies for responding to Eagle's superintendent's instructional focus areas and performance targets for each school year. Strategies must be described for each objective represented by a performance target that was assigned to the school. Eagle identified, for its cluster supervisor, interventions and program elements that needed to be monitored during the school year. An example would be that in 2000-2001 a priority area was Reading/Language Arts. The objective was to reduce the number of students in third and fifth grade in the lowest quartile. During the 1999-2000 school year, the baseline year there were 50 third graders in the lowest quartile and 66 fifth graders. The target for the 2000-2001 school year was to have only 47 third grade students in the lowest quartile and 56 fifth graders in the lowest quartile. Movement of those low quartile students would naturally positively impact the middle and highest quartiles.

To increase student achievement Reading Recovery, an early intervention program for first graders at risk, was adopted. The Reading Recovery teachers also conducted guided reading groups for students in the afternoons. Tutors provided one-on-one instruction for students in the lowest quartile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Additional support was provided by after school tutorial programs. At risk third graders attended the Sylvan at School Extended Day program. Students also received assistance from community tutors.

Eagle began the Success for All (SFA) program, Roots and Wings, during the 2000-2001 school year. Success for All became Eagle's schoolwide reform model. This program emphasizes early prevention and intervention to anticipate and solve any learning problems that relate to acquisition of reading, literacy, and comprehension skills. The Success for All Foundation provides schools with research-based curriculum materials. Classroom teachers, tutors, a program facilitator, and parents share instructional roles.

Strategies to achieve this decrease in the number of students in the lowest quartile included but were not limited to homogeneous grouping within and or among classrooms and grades students with common skill sets. Students are formally assessed every eight weeks. The goal is to move them from one skill level to another during an eight week period. Parents assist with homework and as volunteer tutors. Training is provided for them so that tutorials are standardized. Community agency volunteers, local educational agencies such as colleges and universities provided student tutors as did local private high schools and other corporate volunteers. Staff development was conducted to eliminate staff weaknesses.

Program elements that needed monitoring or adjusting during the 2000-2001 school year included teaching strategies, classroom teacher assessment strategies, strategies for addressing the needs of students in the lowest quartile, professional development, allocated instructional time, time allocated for before and after school tutoring, instructional resources, use of persons other than classroom teachers, and integrating technology into the instructional program. Teaching strategies adapted to meet the target incorporated small group instruction, tutoring and parent assisted homework. Assessment strategies for classroom teachers included assessment through curriculum, assessment through Roots and Wings and assessment through observation. In order to meet the needs of students in the lowest quartile, students were exposed to small group instruction, tutoring and one-to-one instruction.

All staff involved in implementing the Success for All program received a three-day initial training. Follow-up training was provided as an integral part of the program at regular intervals both on site and in conjunction with other schools across the country that were and are implementing a Success for All Reading reform model. Instructional time was modified to include a ninety (90) minute block of Success for All reading instruction at the beginning of each school day, plus Success for All instructional strategies were integrated throughout the total curriculum. Time was provided before and after school for scheduled tutoring. Instructional resources included Success for All curriculum materials, Sylvan materials and personnel. Computer usage was included where appropriate. Tutors were used for individual instruction. Administrators and support personnel provided support to staff. Volunteers assisted students and teachers as appropriate.

The School Achievement Plan for 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 was more sophisticated and included a vision: Working as a Team to Achieve Success for All as well as a mission statement and a set of school goals. The school goals are aligned to the superintendent's system goals. Eagle's goals are as follows:

- Raise achievement levels in reading and mathematics.
- Help students develop effective written and spoken communication skills.
- Provide opportunities for students to acquire a broad base of knowledge in science and social studies.
- Improve student attendance.
- Provide a clean, safe and supportive environment for learning.
- Develop and maintain a positive working relationship with parents, business partners and other stakeholders.

These goals have remained consistent over the years even though they ceased to be identified in the School Achievement Plan after the 2004-2005 school year. As the School Achievement Plan became more exact achievement goals/targets were more specific. Action plans for achieving goals in Reading, Language Arts, Math and attendance became precise.

### **Achievement Data**

A two sample T-test was performed on the achievement data. The purpose of this test was to determine if there is a statistical difference in the performance of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students that took the Reading/Language Arts and the Mathematics component of the CRCT test in 1999-2000 when compared to those who took the CRCT in 2005. This test is based on a 95% confidence meaning that if the output characteristic defined as a p



value is less than .050 the difference in performance between the two populations in the study is statistically different.

The closer this value is to .000 the greater the confidence. As an example with a p value of .050 you only have a 5% probability of saying a difference exists when there really is not. With a p value of .001 you only have a 1% chance of being wrong. In most cases except in life treating characteristics, the 95% confidence level is a standard test. See Appendix I.

The two-sample t-test results for Language arts (student not meeting standards on reading portion) comparing the base year results to the 2005 results is a clear indication that there is a statistical difference between the two results. This suggests that the difference is not by random chance but may be the result of specific actions being put in place to cause that change. Correlation does not prove causation, however.

Looking at the data for students exceeding standards for Language arts from the base year compared to 2005 there was an increase from 4% to 26%. The t-test results are T-Test of difference = 0 (vs not =): T-Value = -233.85 **P-Value = 0.000** DF = 467. Since the P value is less than .05, this indicates the difference between 4% and 26% is statistically significant and did not happen by chance. See Appendix J.

In looking at the Math performance aspect of the CRCT (meeting standards data)  
The T

test results are as follows T-Test of difference = 0 (vs not =): T-Value = 364.14 **P-Value = 0.000** DF = 462. Mathematics not meeting standards had a baseline performance of 73% in 1999-2000 and an actual performance of 40% in 2005. Since the P value is less than .05 this indicates the difference between 73% and 40% is statistically significant and

did not happen by chance. We have a less than 5% probability of this conclusion being wrong. See Appendix K.

In looking at the Math performance aspect of the CRCT (exceeding standards data) The

T test results are as follows T-Test of difference = 0 (vs not =): T-Value = -23.40  
P-

value = 0.060 DF = 469. Remembering the rule that if the p value is less than .050 then at a 95% confidence level there is a statistical difference between the base line performance of 0% exceeding the standard and 2% in 2004 -2005 exceeding the mathematics portion of the CRCT. This data would indicate that we do not have a 95% confidence that there is a statistical difference and in fact this improvement could have happen by chance. If we were to try and make this assumption we would have a 6% probability of being wrong. See Appendix L.

This data is consistent with the fact that no mathematics reform model or specialized mathematics program was in place at Eagle during the transition. Instruction was based on state curricular requirements. There were, however, tutorial sessions for students with mathematics skill deficits and classroom instruction was differentiated to meet individual student needs.

### **Section Summary**

This study defines purpose as a clear, well defined and accepted mission. This accepted mission came to life as a result of the adoption of a viable reading reform initiative, appropriate use of Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum and Georgia Performance Standards. The newly established purpose caused administration and staff to examine what Eagle was really all about. These educators did not want to retain the label of a failing school. Shared purpose gives rise to teamwork and collaboration which

encourages individualism and collectivism as essential components for organizational learning. A momentum developed that resulted in Eagle's almost immediate reversal of organizational functioning. Eagle was no longer on the failing schools list at the end of the 2000-2001 school year.

Purpose set in motion first steps towards distinction. The methods, materials, and procedures used to support teaching and learning calmed the chaotic waters swirling around and inside the school. Decisions based on purpose resulted in the choice of directions, goals, and missions that bore successful fruit almost immediately. Everyone knew what the end game was.

Comprehensive School Reform in the package of Success for All coupled with school achievement plans provided the blueprint for Eagle's multidimensional organizational functioning. Clear purpose made it possible for administration and staff to evolve into a team focused on and connected to the purpose of teaching and learning. Programs were initiated to support teaching and learning simultaneously thereby supporting the organizational well being of Eagle Elementary.

Parents and community members acknowledged the mindful and collaborative move toward positive educational change. They began to support the way change was being approached. Things were not perfect at Eagle, feathers were sometimes ruffled, however, fidelity to purpose won out.

### **SCHOOL CULTURE**

School Culture is reflected in Eagle's ambiance, feel, and moral code--school pledge: *As an Eagle Elementary School Student, I will not argue, fuss or fight. I will show respect for myself, my classmates, my teachers and other adults who work with me.*

*If there is a problem, I will walk the Peace Path or report it to the nearest adult. At no time will I take matters into my own hands. I will follow all rules and regulations and uphold the high standards that have been established at the best elementary school in the city: Eagle Elementary School!*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Characteristics of culture are determined by the way the building is maintained and decorated-banners in the auditorium, murals on the walls, outside classrooms. The banners in the auditorium are rewards for meeting the superintendent's targets and for being a Title I distinguished school and a 2007 Georgia School of Excellence for Student Achievement. Signs at the entrance and exits are symbols of a culture of success and high expectations for student achievement.

Values are evidenced in the way people in the school interact and function. Culture is evidenced by the beliefs that are taken for granted about people and how an "Eagle" student acts and the belief that this is the **best** elementary school in the district. The school reflects the children, their accomplishments, their quality work is displayed. The decision-making process includes teachers, students, administrators, community partners, and parents. There is a belief that all students can learn.

The school itself is welcoming and conducive to learning. Visitors have commented on the fact that the school has so many positive posters and signs all over the building that it must be difficult not to feel positive in the building. The environment promotes communication, interaction, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment.

Teachers are collegial, classrooms are inviting, teachers have sufficient materials and supplies, the building is clean and well maintained, adults and students feel safe on

school grounds. Interactions between teachers, staff and students are caring, supportive and respectful. Everyone in the building is respected and valued. There is a sense of community. There is an emphasis on teaching and learning.

Teachers differentiate instruction to support the different ways students learn. Expectations are high for all students and all teachers. Progress is systematically and regularly monitored. Assessment data is used to drive and improve instruction. Achievement and performance is rewarded and encouraged.

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Eagle's purpose during the transition years created a cultural shift that altered staff beliefs about how things were done. Elements of that cultural shift began with the development of a viable purpose and a set of organizational goals. Aligned with viable purpose and distinct goals are collaboration, leadership, a commitment to enhancing teaching and improving learning, and the willingness to work from bell to bell day in and day out. This is the cultural shift that stands as the foundation for positive educational change at Eagle.

#### School Achievement Plans

Culture is not visible; it operates out of our awareness. It becomes visible through its representations, given an account of and in the ways it is portrayed. School Achievement Plans during the 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 school years specifically address the need for supporting student achievement by building a supportive school culture and providing supportive services for students. Eagle's stakeholders espoused the belief that the school's culture is the foundation for school improvement. The values and norms established and transmitted to others in the community of learners will either encourage high levels of achievement or stifle it. If the cultural norms are

strong, continuous and widespread, the school's climate will be one in which students and staff was encouraged to meet and exceed expectations and garner the support of parents and the entire school community.

Based on the Hi-Places Survey data for the 2001-2002 school year, three areas related to Eagle's culture were target for improvement for the 2002-2004 school year.

These areas are: (1) staff involvement in the decision-making process; (2) team and grade level interactions; and (3) application of best practices in the classroom.

Professional development was the tool used to improve these areas as a means of contributing to higher levels of student achievement. Strengthening these areas enhance collaboration techniques and skills.

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Eagle's staff recognized the importance of having community and governmental agencies to serve proactive roles. In order to assist students who have non-educational challenges, several community agencies provided support services. A local hospital's child and adolescent psychiatry clinic provided therapeutic services on site, one day a week. This was one of the services secured by Eagle's counselor (this researcher) during the transition years. This service continues. Practitioners include a medical social worker and two psychiatrists. Services include family and individual counseling.

Eagle is a work study site of a local university. Students come to our site and provide clerical assistance and serve as teacher assistants during the 90 minute Success for All Reading program. This support is provided through the America Reads initiative portion of No Child Left Behind and began during the 2000-2001 school year. These students also tutor and mentor students under the direction of the Success for All tutorial

program. Additionally, they serve as listening partners for students who have no listeners at home to help them complete their Read and Respond forms. Read and Respond requires students to read or be read to for 20 minutes at home for homework and respond to questions after their reading selections. Eagle began its partnership with this local educational agency during year two of the transition period. The relationship with this university is still in tact.

During the 2000-2001 thru 2002-2003 school years, a local historically Black college/university (HBCU)'s Department of Allied Health Services conducted a Math/Science Academy after school. This program exposed students to Allied Health Services careers and provided homework assistance. Children participating in this program had the opportunity to shadow college students on their campus. This was a grant funded program written by professors in the Allied Health Services Department. Eagle benefited in the form of intellectual capital, human capital and math and science materials. A unique result of this collaboration between the HBCU and Eagle was a mini-medical school on the Eagle site.

Zap Asthma, Inc. provided field representatives, from 2000-2005, who made home visits to do home evaluations so that asthma triggers were removed from homes. Students with asthma and siblings with asthma received educational sessions on asthma management. Staff was provided with in service regarding asthma, its signs, triggers and ways to be supportive of students with asthma.

The local departments of corrections had a cadre of officers who assisted parents with student discipline challenges that may impact student performance. Officers make contact on a regular basis with specific students in order to maintain positive school

behavior. Officers conduct group sessions with specific students to encourage positive school behavior and gang resistance behaviors. The city police department, using school detectives, and the county sheriff's office continue its involvement with Eagle conducting Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) programs each year.

Foster Grandparents, Inc. has provided two foster grandmothers who serve as teaching assistants in classrooms since the 2001-2002 school year. Their presence has a calming affect particularly with the K-2 students. They provide an extra pair of eyes, ears, hands and arms for a much needed hug. There are still two grandmas at Eagle. They have changed over the years, but the program is in tact.

#### Interview Responses

Interviewees were asked about changes in school culture and how those changes contributed to educational improvement at Eagle. Culture is defined in this study as a shared sense of direction and responsibility, a source of unity and how things are done.

*P-2: I notice that everybody here is after the same thing. They are about the kids learning. You know a mind is a terrible thing to waste and everybody here just wants the best for these children. Like they come with their sewing kit to patch them up, to talk some sense into their heads, to get them started on the right track, to make them feel worthy. This staff wants these kids to feel like they are somebody, because they are. I've seen teachers come up with ideas. They haven't talked to each other but it's the same idea. You remember the Katrina victims, well everybody wanted to share and help and we helped the ones that came here. The unity was so evident when the hurricane victims came to our school and everybody just pulled together. I've seen this even before the hurricane. We have had staff members fall on hard times and when you look up someone*



*is collecting love offering for that person. It's one mindset and everybody focuses on one goal. That goal is helping these children to achieve. We want our kids to do well and learn and everybody works hard on that goal everyday. We want them to arrive at their highest level.*

*T-1: I think, over all that the culture improved. I think, initially, it took about a year. Going into that second year you could see the culture of the staff start to come together and a lot of things changed. I mean you always have that group, no matter what, is going to be over in leftfield. But for the most part, 80% of the staff had started to buy in and to actually talk about and do things that helped improve our school from the inside out.*

*T-2: It was a culture that people wanted to succeed. That was the difference. If you come in with an attitude thinking you can win, then it changes the whole environment, the whole outlook. If you think you can win. I remember a student saying to me in my very first class after A-1 came: "Oh yeah, we used to be able to do anything we wanted to do. If we wanted to walk out of the classroom we could walk out the classroom. We could just do anything." But that wasn't happening in my classroom. I didn't tolerate that, because my whole focus is wanting to win, most of us believed that we could win and it carried over to the students. The expectations changed.*

*When you change, the culture becomes one of success and expectation of success either you get on board or you leave. With the high expectations, again, I go back to the reform model that was instituted at that time although our new principal was a kind person, she was firm, she had an expectation that we would succeed and everybody knew it. She didn't have to say it, you just knew it. Even the students knew it so, even those*

*students who used to walk out of the classroom and wanted to do nothing started wanting to do something. To me, it's almost as though culture and expectation walk hand in hand and they became one in the same. They can't be mutually exclusive because the school culture was that we believed we could succeed that we could win that we could do well. So we worked to make that belief come true.*

*T-3: It stepped up, oh yes! There was high expectation, the principal that came in and the assistant principal knew and wanted us to know that they didn't want to be on the failing schools list and were not going to be on the failing schools list. They talked up and pumped up everything. I think the expectations soared and teachers soared to meet that expectation. Everybody was finally on the same page.*

*My impression is that I don't think any previous administrations wanted the school to be a failing one. I think the new administration stepped up and did more to make sure that the best things happened for our children and for us. I think that as a teacher and the teachers that were on my team we wanted our group to be strong at all times. And for the most part we were, regardless of administration. We just stepped up to what we had to do. We always wanted our group/grade level to be the top group although our group on the first grade level didn't have a great impact on the test scores at that time we sure tried to pump them up so that when their scores did matter they would have a good foundation. We wanted them to go to the next grade and make a positive contribution. When kindergarten and first grade teachers lay a good foundation the residuals impact test scores later and that's why we worked so hard. We wanted the school to be successful and so we worked hard to prepare the students to be ready when*

*they went to the next grade where test scores were important. We all believed that we all had to make a difference in or for the school to be successful.*

*T-4: Teachers started asking each other, how do you deal with this? They were not afraid to ask for help or to give it, it became more like a community. People got involved in solving the problems that occurred in the school. Before you just solved your own problems or you just lived with them and that created more problems. And back then there was no help anyway. You felt like you were just out there by yourself. The changes made us feel like we were a part of a community. There was always someone else you could go to and ask for help or support. You didn't have to pretend everything was working fine when it wasn't. You could also team teach. Before you had little splinter groups within the school. This little group over here was doing this and this little group over there was doing something else. Then if this little group didn't like what another group was doing there was chaos. That was what was mainly cleaned up. We were learning how to work on one accord. Before A-1 came in we were in chaos so she had to calm everything down. She had to clean up the little group here little group there and the messiness.*

*A-1: There had to be a paradigm shift where everyone transitioned from a culture of failure to one of success, then providing the structure that was needed in order for this to work. Setting high standards and expectations for all stakeholders, providing a safe environment that is conducive to learning, providing tutoring for students in need or remediation and/or enrichment and focusing on attendance have contributed to student success. I believe the culture that is established contributes significantly to high levels of student achievement. This is why it is so important for the school leader to work*

*diligently to develop a culture that fosters high achievement and a high degree of order while allowing students the opportunity to develop individual gifts and talents and become risk takers. Students must feel that they are an integral part of the process in moving from failure to distinction. Otherwise, they may resist any efforts to change. The culture at the school stresses that learning is serious business, but we can have fun while we learn. Therefore, children look forward to learning. Students who are not ready to learn are provided whatever they need, counseling, social services or other materials and supplies. The same may be said of staff members and parents. The changing culture must come from within every person who may be impacted. A culture of success will eventuate into **better** staff relationships. All reasonable people identify with success. No one wants to fail. Once staff members get a taste of success, they tend to work more collegially than if they must work in a culture of failure.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflection): A-2 was in a unique position in light of the fact that he had to follow A-1 the principal who is credited with beginning our transition from failing to distinguished school status. A-2 was charged with keeping the positive movement going. He could not drop the ball. He had to continue the momentum and propel this school to even greater heights. His comments relate to the second transition. That transition took place when he became principal after A-1's four very successful years. This too, was a challenging period. It is difficult to follow a beloved leader who had taken us to heights we had never before reached.

*A-2: It started off very rocky. It was a very challenging period for all individuals included. I think, and I don't want to minimize it and just say that it was because of a new leader, a different style, different leadership style. Things were changing. The level of*

*accountability changed as it continues to change on a daily and a yearly basis so, I think, it started off very rocky. But, I think it's improving, I think it has improved tremendously and I think there is a lot of room for improvement, as well. But I think, we're in a better place than at the outset at this point, compared to this point.*

*It was supportive in that agencies or different departments really pushed to support teachers and students here. And that included the office, the different leadership members, the counselor, media specialist, and so forth and the principal as well. So that was the push to support teachers and students. But then again, the human relations side of it took away from it in that because people were getting used to change and a new level of and, different expectations.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflection): A-2 brought in the “Who Moved My Cheese” story in an attempt to help staff adjust to the loss of a beloved, charismatic, successful leader-A-1. This beloved, charismatic, successful leader had come in fully aware the Eagle was on the failing schools list. She had gone to the internet to look at test scores and other available data on the school. She had also spoken with educators who had knowledge of the school’s past and present. Her concerns about accepting a principal’s position in such a school were many, but as a veteran educator with training and experience that had taken her in to all types of settings, she believed she could facilitate positive change in this school. In fact, it was her efforts that resulted in a change of mascot. We went from warring Trojans to Eagles soaring toward excellence. Her understanding of what message she wanted to send, even in the choice of a mascot, was so visionary. She understood the unspoken impact of students and staff and parents seeing Eagle as warring Trojans. The mascot had to represent the positive cultural shift

and the new set of values and commitments that were replacing those that troubled the waters swirling in and around Eagle.

She had a clear understanding of the fact that no child should be burdened by attending a school that is not successful. When asked why something was required of staff, her patterned response was “It’s for the children.” She had heard that there was very little structure that the staff did what it wanted to do, that parents were out of control and intimidated the most recent principal and that achievement levels were low. Positive change occurred in her first year at the helm due to her ability to plan, communicate and develop a cadre of believers on staff who helped push her vision. Staff received pay for performance pay. Schools meeting between 70% and 100% of the superintendent’s student achievement targets receive a monetary bonus in their December pay check. The school came off the failing schools list. That was a difficult act for A-2 to follow because of the successes of A-1’s four year tenure here. A-2 took the baton when it was handed to him and began running to move Eagle from good to great (his motto).

*A-2: Ok, what I did after my first year, at the end of my first year and getting over and just being able to say I survived the first year. I really sought the counsel of staff members and actually teachers and I really asked their opinions about how they thought things went the first year as it pertained to my leadership style, my communication style, just the air that I gave, what people received in my verbal and nonverbal messages. From that I really saw that there were some areas of improvement needed on my part as well as others. As well as I thought we needed to see how we could move away from reflecting on “I wish the old administrator was still here and I missed the old times.” And so, during the summer I started to collaborate with some teachers and staff members, the ILS and*

*counselor. We talked about some different things that we could do to begin to change the culture, to begin that process and so with that came suggestions of ways we could get together as a staff I did a lot of self reflection and looked at some of my behaviors so that the current staff would receive my messages hopefully better. And one of the things that I reflected on I was focusing on a book called "Who Moved My Cheese" which is a very famous book. So during our preplanning or staff orientation for my second year we actually looked at a power point and talked about what were some things that we could do to move away from the old feelings, negative feelings that we had and how we could foster and begin to look at creating a community of learners, a team, that would work together for the common good.*

*With that focus on "Who Moved My Cheese" to move to a new level we had to really emphasize and to just really move away from what we were comfortable in doing before. We had reached a point in the school's history as it pertains to student data that the school had made the jump to that next level where we were not being recognized as a low performing school. But we had moved to that middle area so to speak where we were doing a pretty good job. With the moving our cheese it was another step in just realizing that doing pretty good is not enough. And we have to take it to another level and I think that that was also a beginning point for us to begin thinking about how we could reflect on our teaching practices, how can I teach differently. How can I address the needs of my students who have so many different needs? And be able to demonstrate it based on the accountability measures, the CRCT and other factors.*

*A-3: You will remember, we didn't get many kids from outside that community and our kids came from two housing projects. So what we did was create a culture within*

*the school. Once the culture of success inside the school stabilized we exposed culture to the community. Once kids found out they could learn, they felt better about themselves. All of a sudden articulation became better. I remember some of the assembly programs we had, you know, how well the children learned to speak. One thing also that I loved, that was a part of our program, every child belonged to every teacher. Just because you were 5<sup>th</sup> grade didn't mean that a first or kindergarten teacher wasn't concerned about your children. Your kid was every kid at the school. We established a culture of excellence and outstanding performance. They could see themselves out of the projects. Career days were the best because bit by bit the kids began to change what they wanted to be based on exposure and accomplishments. They actually began to believe that they could be business managers, business owners, accountants, nurses, doctors and other careers that were represented at those presentations. This was so important and made such an impression because the presenters looked like them and many of them grew up in the same circumstances. They began to produce products that were competitive with other students across the district in Social Studies and Science Fairs and could stand toe to toe with their age peers in those competitions. When they brought winning ribbons back to school they were so proud and we made such a big deal of it that their school peers were proud too and wanted to be the next to compete. We created a collective sense of what mattered and what was expected, but beyond that, I have long believed that poverty is not just an economic condition, but also a condition of mind that has a culture of its own. When a child is able to get good grades and feel good about his learning experience it does something to his thought processes. All of a sudden now you know I could be a banker or a doctor. I can be an attorney. Whereas, prior to that, I don't speak*



*well enough or I know that he be, she be, they be won't get me into law school. I understand why I need to say he is, she is, they are. Like I said, collectively, as a group, all of us felt that every child was my child and we owed that child something. We had some difficult and challenging kids but the pure fact that they were ours was key.*

*A-4: Again, teachers understand the need for collaboration. The culture changed in a positive manner. Once everybody understood how important it is to share, to work together we achieved more by working together. It just made for a better environment to come into when you know that your colleagues value you and you value them. I have a shoulder to lean on. It's a risk free kind of environment. It's safe. If I don't know it I know that I can go to someone that does know it and that person is willing to help me. That makes for a very positive and welcoming kind of school culture. Even though you may not know all of the answers you know that there is support and the support is on your grade level. No one is as smart as all of us combined.*

*During the transition period, I would say, change is not easy. Because initially, a lot of times people think that you are saying that they are doing something wrong or have done something wrong. They are afraid that it is going to come back on you as the teacher. I think that it felt like a personal attack. So you're saying to yourself, I'm not. I am doing what I am expected to do. So, initially, it wasn't easy to get people to understand that the way that you have been doing things hasn't gotten us the desired results. And you have already said that you want to be a part of a winning team and you have been on a losing team for a while now and we have to change some of the attitudes and behaviors and some of those teaching practices that you have previously embraced. You have to change what you've been doing if you want to see a difference in our*

*instructional program here. So, initially, it wasn't easy. But again I think that it was a part of the vision of the school leader to help people understand why you are being asked to change the way you have been doing things to change your thinking about the thing, if you want positive and desirable outcomes to occur. Initially, it wasn't easy, but once the sense of urgency was put out there, once the data was presented, once they understood that either you get on the boat, get on the bus or you get off then things quickly turned around once that sense of urgency was put out there. Was it easy, no, because change often times is not easy? But, teachers did buy in and we are now reaping the benefits.*

### **Section Summary**

Eagle's sense of urgency to erase a culture of failure and dysfunction resulted in a rally around the belief that the school's culture is the foundation for successful educational change and school improvement. A culture of achievement and success provided identity that helped administration and staff mature and come together around Eagle's common purpose. Eagle's culture evolved into a shared sense of direction and responsibility. Culture became a source of unity. Culture imbued Eagle with a sense of success and an expectation of success. Elements of a professional learning community are emerging in Eagle's culture. The collaborative dialogue so critical to professional learning communities was a constant. These new cultural shifts enhanced the organizational functioning and well being of Eagle Elementary.

### **SCHOOL STRUCTURE**

This study defines structure as the utilization of time and space and methods of defining responsibilities and roles in schools. Traditionally utilization of space promoted teacher isolation. During the transition, Eagle used space to establish unity among grade

level teachers. Proximity resulted in collective efficacy and a heightened capacity to problem solve when challenges arose. Roles and responsibilities were impacted by shared vision. Teachers and staff learned to work together as teams. Collaborative teams developed out of the strength of each member, out of interdependence and a keeping an eye on the prize attitude and work ethic. Changes in school structure can positively change behaviors in schools.

### Comprehensive School Reform

The curriculum structure of the Success for All Program necessitated considerable change in organizational functioning and practices for Eagle. There were changes in teaching methods and how teachers implemented best practices. Success for All impacted the utilization of time and changed the master schedule at Eagle. Success for All time became a designated, sacred time for teaching reading comprehension and fluency skills. Success for All provided for differentiation of reading instruction based on cross-grade grouping for the purpose of establishing homogeneous groups for reading during the first ninety-minute instructional block of the day.

Providing reading instruction from 8:20-9:50 requires all certified staff members to be involved in the teaching of reading employing strategies outlined by the Success for All Foundation; consequently art, music, physical education, and foreign language teachers were a part of the Success for All instructional team. An additional 30 minutes of Language Arts was added. This brought the time designated in the master schedule for the teaching of Reading and Language Arts skills to 120 minutes each day.

With more schools adopting comprehensive reform models that require at least two hours of Reading and Language Arts instruction, the school day needed to be

extended at least thirty minutes for elementary schools with such initiatives. To accommodate the 120 minutes of reading instruction Eagle extended the day by 30 minutes. Eagle's school district was amenable to such an extension. This time provides more uninterrupted quality time to focus on math as well as reading/language arts. Eagle extends the school day three days each week to provide additional individual instruction for our students. Extended day classes end at 4:30.

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Reading is integrated into all subject areas during the school day. All teachers are required to engage students in mindful, meaningful, relevant, and interesting reading activities related to specific content areas. The integration of reading/across curricular instruction ensures that essential reading strategies are not being taught in isolation.

#### School Achievement Plans

Roles and responsibilities were redefined in some instances as Eagle focused on enhancing teaching and learning. During the 2000-2001 school year, Eagle's school achievement plan identified the adoption of Reading Recovery, an early intervention program for at-risk first graders. A cadre of Reading Recovery teachers and tutors, initially paraprofessionals, were identified to provide guided reading groups for students in the afternoon. Tutors provided one-on-one instruction for students in the lowest quartile on the ITBS. Additional support was provided through Safe Haven and staff conducted after school tutorial programs. At-risk third graders attended the Sylvan at School Extended Day program.

### Achievement Data

During the 1999-2000 school year, Eagle made only three of nine student performance targets for a percentage of 33%. In the instructional priority areas, Eagle met its goal of decreasing the percent of students in the lowest quartile (1-25 percentiles) on the reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills at the third grade level. Eagle met its goal of decreasing the percent of students in the lowest quartile (1-25 percentiles) on the Mathematics portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills at the third grade level. Eagle met its goal of decreasing the percent of students absent 10 days or more at grades K-5.

During the 2000-2001 school year, Eagle made 14 of 15 targets for 93.3%. These targets were met by student performance of third and fifth grade students in Reading and Mathematics on the Stanford Achievement Tests and fourth grade student performance on Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics Tests on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests as well as meeting attendance goals for grades K-5. 2000-2001 was the first year of full implementation of the Comprehensive School Reform Model Success for All Reading.

### Interview Responses

Interviewees weigh in on the Comprehensive School Reform Model. P-1: *I like how they have instruction now. Especially the SFA program in the morning time and all the tutoring. It looks like they have more grants where they can get more things so that our children can compete with the other children in the district. I like how they have the areas in the class room. I'm talking about how they have the math centers and reading centers and all the other centers. I see them in all of the rooms, you know, because I am a custodian and I see how everything is set up in the classrooms. I like the word wall, it has*

*all these words that children have to master and I look at all that and take that into consideration when I think about how the teachers are teaching now. I like how everyone has to teach in the SFA program and how we have all these tutors for the children. I remember when my son was in the Sylvan After School program when A-1 first came. I liked it, even though he didn't need it like some of the kids did. They were trying to use all the resources possible to bring the children up. We got a lot of resources when A-1 came that we never had before. I think that teachers are more involved and more dedicated than they were back then. They seem dedicated like they are trying to accomplish some sort of goal. They are not worrying just about tests, they want the children to know something when they come from this school and go somewhere else.*

*T-1: Basically, because SFA had to be 90 minutes, uninterrupted time. That meant that children were tested, they were grouped based on reading level. If you were first grade and your ability was third grade you were put into a group where they could teach you and move you forward. Even if you were 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade and you were a couple of grade levels below you were still put into a situation didn't make you feel like a failure. It sets children up to succeed. You may start out down here, three or four levels but if the program is carried out and instruction is maintained the way it is supposed to then it works. We got more volunteers to come in and tutor and become a part of the inner workings of the school and I think that that helped us to improve. The new math thing that came into play later on helped.*

*T-2: The structure of the day changed because of the 90 minute SFA reading block. I left out the language arts block so there was a 120 minute block for Reading/Language Arts. Nothing else changed to my knowledge. One of the things we*

*did was all teachers on a grade level had a special, extracurricular class at the same time. That gave us time to come together to plan and that was a big plus because you didn't have to wait to do this after school when you are exhausted. This common planning time was during the school day and we had that time at least once a week. That impacted learning because you could coordinate and we knew what your team mates were expecting. Also if you couldn't figure out something and you collaborated with somebody else two heads are better than one. Coming out of that isolation united the staff as I said earlier. When we were all together we could discuss what we needed to do in certain circumstances and situations. You could say I'm kinda weak here what do you suggest. There was a transparency there and although I was the senior member of the team, I respected the opinions of everybody. We are always forever learning. This planning time built cohesiveness.*

*T-3: I think SFA is a good program. The objectives are great. Now sometimes, you know me, I'm old school and had my own way of doing things. SFA put in a 90 minute block of time in the schedule first thing in the morning where everybody had to teach reading and that was good because we couldn't be interrupted when we were teaching reading. Parents couldn't come in and nothing took that time away from the reading. This was really good, I thought, because you remember when we had less than 30% of the children reading on or above grade level. That was why we had the reading recovery program here, remember? Reading was one of our biggest weaknesses. That's why SFA was such a good program for us to have. We needed that time blocked out. For one thing we had a master schedule and that was great. It gave teachers a chance to regroup during the day and to plan collaboratively. That was really great and one of the*

*pluses for the staff and the students. Another change was that we had smaller classes. When I first got here I had 28 students in my class and that was not the greatest situation because I had primary grade children. We were fortunate to have a newly renovated building and that made a difference too. That was a plus too.*

*I think that was the time that we started having substitutes coming in and we had a chance to meet with the leaders of the SFA program so that we could better understand what we were supposed to do. We continued to get support on how to do the program. We learned how to work with the media specialist, our math people, our social studies lead teachers and we had to learn how to teach reading across the curriculum. We collaborated to learn how to do cross curriculum teaching. We had the kids reading everywhere. I guess that's why now teachers are pulled from all the areas to work in the SFA program, like the P.E., Art, and Music everyone was trained. Any one that is certified could be pulled in to teach in the SFA program. That meant that every SFA class had more than one adult in the class and they collaboratively teach the class. That really gives kids support because they can be monitored better because there is another adult with them. Relationships were strong because we were all depending on each other to make things successful. Teaching reading was an all day thing and we all had to do it in some way. We planned and collaborated during common planning and during faculty meetings, too. I must say this; most of the planning was directed by higher administration. We came together as a team to see how we were going to facilitate whatever the mandate was and we did that in SFA component meetings.*

*T-4: For one, especially for the reading, it was a set schedule that everybody followed. It was really good especially for new teachers it gave them a map on how to*



*teach reading. For math and other subjects you could use some of those same strategies. It changed the whole delivery of curriculum. It gave us a little format and schedules to manage the day and how to set up objectives and goals to follow. And everybody was doing the same thing. From 8:15 til 10:00 there was just reading during that time. Nothing else took place during that time. All certified teachers were working in an SFA class. Anyone coming in to help had to work in reading classes, no music, no PE, all the other classes started after 10:00. It just made sense after a while. SFA had a tutoring component that helped too. That took place in the afternoon and children were pulled out of class for that help. Those students who were having trouble were pulled out for 30 minutes additional help with reading.*

*A-1: Adopting a reform initiative in reading Success for All four years ago and using Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum and Georgia Performance Standards have made a difference. SFA has numerous strategies, such as, listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, meaningful sentences, partner reading, et cetera that have helped students overcome deficits in reading that may have served as a barrier to understanding and processing information. Students are also taught test-taking strategies and receive practice using various resources, printed materials as well as online resources that provide immediate feedback. We set aside 120 minutes a day for reading and language arts and at least an hour for math by adjusting the schedule and cutting back on the time for pull-outs and "specials" that are not required. Also, the effective use of time, space and methods of defining roles and responsibilities was extremely important in impacting change. The district curriculum has been aligned to the state's standards. The content of what teachers teach is aligned to the district curriculum. Teachers do review assessment*

*data when they plan instruction. The principal or his/her designee reviews lesson plans, monitors collaborative planning sessions and offer guidance in terms of improving planning to address the needs of the students on the basis of available data. As principal I allowed time for collaboration by establishing planning days for grade levels and content area teachers and regular established common planning times during the week.*

*A-2: As it pertains to master schedule providing more collaborative planning for the staff, for the teachers to work on the work that they have to do, to plan and to deliver a quality lesson, that was something. For the spacing in the building, I would say after my second year, there were changes in making some grade level assignments. Where after my first year I realized that some teams were not as effective as they potentially could be and making some changes that had to be accepted. Some people had to be moved out of their comfort zone. What I did in looking at the data after my second year I saw that some of our teachers were doing a very effective job of teaching the standards. It was demonstrated by the performance of their students on a daily basis as well as on the standardized tests and assessments that we use. What I decided to do, I decided to have some teachers to loop with their students to see if their best practices would continue to improve student achievement over the next year. So, there was a kindergarten teacher who moved from kindergarten to first. A first grade teacher who moved with her students to second grade. Two second grade teachers who both moved from second to third. They actually moved with their classes in those grades.*

*Staff roles divided in the sense, divided the staff at times when individuals who under the previous leadership had different levels of responsibility and respect. I like to look at things sometimes as a totem pole. If you are at the top then you have more power,*

*more influence, you dictate more of the things that go on in the school and I think that initially some of these individuals who were way up on the totem pole in the previous administration were moved down at the outset of my administration and so I think that was divisive for our staff. Now also with that I would say some individuals moved up on the totem pole and I think in areas where it pertains to student achievement it helped us move where we are at this point. And giving some individuals more leadership, more opportunities as well as just sometimes just giving other indirect confirmation that what they are doing is making a difference and is helping our school.*

*A-4: Again, because it was a new practice, a lot of it had to be presented with research that showed the benefits of collaboration. Once teachers were able to buy in to it based on what the research said, how research supports collaboration they had a better understanding of why we need to do this. I think now they know that no one is trying to delegate how you are to use your time, but they understand the benefits of it and how meaningful it is. Time was allocated by making sure that teachers had a common time in their daily schedule by grade level. Each of them would receive enrichment at the same time. That is their students were with enrichment teachers at the same time each day across the board on specific days of the week to insure that teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate. If there is an area in which someone is weak, during collaborative planning teachers can address that with another colleague and find out what they are doing. They can safely say what areas they are lacking proficiency in and get ideas and support from their grade level teammates. Is it okay for me to come into your classroom when you are teaching and observe you? This is some of the conversation during common planning time. The principal has made sure that enrichment teachers*

*receive the same grade level at a designated time so that an hour to an hour and a half is dedicated to that particular block of time each day so that teachers have that professional dialogue day in and day out. If they want to look at student work then during collaborative planning time they can look at student work. They can talk about the task itself and define and design learning tasks for the students. It wasn't really difficult once the administrative team determined that this is something that would be beneficial to the teachers. It was just a matter of developing a block of time everyday and carving out that time using enrichment teachers. Professional development is also set up during that time even though we try not to do a whole lot of professional development during that time because we really want the teachers to have time to interact with each other in planning learning tasks and designing quality tasks for the students, plan upcoming lessons, design assessment instruments, talk about what works or does not work. But some of the time is designated for professional development, but not a large block of it. They may have professional development once a month during collaborative planning time.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Between 2000 and 2003, there were many programmatic and personnel supports put in place at Eagle to buffer the Success for All Reading Reform model. These supports included, but were not limited to strategies for addressing the needs of students in the lowest quartile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and those not meeting the standards on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test. Strategies included small group instruction, tutoring, and one-on-one instruction. Before school and after school tutoring was added to the schedule. Other tutorials were scheduled: Safe Haven on Monday thru Thursday, Capitol Area Mosaic (CAM) tutorials were held in the community center in walking distance from our location on Monday thru

Friday and Sylvan tutorials were held on Tuesday and Thursday. These additions impacted teacher roles and responsibilities, paraprofessional roles and responsibilities, support staff roles and responsibilities, as well as administrator roles and responsibilities. Community members became a part of the cadre of volunteers, mentors and tutors who assisted in the positive changes in the structure of the instructional program and the supports put in place to enhance teaching and learning. These safeguards were a part of the calming of the chaotic waters and the move from failing to distinguished school status. The multidimensional organizational functioning was in its positive morphing phase. During this two year period internal and external supports were developed to ensure positive change. The school was no longer isolated and floundering on its own. Eagle was making positive strides in all areas.

### **Section Summary**

Eagle's comprehensive Reading Reform Model redefined the school's structure in terms of the utilization of time by establishing a designated time for daily Reading and Language Arts instruction. Differentiation of instruction began to include cross-grade grouping for Reading. All certificated personnel were assigned roles and responsibilities for Reading instruction and supporting instruction to address students with academic performance deficits. The school day was extended to provide additional support for integrating Reading into all subject areas.

Paraprofessionals, college students from local educational agencies, community partners and community tutorial programs provided support to Eagle's instructional program both during the day and after school. Continuous and ongoing support from the Success for All Foundation, time for collaborative planning for grade level teachers and

the staff itself and professional development strengthened the structural changes. Programmatic and personnel supports enhanced buy in for changes in roles and responsibilities and tightness of time during the school day. Structural revisions netted positive changes in teaching and learning and organizational well-being.

### **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

The leadership frame's focus is the official and unofficial leaders within a school who must cultivate organizational improvement and learning, and furthermore maintain and encourage the types of relationships that support the capacity to act positively in response to change. In the current climate of change in schools, leadership needs to incorporate the search for common goals, empowerment, a collaborative culture, professional development and problem solving. The need for a cadre of individuals to address the various demands of educating students is a necessity. Empowering teacher leaders is a component of the positive educational change at Eagle.

#### **Comprehensive School Reform**

Comprehensive school reform models have been successful in promoting positive achievement in high-poverty, high-minority, and urban schools like Eagle. One of the major strengths of Eagle's reform model is the program facilitator. Success for All facilitators are experienced teachers with strong backgrounds in reading instruction. Because they are part of the teacher support system facilitators are not administrators, however, they do provide leadership. The facilitator functions as an informal leader whose goal is to ensure an effective, efficient, successful reading program. Eagle's facilitator during the transition from failing to distinguished school status was one of the informal leaders who operated as a change agent. She made sure that no child or teacher

fell through the cracks. Her expertise was essential for buy in of the program. She was the overseer of effective implementation of changes in reading instruction and the use of the Success for All curriculum.

The facilitator provided professional development and taught demonstration lessons as a follow up to the in-service training. She was especially valuable and supportive of new teachers and teachers new to Eagle and Success for All. She was the liaison between teachers, tutors and support personnel. Her ability to communicate and keep information flowing between all essential parties has been critical to the success of Success for All at Eagle.

A major facilitator responsibility is the bimonthly component meetings with teachers and tutors. She also coordinates and manages the eight week assessment and placement of students in appropriate classes. Eagle's Success for All facilitator is also the school's Student Support Team (SST) chair and is responsible for helping teacher design strategies for struggling students. This is done to keep students out of the special educational loop if that kind of assessment is not warranted.

#### School Achievement Plans

School Achievement Plans (SAPs) are written by a team of people. Early School Achievement Plans were developed by the principal, a teacher from each grade level and specialty area, a business partner, a paraprofessional, the media specialist, the Instructional Liaison Specialist, a PEC (Program For Exceptional Children) representative, the Counselor, and two external advisors. Plans indicate what is being done to enhance student achievement and what additional strategies will be put in place to ensure student success. The team also assists in monitoring its implementation. The

collaborative effort is a clear indication of a willingness to work toward continuous improvement. The continuous improvement is in the area of learning and student achievement.

Each participant was required to sign the School Achievement Plan prior to its submission to the Executive Director for Schools. Typically those involved in the School Achievement Plan development process are a part of the leadership structure at Eagle in a formal way or an informal way. The early teams involved twenty plus people. As the process has become more sophisticated and more specific to the direct instructional needs of the students, the number has decreased to ten to fifteen people and the document itself has been streamlined from approximately fifty pages to approximately twenty pages.

A team of persons from the group who developed the School Achievement Plan is selected to provide a defense of the plan to the Executive Director for Schools. The number of defenders varies each year, but always includes the principal and the Instructional Liaison Specialist, the SFA facilitator. This researcher served on the defense team each year during the transition years from 2000-2005, the years covered in this document.

#### Interview Responses

Interviewees were questioned about ways in which changes in leadership involving the principal or staff contributed to educational improvements at Eagle; and they were asked to discuss the emergence of informal leaders who made positive contributions to educational improvements at Eagle. The responses were enlightening and varied.



T-1: *The 99-00 school year had been a year of turmoil for a number of reasons. So in a way it was good that we had a clean sweep. We had teachers revolting; we had all kinds of things going on. I knew that whoever they brought in was going to be someone that really came in to take charge. It would have to be a strong individual. Someone who could make a difference and fortunately we got somebody who did that. It was hard. It was a lot of work and a lot of times you wanted to say this is for the birds, but my dream has been to see this school move from the basement, the sub-basement and compete with the schools in the penthouse, on level. During that particular reign, I saw that. In fact, I got real full a lot of times because I could sit and say goodness, this is my school and I really became proud to be here. I mean I was always proud of the school because I always felt that the children here were some of the best children. You just had to be there to know what I mean.*

T-2: *I think A-1 came in and did such a great job. I mean, just her people skills, how she related to people, that had a great impact on how in just one year we came off the failing schools list. Then you had such a cohesive team, A-3, A-1, A-4 the curriculum specialist, just worked so well as a team and anything that we needed we knew there were no worries. We knew that they were going to get it. The teachers knew we would get what we needed. Now, they had high expectations for us, but when you know someone is in your corner, you know that they are going to do whatever it takes to help you succeed, and then it makes your job easier. It makes it easy to come to work. It also makes you want to go above and beyond.*

T-3: *I have found that the stronger the leader, the greater and more effective the staff is. There have been two principals who made me feel that Eagle was the best and*

*needed all my effort and energy to keep it that way. These two principals knew how to motivate and do anything that the school needed for the students. The transition principal (A-) included you in the decisions to make needed changes in methods, procedures, and materials for the good of the students. The former leadership was changed because it was no longer productive. I think some of the principals were stronger than others.*

*Leadership improved. It was stronger, it was more direct. Leadership did more to assist you and strengthen the instructional part of the program. We had to go to all kinds of meetings and things to strengthen our skills in delivering instruction to the children. The new principal wouldn't ask you to anything that she wasn't willing to get in there and do herself. That made you more willing to do whatever you had to do, even the mundane responsibilities that you had to do like duties and things that you had to perform. You know, watching kids cross the streets, monitoring the traffic in the hall at dismissal and when children were coming in and out of the classrooms and things. You didn't mind sitting eating with the kids at lunch, cuz, she would come in and sit with them too. That made it easy for us to do it too. Our new leader had a genuine ability to make a plan, to instigate the plan and to convince others that this was the plan and we need to follow this and it would benefit the children. I think her prior experience working with the quality of children that we have had she knew things that would motivate them, motivate the faculty and to keep them on task. She knew what it would take for them to be successful. She was dynamic.*

*T-4: I think the leadership change was a big thing. Change starts at the top. We got a new principal for one thing and then she sat down with us and gave us what her goals were and if the people didn't agree they had a choice to leave. They could go other*

*places, so if you decided to stay you had to be committed to the changes that were about to take place. The leadership team and the principal, the principal and the leadership team presented everything to the staff and then they had a chance to review it agree to the changes, and make certain changes and then the final draft was proposed and then submitted to the faculty and then they had a choice to sign and agree or to decide that they wanted to move on and go somewhere else. New people were questioning things because before the change in administrators some of us were asking is this the way it is supposed to be or is it just me? We were told that it wasn't always like this; it just happened over time like a sore that wasn't tended to and it just got infected and once that happened, it just stayed that way. And then someone asked do you know you have a sore on your leg and the doctor says we are going to have to cut your leg off and you couldn't explain how the infection got to that point.*

*A-1: The leadership function has changed from that of being an autocratic one to that of being a facilitative one. Dictatorships simply don't work in today's schools. The leadership contributes significantly in setting the tone for educational improvement. The leader is the one who convinces all constituencies that an "I can't" or "I won't" atmosphere will not be tolerated. He/she gives hope and offers tangible evidence that a change in attitude, hard work and perseverance pay off. While the leader knows that he/she is ultimately responsible for what goes on in the school; he/she trains others to accept some leadership responsibilities. Again, this helps others to develop a sense of ownership and fosters a spirit of trust among the staff.*

*A-2: I feel just working to try to have a more consistent program focused on student achievement and student improvement of course, using data to drive our*

*instruction as well as making sure teachers understand the expectations of what they are charged to do as it pertains to their classroom and their grade level so that they can assist the total school program. Also, I think, the improvement of professional development and really trying to hone into teachers' areas of need rather than just as always focusing on a kind of blanket everyone's gonna get the same thing or everybody needs to do A, B, and C. Trying to really get concrete in what we identify as a teacher need. Kind of like differentiation of instruction for staff, that is a critical leadership function.*

*A-3: As I recall we were all there to work together and that was essential because we knew that school had been officially on the failing schools list for the previous two years.. Knowing that, afforded all of us, and I am sure that everyone had assessed the curriculum individually and collectively and also it afforded me the opportunity to be creative in the way in which I felt I could personally impact instruction. The learning patterns, the teaching patterns, and the curriculum use had failed itself. What can we do to make a positive impact on these children? What can we do to bring these children's performance to a higher level? How can we improve their reading abilities? We got together, initially, to submit some ideas. All of us sat down with the pros and cons of some possible outcomes and measure by how many of these students actually do excel vis a vis the number who do not. We let each other tweak our assessments and there was no big "I" or little "u" in the group, including the principal. She made sure we knew she was there to work with us, not just to direct us. She was always very positive and always open to suggestions. After we submitted our proposal and got our tweaking done by interacting with each other, we came up with a plan. We*

*came up with goals for the plan and as you well know we actually exceeded our goals the very first year. We came up with behavioral issues; we addressed efficiency issues of teaching reading and mathematics. The reading was the major part. It worked the first year and of course we made some adjustments each of the following two years that I was there. I think the second year we stumbled a little bit in reading, but the math did not. Math was stable the entire 3 years, I was there. I think what it showed was how things can work when people actually work together. Working together for the good of the children became routine and ingrained in everything we did. We really had no big "I" or little "u" we were a team. We set our goals and objectives and looked at how well children did as we made necessary changes. I also believe that it's imperative that children understand that what we are doing is for their benefit. They didn't feel frightened by the new information at all. We kept moving along because our objective was to improve student learning and movement through the process.*

*A-4: The instructional leadership has been one in which everybody understands that failure is not an option. The instructional leadership is one in which, I would say, the instructional leader leads by example. The instructional leader is in the classroom making sure that teachers are teaching the standards. The instructional leader is in the classroom assisting students, as well, with assignments if need be. So, the expectations are clear. The school leader is one that has a vision that is embraced by all of the stakeholders that are in this building. So I think that having a clear and defined vision and mission has made a very positive difference in the instructional program.*

**Eagle Speaks** (researcher reflections): In order to ensure that Eagle's cultural norms would bring about systemic change and cultivate success for all, the principal and

members of the Leadership Team participated in Trailblazer Leadership training provided by the school system. This training focused on team building, developing a community of teacher-leaders, consensus building and shared decision-making. The principal recognized the importance of developing teacher-leaders and providing them with more opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

Teachers and administrators were asked to provide input on the emergence of informal leaders and their contribution to educational improvements as a result of this training and other training opportunities. The responses were varied and included many different staff members.

#### Interview Responses

T-2: *I think, again, I mentioned earlier, you being the counselor being available to talk to the students and to help them reason out their situations and whatever they are going through out there. And also, the reading facilitator is an informal leader and when you have those component meetings, or what have you, to aid you and she can aid you in your instructional techniques, then you can improve and you can impact academic achievement. I would say the counselor, the reading facilitator, and recently we have the literacy specialist. And I think that always helps. And of course, you have staff members when you work together as a team. We were informal leaders and we all were just facilitating each other.*

T-3: *The new principal encouraged all of us to help plan, guided us to always remember that the students came first. That was a plus. I think what impedes the changes in leadership roles is when a leader comes in and knows all the answers and has all the answers and everything and thinks that the teachers don't have any sense at all*

*whatsoever, when they are the ones who are actually the ones day to day in contact with the students and really know what's going on. That to me was a plus with A-1, she had been a teacher and worked with a variety of grade levels and in different capacities in schools forever so she knew what we as teachers went through day to day and knew what we had to overcome in order to progress and to get the students to progress. I have been fortunate to work with each level that I have worked on when I came here, I started working on first grade level and I always had a group of people that were good at their jobs and good at helping you to do yours. They didn't mind sharing. They didn't mind sharing their knowledge of a subject area or classroom management, they would help with that. I've always had a good group what ever level I was working on. I always had good teammates.*

*There were times when I would call myself an informal leader. I tried to learn the new reading program and help others with it as we were going along. The principal did make me a grade level chair, so I had to step up to the plate and do whatever was necessary. But, like I said, all of my team mates at that time were very cooperative. We just worked together. In all fairness, each team member had a specific talent and their talent always helped to add to the program we were trying to implement on our grade level. Some were better with technology, some were better in science or social studies, some persons were better with language arts or math, so those talents came through and we had to pull it all together so it would make a better program. Those relationships with the talent in the group fostered organizational learning.*

*T-4: A group of us got together and said something has got to change. It had gotten so bad that some of us said this can't go on any longer. The school system had*

*directed each school to choose a reform and the old leadership team hadn't done that. So the informal leadership team got together wrote a plan and put a presentation together and I don't know what it was, but something we said in the plan got people's attention. We sent our plan to one of the decision makers who would assign a reform model to your school. He came to interview us, because our plan was submitted at the very end and almost too late and it was incomplete. He came to see this group of teachers who were begging for help and he wanted to talk to us. I don't know, none of us knew what he saw. I guess maybe it was our desperation. He came in late one afternoon after school was out and met with us. He said I think you all really need some help based on what you are saying. We felt like the system was ignoring us. It was strange, because when we finally started making progress, they started calling us an oasis in the desert. I know you remember, it was kind of like a desert because we were just out there by ourselves.*

*A-1: The change in leadership has been facilitated as we moved to the concept of "shared leadership." The school being run in a dictatorial manner simply did not work. In order for all stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership, change had to occur. It was not only about the principal making decisions alone, but about the decision-making process becoming a shared one. Shared leadership is encouraged by identifying the gifts and talents of teachers and allowing them to serve as resources at the local school level as well as in other settings where they can share initiatives with which they have been successful. Soliciting ideas from all parties involved and integrating the best of those in the way that the school operated, brought about positive change. I realized that a paradigm shift was needed in many areas, and I, along with the leadership team set out to effect positive change that was needed in order for the staff to believe in what they*



*were doing to garner the support of the parents and the community, and to insure student success. While change was a challenge for those who were not convinced that change was necessary, once they experienced some successes during the school year and at the end of my first year, many of them changed their way of thinking and joined the team of thought that they could succeed. Others left the school, but that was a good thing because they could not taint the thinking of those who felt good about the growth of the school.*

*A-2: Informal, of course, I would definitely have to start off by formally just saying the individuals would be A-4, yourself, the SFA facilitator during that period of time, were definitely leaders here at the school. Then I would say informally certain staff members whose teaching performance has improved in the course of the last few years. Case in point, I would say, probably those some of those who stand out would be the 5<sup>th</sup> grade team chair, two third grade teachers, one second grade teacher in a smaller part because she was only here one year during the course of this period of time we're looking at. Actually, I would just say overall just teachers and all the entire staff in one capacity or another. I think it is just ironic to look at when I initially began here, during my leadership here at Eagle to now and just seeing the growth of the individual staff members as a collective whole as well as my own growth. Of course, you know some stand out more than others, but, I would say over all, all teachers, all staff members in one facet or another.*

*A-3: We had difficulties getting the kids to school and I don't remember all the names of staff who took it upon themselves to go get kids. I know that a custodian, who had children in the school, would go by and pick up kids on her way in. She was very much involved. I know there were one or two others and I admired those individuals who*

*had children here because they were very involved and wanted the best for their children and all the children so they did what they could to help the kids who had no support at home. Despite not having a very strong group of involved parents we were able, I think, to accomplish a lot because, we, staff, were concerned about the children's attendance. I think all the staff was involved in some degree. The ILS, myself, the teachers, and you (counselor) would all let me know when someone was out. If the kids are absent we can't teach them. I remember an incident where a mom came into the building one morning huffing and puffing holding a branch she had snatched off of a tree in one hand and dragging her son with the other hand. She was calling my name loudly and telling the boy she was going to beat him if he tried not to come to school because she had promised me that he wouldn't be absent any more. She kept saying them people at that school won't believe a word I say any more and I won't be able to look that assistant principal, of course, she was calling my name, in the face if I don't get my kids to school every day like I promised. She kept hitting the branch on the floor telling him to come on. It was funny, at the same time; it showed her commitment to her child because she knew we would take care of him once she got him here. One thing we, the administration, tried to do was to try to get the parents to buy in to the program. We want their/our children to learn. I think that helped to have parents, custodians, teachers and other staff as informal leaders.*

*A-4: Informally, every staff member in this building is considered a leader. The custodial staff understands what the vision and the mission is. Enrichment teachers understand what the vision and the mission is. So basically, everyone in the building is considered a leader. Everybody embraces the vision that is here each one is expected to*

*come into the building to work with kids and make a difference in the life of kids. I think that informal leadership makes a difference as well. Those that stand out, I would say, would be the enrichment teachers. Because outside of teaching P.E., outside of teaching Music, outside of teaching just the arts period those teachers are also in the classroom, when their schedule allows, assisting the classroom teacher in delivering a quality instructional program. So, the enrichment teachers, definitely. I also think this kind of involvement by an enrichment staff is unique to Eagle School. I have not heard of this happening in elementary schools. I know that in the middle school setting this is the direction in which they are moving. But, as far as elementary schools, it is unique to Eagle School. This is just another way of approaching the mission, pulling these teachers out of their areas of expertise and using them to meet our instructional goals. They are all certified teachers so they work in the reading program. Every certificated person is qualified and has been trained to deliver the reading program, so they can teach the reading program and they are in classrooms doing that. When their schedules allow they are also in the classroom working with the classroom teachers. So our enrichment teachers helped facilitate positive change and their involvement is unique to Eagle School.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): At the end of the 1999-2000 school year we were on the failing schools list. The state department was giving us one year to get our act together or reconstitution was the next step. A new principal (A-1) was put in place which set in motion many changes that occurred quick, fast and in a hurry. It was like being in a time warp. Things were happening so rapidly! Eagle's entire administrative team was new at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year. We had a

new principal, a new assistant principal and a new instructional liaison specialist. Additionally, we had a new comprehensive school reform model.

A-1 came in with the knowledge that something had troubled the waters at Eagle and she knew that you cannot calm the waters without getting into the water. And, get in she did. Leading by example, with plan and vision in hand was just the beginning of Eagle's transition from failing to distinguished school status. The change in leadership, putting A-1, A-3 and A-4 together as a team was the impetus for the calming of the waters and the beginning of the transition. They worked like a finely tuned engine. It was as if they were three bodies with one mind, it was amazing. Staff was so busy working on the work from bell to bell that we did not realize what was happening, until it happened. We were off the failing schools list. We met the superintendent's targets. We got pay for performance pay. We got to sit on the floor at convocation. Only the best performing schools get this distinction. Other schools sit in bleacher seats. We made AYP. We had a new identity. We were successful.

Teachers and staff were stepping up to the plate. A new mindset was in place and the taste of success was in everyone's mouth. Pride was the watch word. We wanted more and we did what we needed to do to attain more. To think that it happened because A-1 made it clear that failure was not an option. She made it clear that children do not deserve to be in a school where they could not succeed. Expectations were high and we were willing to meet them.

### **Section Summary**

In the climate of change at Eagle, leadership incorporates the search for common goals, empowerment, a collaborative culture, professional development and problem

solving. The development of a cadre of individuals to address the various demands of educating students became a necessity. Empowering teacher leaders is a component of the positive educational change at Eagle. Leadership is no longer solely the function of the principal and instructional liaison specialist.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

The Eagle staff participated in the Success for All training and Core Literacy Professional Learning Communities, McMillan McGraw-Hill training on a continuous basis over the transition years. Other training on curriculum mapping, quality work and rubrics is provided for first year teachers, teachers new to Eagle and teachers identified by school administration as needing assistance in these areas. Team building, peer coaching, classroom management and organization, strategies for developing critical thinking skills, cooperative learning techniques and technology integration training has also been made available during the transition years.

Staff development is provided based on the needs of individual teachers or groups of teachers. Staff members have the opportunity to attend conferences and upon returning to Eagle are required to re-deliver the content of the conference. That practice provides staff the opportunity to develop training skills which enhances their skill sets. Each staff member, at some point, is a part of an in-service team and provides staff development for their colleagues.

This practice has developed a staff that recognizes their roles as change agents and the need to develop as teacher-leaders. Staff members are developing a greater sense of ownership for what happens at Eagle. This empowers them to take greater risks that will continue to foster student achievement success and organizational well-being.

## Comprehensive School Reform

A key component of the comprehensive school reform model in place at Eagle is in-service. Prior to the initial implementation of Success for All certified staff received three days of in-service before school began. During the school year formal in-service is provided by the Success for All staff and informal in-service is provided in component meetings conducted by the on site Success for All facilitator. Opportunities are available each year for teachers to attend the Success for All conference, which is held in one of the forty-eight states where Success for All is used.

## School Achievement Plans

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): During the 2003-2004 school year, a system level monitoring team, staff, students, the PTA and the Local School Council provided feed back that three areas related to maintaining the culture of success needed to be targeted. The three areas were: (1) building a professional learning community; (2) applying best practices in the classroom; and (3) garnering greater support from the business community. Eagle went about the business of securing appropriate professional development for staff and training for stakeholders.

The professional development provided was based on the work of Eaker, Dufour and Dufour (2002). A system level model teacher-leader began a series of sessions in September and continued throughout the school year. The primary focus of these sessions was building a community that is characterized by a shared mission, vision, and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation/experimentation, commitment to continuous improvement and results orientation. As a result of this training staff

members began to recognize their roles as catalysts for change and began applying skills and competencies learned from training sessions.

#### Achievement Data

Student performance goals as they relate to the CRCT focused on the performance of students in grade four from 1999-2000 until 2004-2005. During the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school year, Eagle met only four of seven targets. This is 57% of the superintendent's targets. The system's superintendent has set a more demanding set of percentages required than the state. Eagle did make AYP, however, because there were measurable improvements in student achievement based on targets set by the state. The seventh target, Attendance, was met. The Attendance target includes students in grades K-5. See Appendix H.

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): The two years of not meeting the superintendent's targets were difficult years psychologically and professionally for the Eagle staff. Coming off the failing school's list like we did in 1999-2000 school year and meeting targets during the 2000-2001 school year gave us a sense that what we were doing was working. Our instructional methods and procedures were heavily scrutinized during those two very successful years. Everything we did was questioned. We had a "fish bowl" experience, because our success was immediate. There was a level of disappointment that had staff members questioning their abilities to insure success for all of Eagle's students. The legitimacy of our efforts was challenged. Was our students' success a fluke? Truth be told, the authenticity of our students' achievement was also under question.

During that period between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 the school received students from two schools that had been closed due to low enrollment. These 95 new students had not had the benefit of three years of Success for All instruction and the reculturing that had taken place. Getting buy-in from a new crop of students and parents proved difficult. Eagle's faculty and staff understood that we are the protectors of our children's intelligence and are honor and duty bound to enhance their learning competence. Not meeting targets in a school where failure was not an option was difficult in light of the time, energy and effort involved in teaching and learning. Organizational and professional learning supports eased the anxiety and strengthened our resolve. During the 2003-2004 school year Eagle met six of seven targets for 86% of the superintendent's targets. This is an indication of staff resolve to insure success for all of Eagle's students. Our collaborative culture, personal efficacy and persistence were intact. We had weathered a new kind of storm and came out of the experience more determined than ever to move from good to great.

#### Interview responses

Interviewees were asked to identify changes in professional learning opportunities and contributions these opportunities made to educational improvements at Eagle. I was also interested in how interviewees were able to adapt to or implement specific and general changes as a result of professional development.

*T-1: I think we had more highly qualified teachers in specific areas that had expertise and that helped. We had a lot of staff with masters and beyond. For some people it was a stepping stone for some people to come here. But their training was a good thing.*



T-2: *If you are better trained, then you are going to get better results. If you know what you are doing, and you have opportunities to receive training, then you are going to be a more effective teacher when you come into the classroom. I think that's what happened. With SFA there were many opportunities to be trained. We had those component meetings and those other meetings you know, system wide meetings and we went out of town to be trained. When there is adequate training it strengthens your chances of succeeding. The professional development just improved teacher techniques and strategies. People learned to adapt because there were professional supports.*

*Professional development was the nuts and bolts of it. If you received the training, you understood the program then you could effectively teach the program whether you liked it or not. You could effectively teach it, so it was very important. You couldn't survive without it.*

*I learned so many primary skills for teaching reading which was not a part of my school training. You see, I taught older roots, which was the program that taught primary skills to older students who were below grade level and had very large gaps in learning. I learned how to teach reading strategies galore and it has helped me tremendously. That's why I have been able to do a resource class because I use what I learned from teaching SFA and basic reading skills. I have been able to translate those skill sets I developed to other things, like my reading resource class, my CRCT Prep classes and much of that came from, much of those teaching skills came from SFA. Teaching SFA builds skills for teaching reading across the curriculum. You have to read, you have to read in math, in science and social studies so those skills are what I call universal skills. They can be used anywhere.*

T-3: *Oh we got all kinds of training. It prepared the teachers so that we didn't feel inferior or inadequate to do whatever the program was, because we really got a lot of staff development during that time. We had a varied type of staff development. We had people what would come in and give you not only the materials that you needed but also teach you how to use those materials so that was a big help. We saw so many videos and all that. Some of the videos were down to earth because we would see children that mirrored some of your kids that were responding in the film the way they were responding in the film itself they looked and acted just like some of the kids in your classroom. I think the staff development offerings were great. It looked like we were in meetings all the time. We had meeting during the day, meetings on Saturdays, and all that. It was well presented; we had a lot of programs and opportunities to enhance our skills. I think it was important particularly with the SFA Program. It was important because it was equipping the teachers with information and skills so that we could do the program and teach better. We could understand what we had to and needed to do and what was expected of you.*

*When they brought SFA in, really, I didn't know what SFA was. We viewed videos and attended classes and everything and the crowning part that made us select that was everyone had a willingness to change to upgrade our school. I think that not only did we learn how to identify the different needs of the children and how to address those needs. We learned how to set up a classroom so that you could better manage the classroom and stuff like that. So I think we gained a lot of skills that enhanced the ones we already had. We had classes in assertive discipline, the SFA program itself has a class management component built into it and with the support of the administration we were able to do*

*well. We had no choice but to be successful because of everything that was put in place for us and that's why the kids were so successful.*

*T-4: Now that was one component of SFA. We had two weeks training during the summer before school started right when A-1 took over. And then the person over the program, the SFA facilitator, had meetings once a week with the grade levels and that was called component meetings. They were always structured and had a theme. The teachers would be able to, if they were having problems, suggest what was discussed. Next week can we talk about this or we need to talk about whatever was giving them trouble. Sometimes the leader of the component meeting would let teams of teachers present something. Three times each year they had people from the SFA foundation to come and train us. There was a lot of support, a lot of training. We had really nice conferences on the national level and people from all over the country made presentations. This took place once a year. We had to travel out of town for those conferences. Selected staff made the trip. Some of the same people had to go each year, but different staff members were selected to fill the other slots. After a time everyone had a chance to go. They were in New York, Houston, Boston, Florida and places like that. So everybody got a chance to go. That was also an incentive too. If you really wanted to go you had to show evidence that you were willing to work the program. And your students were making improvements.*

*A-1: The kinds of changes that have occurred relative to the school's organizational and professional learning have shifted from "Do as you are told" to "Let us assess what needs to be done." When staff members are led to assess the situation and allowed to provide input about the changes that need to occur, it is likely that they will*

*buy into the changes. The leader has the responsibility to facilitate action research, keep staff members engaged in the process and provide meaningful professional development to support changes. One cannot give an order to change without providing the means to do so. Professional development, action research, analysis of data, et cetera, are a must if any school is to maintain its distinguished status. Many educational leaders challenge the staff to perform and to grow, but provide no blueprint for doing so. Professional development comes about as a result of system initiatives, classroom observations, analysis of test data and other empirical data. It is not assigned haphazardly or unnecessarily. All teachers have had training in literacy. They also have been provided training in on line assessments, developing tests, developing and following scope and sequence charts, effective instructional strategies and helping students produce quality work. Assessment data is used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's program.*

*A-2: I think that some people had a perception that they could not speak or could not share. I think that has changed. There are people who are feeling more and sometimes too much feeling that they can share or share their best practices. I think it's been open and the door, the invitation has been that we want people to share to improve student achievement, not only in their classroom, but across the board. I think providing opportunities for teachers to present their best practices to staff has improved student achievement overall as well as providing opportunities for staff participation in staff development on the school level as well as outside the school .*

*To implement them was of course an ongoing basis. What I tried to do is pinpoint again based on the data, if you had very high test scores I gave them opportunities to*

*share what practices they were implementing to be so successful based on student data. Those were some initial steps. Also just trying to and that's an ongoing objective to help create a professional learning community where people are working together, they're dialoguing, they're being respectful of one another, they are being able to send messages and receive them in a positive manner without intimidating and threatening. That is still an ongoing challenge.*

*Staff development is very important. And it's an ongoing work a work in progress, because just becoming a little bit more succinct in knowing what we need to do. Before, as I mentioned earlier, we just kind of had professional development across the board. I think because of our improvements over the years we are starting see that we don't have to redo our whole program. We just have to find the missing gaps and make those modifications at that point.*

*A-4: Professional development went a long way in developing the paradigm shift necessary to embrace the need for change. Supports were put in place to develop collective problem solving skills and to assist teachers and staff. Teachers go to in-services and work shops, come back and present to the entire school to make sure that everybody learns from the professional development that was given to one person. We use the each one teach one concept.*

*Additional supports that have been put in place came in the form of human resources here in the building. We don't always have to send teachers outside the building to receive that professional development. We have the instructional specialist that's here, that is a support to teachers. We have the reading facilitator that's a support to teachers. We have a reading coach that's a support to teachers. The assistant principal*

*that was also here that provided support to teachers through math clinics. So just through the additional human resources that are located right here day in and day out in the building is on going. So teachers don't have to feel like it's a one shot deal. You go to this workshop and it's all over. We had and have a safety net. You have people right here, those extra support personnel that are right here in the building that provided that extra support to teachers, day in and day out. With the support being ongoing, growth and problem-solving become ongoing as well. Situations that might, because of uncertainty and pressure, have caused conflict didn't have time to play themselves out because the human resources were and are on site.*

*Professional development was critically important. I think that we are of the mindset that we are on the list of failing schools so evidently there was something going on with pedagogy, with methodology, with the way that teachers were trying to get things across to students that was ineffective. We were obviously in need of change. So in order for there to be a positive change we knew that it would have to come through professional development, helping teachers to become better teachers. We needed them to understand how important it is to deliver instruction, but it has to be quality instruction. You have to be able to identify the learning styles of the kids. You have to know what their needs are in order to reach every single child. So professional development is and will continue to be I think a very substantive part of our academic family here to continue and make sure that our teachers are growing and are abreast of current trends and issues in education. We make sure that they are updated with best practices that are taking place in education to make sure that we continue to sustain the momentum. Professional development is one way to insure that the momentum is*

*sustained and that we are a high performing school and continue to be and that we don't slip back or go back to where we were. I think that a lot of that is going to be contingent upon making sure that our teachers are well developed and consistently supporting their development and maintenance of their skills.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Professional development was not limited to teachers. This researcher was provided professional development opportunities to enhance counseling skills that would be vital to supporting instruction. This professional development is at the system level as well as through participation in seminars and trainings conducted by outside vendors.

Success for All has a component called the Family Support Team (FST). The counselor serves as Family Support Team facilitator. That component serves as a vehicle to help parents and guardians feel comfortable coming into the school. This team is charged with helping parents and guardians become actively involved in their children's education and with securing outside or school support services for the families as needed. Success for All conferences provide in-service sessions for Family Support Team facilitators that enhance problem solving intervention skills, relationship building skills and strategies for improving and increasing parental involvement.

Family Support Team facilitators and parent liaisons provide parent in-service at the school level so that parents are a part of the learning community concept. There has been a holistic approach to organizational and professional learning that extends to all stakeholders of the Eagle family. All stakeholders have had opportunities to develop and or enhance skill sets that would improve student achievement and support the overall well

### **Section Summary**

Organizational and professional learning became key, in beginning the paradigm shift necessary for accepting and coping with the need for change at Eagle during the transition years. The comprehensive school reform model Success for All brought with it formal and informal in-service pieces, support personnel and an on-site facilitator who would provide on-going professional learning opportunities. Staff members attending conferences would return to Eagle and re-deliver the content of those conferences to their peers. Each staff member at some point has provided staff development for their colleagues. Staff members recognize and embrace their roles as change agents and support systems for their colleagues.

The skills developed through professional learning sustained staff during a two year period when the superintendent's targets were not met. Staff's resolve to enhance best practices and provide quality instruction to Eagle's students allowed a continued focus on a shared mission, collective inquiry, collaborative team work and a commitment to continuous improvement and results orientation. Staff development has become a vehicle for assessing strengths and weaknesses in the school's program and providing a remedy for the weaknesses. Eagle as an organization is strengthened because of its proactive use of staff development.

### **TEACHER EMOTIONS**

Teaching and the demands inherent in it require immense emotional engagement. The emotional nature of education, the constant change in school environments, curricula, relationships and societal pressures impact school operation and change. The pressures to embrace change in order to transition off the failing schools list impacted



teacher emotions at Eagle. All staff was impacted. Negative emotion in teaching surfaces with external, consistent, shifting demands for change, public criticism, fear of failure to meet a new set of standards and poor student achievement. Change evokes an emotional response. How people feel dictates how people adapt and cope with change. This determines, in a large measure, the success of change initiatives.

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Teacher emotions during the beginning phases of the transition from failing to distinguished school status was wrought with frustration. Some people got so frustrated they left Eagle. The honest truth is they could not take the pressure and that was the impact. Staff's feelings went from one extreme to another. Change is hard. The stress and strain of not being accustomed to a structured environment and having A-1 come in and impose structure was difficult. In a situation like that some stay and some go and that is what happened. The extreme emotional reaction was to succumb to the pressure of change and to leave.

#### Comprehensive School Reform

Success for All provided a focused research-based schema for teaching reading across the curriculum. It was very precise and allowed no variation. Each daily lesson was scripted. With the regimentation came pressure. With the pressure came a variety of emotional responses. These interview responses make some of those responses and reactions clear.

*T-2: I personally felt a lot of pressure, to be honest with you. In the beginning we had so many people in the building. That year when we came off the failing schools list every day there was someone walking into the classroom and you felt like you were under a microscope. That first year was very difficult. Very emotional, very difficult, long nights*

*it was almost like we were afraid to go home because we might not be prepared enough the next day. It was like we all needed to put a cot in our room and just stay here.*

*T-3: When SFA first came everybody was gung-ho and really like it and I think the drawback was that teachers weren't able to put forth their talents or teach with their particular style. That was very frustrating for some of us. We had to follow a format that the SFA program set up. As the years progressed, you could see the SFA program beginning to help the teacher foster some of the things they were asking you to do that were a part of best practices that we were using before. Those practices were already a part of the teacher's format or the way we taught so. SFA changed things to meet the needs of the students and the needs of the teacher, too. At first the thing was so scripted it didn't give you a chance to foster your talent, but now there is a little more leeway in that area but still has all the content and meat that it always had. It could be that seven years later we have just adapted to the program and the structure at the beginning had to be there to get us to where we are now. I tell you this; it is really good for new teachers who don't know what to do. The greatest difficulty was with seasoned teachers who felt insulted because someone was telling them how to teach and they had been teaching for 10 to 20 years or longer. This is a good program for those new persons and they turned out to be the better SFA teachers, because they were willing to learn and they didn't have any old habits to break. It took some of us older ones a little bit of time to fall in line.*

*T-4 had this reaction to emotional changes and educational improvement resulting as a result of SFA implementation at Eagle Elementary: Before SFA everybody was kinda like isolated. Everybody just closed their doors and did their own little thing. It was like now doors were being opened and we could peep into what other people were doing to*

*make sure that you were on the same track. For 90 minutes during the day the school was quiet. Everybody was doing the same thing, SFA. Then it was extended to 120 minutes. But during that 90 minutes you could go into any classroom and everybody was doing the same thing. Everybody was teaching reading. I think that really made a difference. It set the pace for the day. Success for All not only dealt with reading, but components dealt with the family, the community, parents, getting along together, it was like a full day. The first two week of each cycle you worked on the getting along together component talking to children about the rules and working in teams and getting along in the cooperative groupings. So not just the staff was involved in teams and cooperative working but everyone including the children were involved in that. It was teaching the teachers to team and collaborate and get along with each other. The children liked working together and the teachers stopped being isolated and I guess they realized that they really didn't like being isolated after all. Feelings changed and things started moving on a good note.*

### School Achievement Plans

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): How people feel dictates how people adapt and cope with change. Asking the Eagle's staff to step out of their comfort zones without benefit of support mechanisms could have been problematic. During the early transition years buy-in was in process. The School Achievement Plans, specifically during the 2002 – 2005 school years provided explicit goals relative to support for classroom teachers. Providing written guidelines indicating who is responsible, who is accountable, who must be consulted and who must be informed in order to assist teachers with their focus on learning eliminates the uneasiness of going into uncharted waters. Being on the failing

list had troubled the waters, uncertainty could cause renewed trouble. School Achievement Plans with specific goals impact how people feel and can be a source of comfort. Knowing what is expected brought a sense of calm to the troubled waters at Eagle. School Achievement Plans receive feedback from system level supervisors and are rated according to their effectiveness.

#### Achievement Data

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Student achievement in a school that has been on the failing schools list is priority one. Staff, students and parents feel the immense pressure to achieve and excel. During the 1999-2000, Eagle made only three of nine student performance targets for 33%. During 2000-2001, the year the school came off the failing schools list 14 of 15 targets were made for 93%. 2001-2002 saw a drop in the number of targets made with four of seven for 57%, however, measurable improvements were made so AYP was achieved. The 2002-2003 school year saw a repeat of the 57% of targets made and AYP achieved. In the 2003-2004 school year six of seven student performance targets were made for 86% and again AYP was achieved. During the 2004-2005 school year, 15 of 23 student performance targets were met for 65% and in 2005-2006 nine of eleven student performance targets were made for 82%.

The pressure to meet or exceed 70% of student performance targets between 2000-2001 and 2005-2006 took an emotional toll on staff, students and parents. Making AYP was almost anti-climactic because the system superintendent's targets were the goal. Making AYP consistently was Eagle's saving grace. Making AYP consistently resulted in Eagle's attaining and maintaining distinguished school status. Status, stature,

school reputation and success were decided based on the ability to meet or exceed the superintendent's targets and making AYP.

Meeting the educational, social and sometimes emotional needs of students in a pressure cooker is difficult at best. The pressure to embrace educational change in or to transition off of the failing schools list impacted teacher emotions at Eagle. Emotions of all staff members were impacted. Staff felt as if there was no choice, remaining on the failing schools list or returning to it was not an option. If students were allowed to fail, then staff had failed. Sustained success was the only option. Working toward that goal required immense and intense emotional engagement.

#### Interview Responses

Questions in this area included ones that explored feelings about being on the failing schools list, positive and negative emotions during the transition from failing school status to distinguished school status, and techniques used to cope and or react to all the changes during the transition.

*T-1: I was aware that the school was on the failing schools list. A lot of the parents of the children either dropped out of school or got caught up, you know, and really weren't going anywhere. I even had some parents to say "I didn't do this, this and this and I was alright." That kind of mentality, so, I think it had an impact on it but it was also the community at the time.*

*Because this was a failing school, however, we tended to get the staff that was involuntarily transferred from somewhere. I felt for a while that this was a dumping ground for a certain level of people (laughter), unfortunately that impacted us greatly. There was a good group of dedicated teachers here who really worked hard with the*

*children and the community and really tried to make a difference. But you also had the fifth and the twentieth group with that mentality; I'm here for my check. I think it was because of those teachers that really cared and really went the distance that made a difference. For example, my dream for the school, I couldn't believe how far down we were until later on that we were not getting the resources and stuff that we needed because of the fact that we were a failing school. I think that was a misplaced judgment because those schools need the resources, additional resources and a highly qualified staff.*

***Question: In what ways, if any, did Eagle as a workplace during the transition promote positive emotions or negative ones?***

*T-1: I think it was a combination. Initially, I think it was sort of split down the middle. You had a group on this side; no matter what I do it's still going to be this way. Then you had a group on this side that was going to do whatever was put before them to do. So, I think it took them becoming comfortable once the transition took place. I think going into the second year it became a little bit more positive. The third year a little bit more. But you still had that group that was going to be off to the side (laughter) and find reason not to cooperate, the undercurrent. After a time they learned to cover that up and go with the flow. I think that in the end there were more on the positive side than on the negative side, because a tremendous amount of change took place. And these were positive changes. And these changes contributed to the educational improvement of the school. Sometimes it's like pulling teeth to get people to buy in to these changes. We've never done it like this so why should we do it like this now? Once we got some of the main doubters to buy into it, or to leave we moved forward. I think, on some occasions*

*some people, it was suggested that you're not happy here, this is not the place for you, you want to find someplace where you can blossom so you might try to find a better fit. That was a nice way of saying that you need to make a change (laughter), putting the ball back in your hands, giving you the opportunity to change locations.*

*T-2: I remember the intensity being almost at a boiling point. The fear that you felt was unbearable because of how the results of your work and test scores would reflect on you and the school. You wanted those people to know that you had done your best. But certainly during those years there was a lot of pressure. If they didn't pass the test it would be awful. It sort of subsided once we came off the failing list and continued to progress. In terms of promoting positive emotions when you were doing something good you would be recognized on the intercom. Let's say the SFA team came and they recognized that you were doing a great job you would get a certificate. I remember I got a certificate for teaching older roots. And that made you feel valued and it kind of acknowledged your effort. I think that was very positive. The only negative feeling was the pressure that you felt when people were around but I understood it was for an issue of accountability. The school had been failing consistently and consecutively and you were a new kid on the block and had nothing to do with it, but you were going to be held accountable for that so and the spotlight was on you and everybody in the school and that was the only time the pressure got to us. A-1 did a lot of great things to let us know that we were important and that we were valued.*

*The emotion of feeling pressured made you feel like you had no other choice. You just had no other choice, you just had to do. From everything, I just remember feeling like very very focused. That I just had to focus toward the goal. I remember we went to*

*convocation and we saw other schools up there on the stage being applauded for their achievement and I remember, I didn't know other teacher came to A-1. But, I remember I said we re going to be on that stage next year. It is funny, but we were all saying it to her and to each other. We are going to be on that stage next year! I had no clue, but she said that several people had said that. She told us in staff meeting, we're going to be on that stage, but we're going to have to work hard to make it happen. I guess that, was the impact of it all you just focused and that was all.*

*T-3: Well for some, it was negative, but most of us felt it was positive. For those of us who enjoyed teaching and love what we do, you know, tried to embrace whatever changes came and work with it. Cuz, you know we came from Writing to Read to where we are now and so we've had a lot of changes to come through. You just embrace whatever changes come along and try to make it fit the needs of your children and work on from there.*

*T-4: When we were going through the storm you know, you think this is not working. We had been doing the same thing getting the same results and the results were not good. We needed to do something different. And slowly but surely, we began to do something different. We started to do something different. At first it was hard, at first everything was hard, but once everybody was on board it sorta eased up. We saw different results. We saw different changes. We saw attitudes changing. But of course, during that storm, of course we were going to have conflict. But as we saw little changes and when we had conflict we had to go back to the goals. Now what are we trying to do? What is our goal? Then everybody starts getting back on track. But we had to vent for a little while. But as we kept going and the different changes were getting us different*



*results we could keep going. The children saw that the staff was on board, they saw teachers helping each other and SFA taught the students that they could help each other they got on board. All of this made for positive emotions. But at first it was mostly negative for some people. But the ones who stayed, they were happy. Because it they got some cohesiveness. SFA also provided some structure for the first part of the day, actually the whole morning and things were smooth and orderly and they had to get used to that.*

*A-1: Initially, change was impeded because many of the stakeholders including staff, students and parents did not believe in what they were doing. Their purpose appeared to have been to get through the day without a major calamity. But as initiatives were introduced and the parties involved witnessed just the slightest improvement in the overall climate of the school, there was a modicum of hope. Hope brought positive emotions. Hope made the purpose clearer as the focus on student success and not just getting through the day. Teachers realized that students who were offered some hope for success, worked to achieve that success.*

*A-2: I think it affected the change process in that there was more for those staff members who were always accountable to recognize that everyone was now going to be held accountable. There was a feeling that there were different levels of accountability for the standards that people were held accountable to. Negatively, I think, people were not willing or committed to be on board, to be open to change, doing things differently, because there was a new leader the messages were different and they had to receive the messages differently. That, of course, made it difficult in the transition. We all know that change is hard, but we also know that there were some factors here as it*

*pertained to teachers and staff members who initially made it very challenging to get through the change process a little quicker.*

*A-3: Of course, the emotions were all positive, for two reasons, first, teachers, all of us, administration as well, and the students and the parents, all got a chance to see how well their children could learn by having a strong program in the school. We were all happy, teachers were teaching, students were learning a whole lot more, the teaching and learning process improved. Parents were happy because all of a sudden where they were seeing B's where before they were seeing D's and F's. All this happened in the span of one year, okay, one year. The new administration and the new program came into a deficient school and ended with a proficient performing school. So it happened so quickly, the pace was so fast and the improvement was so rapid that you couldn't help but feel good about it. Then we got a little "green" incentive at the beginning of the next year for all the effort put in the previous year. For us that wasn't really even a part of our thinking, and I hate to even equate that with good teaching. I think that the intrinsic, the feeling, the pride was our reward. We were in the middle of two housing projects and I do believe that the individuals there did not believe that the children could do it. In fact, I think that most people felt that these children were on the "on the way out list" with dropout potential in their future. Their back ground did not lend itself to doing well. We believed that giving them a new, strong program, with strong instructors, we could teach anything to anybody and we did just that.*

*A-4: I can't think of negative emotions. Initially, as with anything, when you are going through a transition there is some anxiety, and that is just to be realistic about it. There is some anxiety; you deal with the fear of the unknown. Leadership is changing,*

*but over time once the new leadership was put in place with A-1, immediately, I think, just the entire culture of the school was totally reformed. Where Eagle Elementary was once considered a low-performing school where teachers did not necessarily feel good about reporting to the school, with the new leadership and with the transition and transformation I think the new leader was able to help instill a sense of school pride. Eagle became, we got a new building, people felt a sense of warmth, because the building was inviting and stimulating. So I think, just the renovation itself that was a welcome change. Then with a new administrative team, that was a welcomed change, so I think the emotions have been really positive emotions once everybody was able to get over just the anxiety part of what to expect. We're moving into a new building and with that new building we have a new leader as well. So once people were able to move beyond that I would like to say the emotions have been very positive. This is a welcoming, inviting, stimulating, warm place that people enjoy coming to on a daily basis to work.*

***Question: How did you emotionally cope with and emotionally react to all the changes during the transition period?***

*T-1: You know, a couple of times some of the people that were close to the change agent (A-1) could say to the change agent let up just a little bit so that people won't feel like someone is constantly on their neck. In a way it probably should have stayed that way (laughter) because once we came together a couple of times with the administration and aired concerns, that was good. You could come in and say stuff individually or in a group and not be penalized. This was during the initial change. As we moved toward getting goals met you were still given an opportunity to have your say*

*and basically the person in charge would say “Well, it’s for the children” (laughter) and right now we’re not going to worry about you at this point. But then, I think, she soon discovered or decided that in order not to alienate she had to give them some input. That helped. That sort of brought things together more and she started to win over some of the major doubters.*

*T-2: for me, it wasn’t a matter of coping I just kinda did it because it was a new beginning, doing what needed to be done. I can say it was kinda stressful because of the pressure. The pressure of dealing with a new reform model and everybody is trying to check to see if you are doing everything right. The inside administrators were checking and then we had all these outside people coming in. That was nerve wrecking. Really nerve wrecking. I was just glad when that first year was over and we got off the list. After that we didn’t see all of those people. I understood what their purpose was, though. To me, it was a win-win for me. Because not having to think about Reading lesson plans, that took a big load off of me. I just knew in my mind to do. I just had to do. When you’re in automatic mode you just have to do.*

*In those years I got some of the biggest awards and recognitions. I mean, my children got first place at the state regional fair in social science. We interviewed people around the city. We just did everything to have a productive fluid year. So the emotion of it all didn’t have a negative affect it only helped me keep focused on production. The year was a good year. Then they passed the CRCT tests. They passed the writing test. Even the lower students. I think I had 18 or 19 kids and 16 passed and that was over 90% of my class. It didn’t have a negative affect.*

T-3: *I work well with the principals because I just tried to follow whatever their game plan was. I had some surface frustration because it was a new way of teaching for me. I had my little way. I'm from the old school so I had my ways of setting up the classroom and what to do. I knew what the children needed to learn and what I thought was the order of learning these things. SFA sort of guided you in a different way so I accepted the challenge and tried to do what the program said do for the most part. We had to do the right thing to get the kids in line following that program to the letter was one of the things that we had to do. I told you, I was going to do a good job, regardless, so I accepted the challenge. I just did what I had to do and didn't get emotional about it.*

T-4: *We could go to the principal or the SFA facilitator for help and support. We did a lot of meeting as a group to try to solve problems, day to day problems. Not like before when we tried to solve our own problems, because we didn't get any results and kept doing the same things that didn't work. We also had the leadership team or you could go to your grade level chair. We all knew that we could get help from the group. We knew we had many levels of support. We went through the storm, but we had a lot of support during the storm. That was the main difference all the support we had. Everyone wanted us to succeed once we got started. I guess it's because we had been in the storm so long, they just wanted us to get some kind of relief. We could tell we were coming out of the storm because all of a sudden the school was moving smoothly.*

A-2: *At times well, at times, not well. I would say initially, that first year, I took things too personally as well as I felt that I really had to be a solver of problems instead of putting the ownership on others to solve their own dilemmas and challenges. In that regard I did not handle it well. But I would also say, that I came in being very focused*

*and determined and that assisted me in those times of trial and tribulation because I had an end goal in sight for me to focus on.*

*A-3: Well, you know, very positively. I think, too, that, my style, I'm not one of those etched in stone, hard as nails kind of people. My style is to interact. I don't believe in the big "I" little "u" concept. I think for me, the biggest challenge on my plate was convincing my co-workers that I was there to help and I fit in just like everybody else. I wore a shirt and tie because that was my uniform with the children, but when it came to addressing needs the math clinic we did, I think, showed that I wasn't just talk, I walked the walk. I would go into classrooms and take part in the activities the children were doing and of course I think a lot of things had to do with how I presented myself as assistant principal. I was still a part of the team. Everything was a group effort. There was no one individual who could take credit for any of it we did it. If we failed at something or the kids didn't do well in one area it was all of us needing to fix it. We were all responsible. We all felt the loss, everybody was involved.*

*I think if one works at the teaching level, you come in you understand the highs and lows the ins and outs of teaching, but to have someone to support you in the area of teaching and learning to not chew you out say if your lesson plans are late or to give you the blues because you did not include values education on your plans each week. Coming out of teaching and learning, because I had been a classroom teacher myself, I understood the challenges of teaching and it made me a better administrator because I could feel and empathize with those who were out there in the classroom. I did not want them to feel the same crunches I had felt. I did not want them to get their butts chewed on the way they chewed on mine because what I found was that I was not a very*

*motivated person when somebody had their foot on my butt for something as trivial as not putting a line or two in a lesson plan. That doesn't mean I wasn't going to teach it. It just meant for whatever reason, whether I was tired that night or had something else on my mind and just skipped over it or whatever, but they made it seem as if I neglected my duties and responsibilities. And it made me very bitter and I was intent on not having people under my supervision having that kind of bitterness develop because something I have said or done or reacted to with them. We can sit down and have a conversation about duties and responsibilities and you know if you continue to do certain things in certain ways they might negatively impact a student, how can I help you become comfortable with doing things in a way that impact students positively so they can succeed? You can ask your team mates, but we need to figure out a way to get this done. I approach people in a humanistic way. I work toward understanding.*

*A-4: Well, first and foremost, the first time we were called to convocation on the floor (laughter) filled me with such a sense of pride. It made me feel really good to say that I was a member of the Eagle family. From that point on, I knew that the work that we had taken on, the work that was before us and the work that we had done, I knew that it was definitely not in vain and it really prompted me to continue and forge ahead and give all that I absolutely could give. Because when I first got here, the stats were quite dismal and to know we were on the list of failing schools and you know that you have a lot of work cut out for you, but once we realized that we had met 90 to 99% of our targets and we have done that consistently. We have gone from 90-99% to the 80- 89%tile and that is where we have stayed. We have been named a Georgia School of Excellence and it just fills me with a great sense of pride to be a part of this educational family. It feels as*

*if we have won the lottery, that is my exact sentiment, yep; it's like winning the lottery. It's just a great, great feeling to know that you are a part of a winning team and everyone else knows it as well. It's such a good feeling.*

**Eagle speaks** (researcher reflections): Emotional reactions ran the gamut during the transition years. One element in the evolution of positive emotion out of the initial chaos was the many opportunities to celebrate even the smallest accomplishment. These celebrations were in-house celebrations as well as system level celebrations, like convocation.

School-level celebrations recognized and continue to recognize staff, students, parents and community involved stakeholders. Celebrations included but were not limited to perfect attendance parties for students and monthly certificates for staff, daily recognition on the public address system of classes with perfect attendance, grandparents raising grandchildren appreciation luncheons/breakfasts, volunteer appreciation breakfasts/luncheons, terrific test taker celebrations for students improving on benchmark tests and CRCT mock tests, honors assemblies at the end of each semester to recognize Principal's List (straight A students), and honor roll (all A's and B's) students as well as most improved students, and annual National Junior Beta Club induction ceremonies. High achievers, improving achievers and staff accomplishments all warranted some level of celebration. Parents are celebrated for attending Raising Readers workshops and Parenting Skills training sessions. Being recognized for staying the course keeps staff, students and community stakeholders invested in continued progress and improvement. Being recognized for staying the course gives rise to positive emotion and positive change.



### Section Summary

Teaching and the demands inherent in it require immense emotional engagement. The emotional nature of education, the constant change in school environments, curricula, relationships and societal pressures, impact school operation and change. How people feel dictates how people adapt and cope with change. This determines, in a large measure, the success of change initiatives.

Initially, Eagle's reading reform model was a source of pressure and frustration. The research-based schema for teaching reading helped staff use best practices across the curriculum and eventually provided a comfort zone from which to operate, thus easing frustration. School Achievement Plans provided explicit goals relative to support for classroom teachers and eliminated some of the uneasiness of going into the uncharted waters of educational change. These plans became a source of comfort and brought a sense of calm to the staff at Eagle. Not meeting student performance targets was the reason for Eagle's failing school status. Meeting and exceeding student performance targets for the system's superintendent and making AYP requirements for NCLB were sources of immense and intense emotional upheaval for staff, students and parents. Consistent success in making student performance targets and AYP eased the emotional uneasiness.

How people feel dictates how people adapt and cope with change. Change evokes emotional responses. The level of emotional response and the ability of change agents to restore calm determine the length of time emotionality impacts a situation. This determines, in a large measure, the success of change initiatives. Time and support for teaching and learning enhanced the emotional well-being for all Eagle stakeholders.

## RESEARCH QUESTION ANSWERED

During the five-year transitional period from failing to distinguished school status, what positive changes in and among the following six areas—purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and emotional climate—contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School? This question has been the driving force of this case study of Eagle Elementary School’s transition from failing to distinguished school status. The educational improvement process created interrelationships and interconnections between and among six change frames: school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions at the case study site. What follows is an identification of these interrelationships and interconnections and their contributions to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School.

Eagle’s **purpose** as defined in its 2000-2001 mission statement, was and continues to be the need to work as a team to achieve success for all, was the only way out of the maze of failure, low achievement and organizational dysfunction. The faculty and staff committed to working together to create a supportive learning environment. Team work, initially, manifested itself in the implementation of the Success for All program, which involved all certificated personnel and paraprofessionals in the teaching of reading across the curriculum using differentiated instruction, thereby supporting the purposes of teaching and learning overall.

Eagle’s School Achievement Plans provided strategies for responding to the instructional focus areas and student performance targets. These school achievement plans provided support for classroom teachers’ efforts to enhance student achievement

and in building a supportive school culture. Equally important was the recognition by Eagle's staff of the importance of community and governmental agency stakeholders. Staff recognized and continues to utilize these stakeholders to assist students who have non-educational challenges. These stakeholders committed to providing supportive services during the transition years and have continued. Some agencies have been added or deleted, but the commitment is on-going.

At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, Eagle was on the failing schools list. The school system assigned a new principal to Eagle at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year. Inherent in the school's purpose at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year was the need to create a supportive learning environment, to develop a staff of caring and professional facilitators, guides and collaborators who would maintain high expectations for themselves and for student achievement. This would require reculturalization. Reculturalization embodied a **culture** of success and high expectations for student learners and adult learners. There evolved a belief that Eagle was the best elementary school in the district because of a change in and interrelationship/interconnection between the school's purpose and the school's culture.

The choice of and implementation of a comprehensive school reading reform model: Success for All necessitated considerable change in organizational functioning and professional practices at Eagle. These changes in the school's **structure** impacted the utilization of time, changed the master schedule, and redefined roles and responsibilities for staff. Providing reading instruction from 8:20 – 9:50am each day requires all certified staff and all classified staff to be involved in the teaching of reading. Reading and Language Arts skills were taught for 120 minutes each day and were integrated into all

subject areas during the school day. Additionally, the school day needed to be extended to provide more uninterrupted quality time to focus on math as well as Reading/Language Arts. The school's purpose, culture and structure were inextricably linked as a result of its comprehensive school reform model.

With the climate of change in operation at Eagle, **leadership** needed to incorporate the search for common goals, empowerment, a collaborative culture, professional development and problem solving. The need for a cadre of individuals to address the various demands of educating students in a school transitioning from the failing schools list was a necessity. A new principal, assistant principal and instructional liaison specialist was brought on board at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year.

The leadership frame's focus is the official and unofficial leaders within a school who cultivate organizational improvement and learning, and maintain and encourage the types of relationships that support the capacity to act positively in response to change. Empowering teacher leaders became a component of the positive educational change at Eagle. Leadership was no longer solely the function of the principal, assistant principal and instructional liaison specialist. The principal recognized the importance of developing teacher leaders and provided them with consistent opportunities to participate in decision-making and in providing peer support through in-house in-service training.

**Organizational and professional learning** became a key component of the evolution of a culture of success at Eagle. With the implementation of the Success for All comprehensive reform model came support in the form of professional development. All staff members received continuous SFA training during the implementation phase,

during the transition years and professional development remains a key component in insuring the use of best practices.

Emphasizing the need for staff to become and remain life long learners through the support of professional development is a means of insuring continued educational improvement and organizational growth. Organizational and professional learning was essential in beginning the paradigm shift for accepting and coping with the need for change at Eagle during the transition years and beyond. Professional development has become a catalyst for evaluating strengths and weaknesses in the school's programs as well as its organizational functioning. Professional learning has been a vehicle for providing remedies for the weaknesses and sustaining the strengths. Eagle as an organization is strengthened because of its proactive and effective use of professional development.

The interplay between professional development, Eagle's purpose, culture of success, staff emotions and leadership has provided support for the school's multidimensional positive educational change. The interrelationships/interconnections between these change frames have been highly significant in the successful improvement of teaching and learning at Eagle. Organizations change, transform, and or improve when they develop and establish internal systematic methods for learning in vivo. One of the critical cultural shifts evolving out of consistent in-house professional development was moving from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning (Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour, 2002). Eagle became a learning lab of sorts for staff and students.

**Teacher emotions** are interwoven between and among Eagle's purpose, culture, structure, leadership, and organizational and professional learning. No change occurs

devoid of emotion. Any and all change evokes an emotional response. Most sustained change can be accounted for based on how people feel. How people feel dictates how people adapt to and cope with change. Educational improvement at Eagle is the result of the interrelationships/interconnections and changes between and among these six change frames.

Data collected and associated with this research question suggests that interrelationships and interconnections between and among the six change frames have positively impacted the organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary. This positive change has enabled Eagle's move from failing to distinguished school status and has made it possible for the school to sustain this distinguished status over time. Eagle is a 2007 School of Excellence.

### **Chapter Summary**

This researcher gathered data on the research site through archival document reviews, interviews and reflective journaling. The nature of this research was descriptive, interpretive, investigative, and explanatory. This research does not attempt to test educational change theory, but is informed by the theory. This chapter aligned and correlated interview responses, school achievement plans, and comprehensive school reform and achievement data with school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotion in order to identify interrelationships and interconnections between and among these change frames.

A pattern emerged. The six change frames are inextricably linked to each other and to Eagle's transition from failing to distinguished school status. In this research

setting, maintenance of the culture of success and its consistency after the transition years is linked to positive movement between and among the six change frames. The evidence collected suggested that caring competent leadership, a hardworking committed staff, a shared vision, shared leadership, a clearly communicated mission and goals, high expectations for adults and children in the site, a greater sense of accountability for all persons involved, attainable and measurable outcomes, appropriate and relevant professional development, a refusal to settle for failure or mediocrity and a sense of hope that success can be had with focus and commitment can create order out of chaos and success out of failure. This school is an example of what can happen to a failing school when all stakeholders work together to foster positive change.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

Continued emphasis on what is going wrong in schools overshadows the positive progress being made. A shift in perspective that seeks out positive changes and examines how they occurred brings with it the potential to create positive organizational and personal well-being in schools. There are very few in-depth studies of how elementary schools recover from academic failure and sustain academic success. However, there is a growing body of educational reform documentation that has produced evidence of high-minority, high-poverty elementary schools that have taken charge of positive change. These schools have been involved with educational change, its challenges, its improvements, and its successes. Eagle Elementary is one such school. This case study expounds on the positive change efforts in these schools by examining the multidimensionality of educational change. It looks beyond the conventional school improvement schema, which solely emphasizes student achievement.

This study was undertaken to understand how the multidimensional organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary appears to have changed as it moved from failing school status to distinguished school status. The multidimensional lenses used to view changes at Eagle included school purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions. Using these lenses to view changes at Eagle provides an explanation of not only how Eagle got off the failing schools list, but more importantly, how it has been able to sustain its success over a five-year period and beyond. This case study provides the essential elements that emerged to



provide a clear picture of how over a five year period one high-poverty, high-minority elementary school bridged the educational gap between failing and distinguished school status.

### Summary of Findings

One question has driven this search for understanding: During the five-year transitional period from failing to distinguished school status, what positive changes in and among the following six areas—purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning, and teacher emotions—contributed to the educational improvement of Eagle Elementary School?

An analysis of the findings laid out in chapter four of this case study delivered the following central results:

- The six change frames are inextricably linked to each other and to Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status.
- Positive changes in Eagle's purpose, culture, structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions support the organizational well-being of this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school making it possible to sustain its distinction as an academically successful and effective school.
- The evidence suggests that caring competent shared leadership, a hardworking committed staff, a shared vision, a clearly communicated mission and goals, high expectations for all stakeholders, a greater sense of accountability for all stakeholders, attainable and measurable outcomes, appropriate and relevant professional development, a refusal to settle for failure or mediocrity and a sense

of hope coupled with focus and commitment can create order out of chaos and success out of failure.

- The selection of an appropriate comprehensive reform model to meet the needs of this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school provided the impetus for positive educational change and the foundation for its transition from failing school status to distinguished school status.
- Eagle is an emerging learning community.

#### Implications

The systems view of educational change focuses on the complexity of change, the nonlinear nature of change (i.e., the implementation of change and the continuation of change are interactive). Every person in the school is a potential change agent. School structure and school culture interact to generate school change, not just trying to implement specific school improvements but also developing the school's capacity to deal with change in general. The interactive change frames support understanding and development of a school's capacity to deal with change. They are the lenses for viewing educational change.

Educational change theory provides a conceptualization of the postulated relationships among school purpose, school culture, school structure, school leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions. This qualitative study inquired into the lived experiences of the learning organization in this high-poverty, high-minority elementary school. This research is informed by educational change theory, however, does not attempt to test the theory. Case studies are descriptive, interpretive, investigative and explanatory.

School studies of educational change provide evidence that academically successful and effective schools are distinguished by relationships between and among the various change frames. Most change literature has focused on school restructuring that can be relevant to the majority of schools. Schools having severe difficulty or schools that have been designated as failing, like Eagle, require reculturing first and restructuring next. Fullan (2001) indicates that restructuring occurs in many instances and positive sustained change does not ensue.

Reculturing which results in “how teachers come to question and change their belief and habits is what is needed” (Fullan, 2001, p. 34). Evidence of best practices must permeate the teaching and learning environment and be visible in the culture and organization of the school on a daily basis. Schools can produce short term improvements in student achievement employing traditional structural changes without reculturing. Reculturing schools and the teaching process creates and fosters mindful and purposeful learning communities (Fullan, 2001). In the case of Eagle Elementary, reculturing, I contend, has resulted in the school’s ability to sustain and maintain positive educational change. This positive change did not stop after the time of this case study. It continues.

Education is about change, transition, and transformation, which makes it a journey of development, awareness, nurturing, determination, empowerment and relationships. The change frames presented in this study are critical components of the educational improvement process at Eagle. These components have provided direction and continue to support continuous positive change at Eagle Elementary a 2007 Georgia School of Excellence for Student Achievement. This distinction is given to schools that have shown consistency in positive improvement in student achievement in the areas of

Reading and Math. Eagle continues to make incremental gains in the number of students meeting and exceeding state achievement standards.

Data revealed that the well-being of the school organization, the well-being of school individuals and high student achievement were facilitated by implementation of a school reform model that addressed specific needs of the student population and specific needs of teachers. The needs addressed impacted teaching and learning and facilitated teaching and learning at Eagle. The transition from failing school status to distinguished school status was facilitated, supported, and strengthened by a change in mindset and culture. A redefined purpose and changes in school structure were woven into the fabric of Eagle's comprehensive school reform. These changes were delivered in organizational and professional learning sessions, SFA component meetings, collaborative planning meetings, leadership/design team meetings and shared leadership roles. Data further revealed emotional engagement by stakeholders resulted in positive educational change and its maintenance.

Unless school policy makers and community stakeholders are prepared to understand the multidimensional reality of the elements impacted by school improvement: leadership, purpose, emotion, culture, organizational and professional learning, and structure, sustained positive educational improvement will continue to be elusive. In order to positively impact school improvement it is necessary to conduct our change efforts with a purposeful understanding of the situation and circumstance in which we attempt them. One size fits all change efforts will not succeed. Just as classroom teachers must differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students, school improvement must be personalized to meet the specific needs of specific schools.

A multidimensional approach focuses on insightful and mindful learning thereby moving away from centering attention on externally mandated performance results. Taking a multidimensional approach to change broadens perspectives and provides multiple lenses through which schools are able to analyze and cope with change. Educational change theory provides comprehensive insights for accepting and coping with the apparently intractable problems of educational reform.

The eight school studies of educational change presented in Chapter II bear this out. The Case Study of Six High Performing Schools in Tennessee (2005) achieved positive educational change by focusing solely on cognitive indicators of high performance in conjunction with developing a supportive learning culture. This study, in contrast, achieved positive educational change focusing on a multidimensional approach to analyze educational change. The seven remaining high-poverty, high-minority schools achieved positive educational change as a result of attention to or adjustments to school structure, school culture, organizational and professional learning, and leadership (Emmons, Efimba, & Hagopian, 1998; McNeil, 1998; Research-Based Strategies to Achieve High Standards a Guidebook on School-wide improvements, 1999; Kratzer, 1997; Stahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas & Ware, 2003; Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Burgess Elementary School, 1999; Archived: Hope for Urban Education: Goodale Elementary School, December 1999) . Sustained school improvement involves more than adjusting cognitive indicators of high performance.

School culture was of major significance in positive educational change. The core of a school's culture converges at its purpose and mission. A powerful culture provides identity and helps stakeholders grow and come together around a common purpose.

Reculturing and restructuring in concert accounted for positive educational change in all of these schools.

School studies of educational change provide evidence that academically successful and effective schools are distinguished by relationships between and among the various changes frames. The number of change frames examined does not lessen this study's convergence with current literature on the subject. This study differs in the number of change frames examined but not in the interrelationships and interconnections between and among these change frames. Positive educational change is consistent among these studies and is evidenced in this case study as well.

It is essential to accept that change is continuous learning. It is critical to realize that change is a journey and not a static blueprint, comprehending that problems are opportunities in disguise, knowing that the provision of adequate resources is necessary for successful change to occur, coming to terms with the fact that change requires ongoing management, understanding that change is systemic, and accepting that change begins with local implementation of innovations.

This study is significant in that it adds to the body of literature of in-depth studies of high-poverty, high-minority elementary schools and their transition and transformation from failing schools to achieving schools. Moreover, this study has theoretical significance in that it incorporates the concepts of educational change theory to understand organizational problems that may result in failing school status. A change frames approach offers a multidimensional lens that makes examining and analyzing change possible.

This study's holistic approach to examining educational change and school improvement suggests that schools serve a broader purpose than the limited cognitive product focused demands of standardized tests. This broader process-focused purpose includes personal goal setting, development of social skills, development of lifelong learners and achievers, and development of strong productive citizens. The foundation for future academic success is built in schools as are learning dispositions. This inquiry has addressed systemic educational change that may have created lifelong adult and student learners and achievers. The transition at Eagle continues as it attempts to maintain its distinguished school status and to move from good to great.

#### Discussion

Change is not new; it remains a constant in education and life in general. Change at Eagle was a wading in the water experience. Failure and dysfunction had troubled the waters. Staff members could not calm the water without getting into the water. What was needed to calm the water was balance based on reality. In reality, what had been done in the past was not working. Staff became aware of the need to work as a team, to focus on creating a supportive learning environment for students and themselves. Changes in the purpose and vision/mission contributed to the development of a balanced approach to decrease dysfunction and establish a culture of achievement success. Eagle Elementary is not perfect. The school continues to focus on teaching and learning thereby maintaining its efforts to improve student achievement outcomes. Sustaining positive educational improvement is difficult and requires continuous consistent commitment. That is reality.

Eagle has risen from the ashes of systemic dysfunction and low achievement. Eagle has transitioned from failing school status to distinguished school status. Eagle Elementary dispels the myth that high-poverty, high-minority schools are characterized by an inability to sustain positive educational change. The organizational functioning of Eagle Elementary has changed it into a caring learning community with the capacity to coordinate and maintain meaningful educational change

Eagle Elementary school has made AYP for the past seven consecutive school years. It is on the list of its state's distinguished schools. It was named a 2007 School of Excellence for Student Achievement by its state superintendent. This is noteworthy evidence of the positive multidimensional organizational functioning of this urban elementary school. This is further evidence of the school's academic success, sustained emotional well-being and daily commitment to moving this school from good to great.

Staff members have moved from isolation to collegiality; from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and from individual accountability to collective accountability. The focus on accountability for all staff members resulted in and continues to result in a relentless pursuit of success based on data driven decision making. The culture of achievement success is pervasive throughout the Eagle community. The staff became a team and made changes as a unit. This approach eventually created a family focused on problem solving, student performance, and the enhancement of teacher knowledge and skills. This family/team atmosphere is evidenced in the positive relationships that exist between students and students, staff and staff and staff and students.



Parents are proud to have their children in the school and proudly come into the school to assist in classrooms, work in book fairs, chaperone field trips and attend Parent University Sessions where they too learn how to be lifelong learners. All of these factors have given rise to the overall development of Eagle as a caring learning community with the capacity to coordinate and manage meaningful educational change. The evolution of this school organization into a successful learning community is the result of its transition from failing to distinguished school status. Transition and transformation continue as Eagle attempts to move from good to great.

#### Recommendations

This case study indicates that Eagle Elementary espouses behaviors and practices that have resulted in positive sustained successful educational change. These multidimensional changes have resulted in Eagle's transition from failing school status to distinguished school status. The overall evolution of this school organization as a caring learning community has developed the capacity to coordinate meaningful educational change.

A case study method was utilized to examine and chronicle the underlying factors that contributed to this transition and transformation. The results of this study supported many of the concepts presented in the literature regarding the meaning and underpinnings of educational reform, changing concepts of educational change, multidimensional aspects of educational change and the relevance of comprehensive school reform. Studies of positive educational change in high-poverty, high-minority elementary schools are limited. Findings from this study could pave the way for schools with dysfunctional systems and relationships to transition into well-functioning systems and relationships.

As a result of this single case study and the literature review, further exploration is warranted. Qualitative research is limited in transferability and generalizability since it does not look for universals that exist free of context. Qualitative research seeks results that not only are context bound, but—in fact—also describe the context. Because of human variations in both the researcher and the participants, replication of a qualitative study may not be possible. For that reason, the following recommendations for further study became apparent from the results of this study:

- It would be valuable to explore and describe the behaviors and practices at other high-poverty high-minority elementary schools to see how the multidimensional organizational functioning of those schools correlate to the findings of this school and to identify important similarities in the practices used to create and sustain student achievement and organizational well-being.
- It would be valuable to investigate the interconnected pathways of positive school change among the following six areas in other high-poverty high-minority elementary schools: school purpose, school culture, school structure, leadership, organizational and professional learning and teacher emotions.

Throughout this research process, I realized that at some point a case study ends and my passion for storied or narrative research must be included in this study. The story continues as long as there is life in the research site; this narrative continues as long as I am there to tell the story; however, the research ended with the analysis of the data collected in chapter four. To satisfy my personal self—the narrative, my research self—the case study and bring closure to A Case Study of An Urban Elementary School's

Transition From Failing to Distinguished School Status, I will close this chapter through the voices of those who participated.

### Final Words

In a social organization such as a school, organizational well-being is experienced when the collective capacities for achieving tasks, connecting emotionally, and making purposeful decisions are fully functional and mutually supportive of meaningful growth and development. For this school, achieving against the odds has been an exercise in survival. The transition from failing school status to distinguished school status is rooted in the purpose, culture, structure, organizational and professional learning, and leadership and teacher emotions. My motivation in this endeavor was to give collective power to the voices of the site subjects as they interpreted their lived experienced during and after the transition from failing school status to distinguished school status. In keeping with that intent I asked each interviewee the following question to end their interview session:

**What, if anything, can be learned from this school during the transitional period about educational improvement?**

T-1: *That if it can happen here it can happen anywhere! This school was down for so long that (tearing up) that you can marvel at where this school is today. And it is able to compete on the level of any school. I think that it was all because we had a visionary that came in saying that we don't have to be here, but we can make a difference. I think too, that if we hadn't had that core of people who thought this school was worth saving it never would've worked. I think we had a guardian angel at the right time, and that's the way I would describe the person who came in and made this school do a 180 degree turn. I can't say enough about Eagle because I spent most of my career*

*at this school. The community changed, remodeled, I've seen folks move in, move out. In fact, I've taught Eagle's children's children, so I've sort of seen it all (tears) I just felt sort of like this is my school.*

*T-2: I think, for me, if you keep trying when something new is instituted, give it a chance. Give it a chance. If you stick with it then, I think you are likely to experience favorable results. Change is very difficult and if you bail out in the very beginning then you may miss something. You may miss out on success. But if you give change a chance you may succeed. Once you allow for the growing pains, there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is light at the end of the tunnel.*

*T-3: I think the message is that you've got to have strong leaders and people who really want to teach. Not coming in with the attitude like, "I failed at this now I think I will give teaching a try." I really get disheartened when I hear someone say: "those who can't teach." I don't appreciate that. I think you have to have strong leadership, you have to have a willingness to change, you have to have a willingness to move up a step or two, you know. At one time we had to write lesson plans out, and do everything yourself. Now you have computers, you can just pull a plan up and get things to help support your teaching. You have to be willing to step up and accept the changes so that changes will be beneficial to not only yourself, but to those you are teaching. I have been doing this so long now that I understand that changes always come, some changes are better than others, but the goal needs to always be the same. We have to always have high expectations for ourselves and our children and take them as far as we can and we have to do it as a team.*

T-4: *That change is not easy. You have to realize that what you have been doing is not working. You have to take the step to say we are going to have to change. Cause, the children are always going to be there. We are going to have to do the changing to get the best out of them. You have to realize that you are going to have to do something different because what you are doing is not working. We can't take the negative attitude that it's not my fault. It's not about fault it's about we have a problem and we have got to fix it. Once that happens, you can become very flexible and open. We can't be possessive of children, even though that is good in a way, but it isn't good when we only want to work with or be responsible for the children in our rooms. We have to be accountable and do whatever we can to make sure that all the children succeed. They are all our children. We have to put the interest of the children first. We have to be flexible. Schools and especially teachers can't be isolated any more. We have to be more like a community now. We have to learn from each other and support each other. We learn most when we meet and talk and discuss. We have to have an end in mind and we have to have a plan. This is here we are and this is where we want to get to. This is the problem what are we going to do about it? This is a community. Everybody has a place and everybody can help solve this problem. I wish everybody could have seen it during the storm and then when we made that 93% of our targets and we were on the floor. It made such a difference. I wish we had the old and then the new on tape. We could have played it on the big screen at the dome. I remember that they didn't believe we had done it. They sent all those teams over to see what was going on over here. I understand, though. It takes a lot of hard work when a school is at the bottom like that and I think it wears you out to work at that pace. You almost have to keep bringing in new people to keep the pace*

*going. Some people may want to go somewhere where you don't have to work so hard. You can't use part-time help to fix a fulltime problem. Everyone has to give 100% or more. It takes so much of your energy to work in the situation we were in, but we did it. Children will perform to the expectation that you put on them. They will act like the environment that you place them in. I wish people could really know what we took that school from. I just wish they could have seen it. You almost have to have been there to believe it especially now at this point. It was a huge transition. We have the same kind of children there now that the school is a school of excellence. We have all the tools we need we just need to keep the commitment.*

*A-1: This school is an example of what can happen to a failing school when all stakeholders work together to foster positive change. Change may not come easily for some, but persistency and consistency that allow rays of hope to penetrate the darkness, encourage all stakeholders to get involved and to carry their share of the load in order to prevent the school from drowning in a sea of despair. Our children deserve the best! The transition was not an overnight process. It required many changes that were slow and deliberate, but well thought-out, based on data gathered and carefully analyzed to determine what was working and what was not. It also took the courage of the leader to make tough and sometimes unpopular decisions regarding changes that were necessary. The administration and staff cannot rest on their laurels with each success, but must continue to set even higher goals until all students reach that ideal plane of achievement. This means that teaching to the middle must be eliminated. All students must be taught as if they are gifted, those who are at the low end of the spectrum as well as those in middle and the high end.*

A-2: *If you have a clear concrete vision, then anything is possible and with that clear concrete vision working the plan and realizing that there will be ups and downs but if you remain focused on the end result then things are possible. And with that, of course, there are a lot of components that come into play, but I think if you have that vision, and that focus then of course that's the beginning piece. And that started with A-1 and it continued with her putting or getting the right people on the bus, getting the right people to believe in her, realizing those who weren't able to believe with her or believe in her to move on to a different or to another bus and just continuing to work the plan. And I would say then from then I would say for lack of a better word, this school is very fortunate and the stars lined up and another administrator was able to come on to continue on to continue the work of A-1, who had not better qualities, but some different qualities that were needed at that time to move forward. And with, you know, just two determined individuals leading an organization or school who were very focused. I would like to think that I have a lot of qualities just like her, with her focus and tenacity and just doing what is important for student achievement. You know if you work your plan and consistently stay focused, and motivated and push your objectives and push what our charge is that you can move, you can improve and just, you know, you know, the possibilities are endless.*

A-3: *I think that if you get a group of people together that are really about the teaching and learning process not about their own egos or what I individually can do but what we can do together and enable them to sit together and actually plan a program and implement it together as a team that the same thing that happened at Eagle can happen almost anywhere. All of us respected each other and we had a relationship. We knew*

*realistically there were some things we could not do, but the things we could do we did them together with the gusto. We knew we had support from our principal, our counselor; all of us were in there together. I remember there were time I brought kids to you and you'd sit down and talk with them. Sometimes you had things to do but because of the nature of the infraction or situation you would stop and attend to that child. I have always respected you for that. We had a good team and you were a vital part of that team. It is imperative that children and their parents know that school personnel care about them and their children. When they know you care they give you the best effort they can. A lot of our children had some unusual circumstances, some challenging circumstances. I remember how much time you spent with those households trying to get the kids turned around and helping the parents if you could. All of that was a part of the team effort that we brought together. You, Doc., the ILS, coach and me I think one of the places we really showed our camaraderie was during our end of the year programs and talent shows. Each of us was a part of that and all of those times of play solidified our relationship. We could work hard together and we could play hard together appropriately. We worked together and we won together for our kids and our school. The kids were learning and we enjoyed each other's company. We had a good time. We as educators don't have those kinds of times very often. It was one of those unique situations, unique and memorable.*

*A-4: I would say dedication, commitment, and fortitude make a lot of difference in educational outcomes. If you are committed to what you are doing, if you believe in your teaching practices, if you believe in your leadership, if you believe in the abilities of your students, then failure is not an option. So just being dedicated, being committed, and*



*exercising, having that fortitude to press on and if we can do it other students, other schools can also do it. We have come from the bottom to the top through lots of hard work and it has been well worth it. Eagle Elementary School staff believes that every single student in this building deserves a quality instructional program. These students deserve the absolute best that every single person in this building has to offer. Everybody in here is giving 150% of themselves 100% of the time, from bell to bell. Teaching from bell to bell, making every single minute count.*

A-3 said “it was one of those unique situations, unique and memorable.” We continue to celebrate the lived experience, the learning and how it impacted the school organization and its people. It was a most excellent adventure wrapped in chaos, challenge, conquest and finally calm. We don’t know if it is the calm before another storm, the calm before another troubling of the waters. We do know that the work continues and the sense of urgency continues. We do know that we come to a cross road every day. Robert Frost said it better than I can:

#### The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I marked the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I,  
I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference.  
(Frost, 1920)

Eagle Elementary stakeholders had a choice during the 1999-2000 school year and during the transition years. Tough choices had to be made. When traveling the road to educational change and improvement we could choose self reliance, we could choose perseverance, we could become a band of brothers, and however, failure was not an option. In schools as well as in life, choice and change are inevitable. The unsettling nature of choice and change is the fact that you never know what your choice will mean until you have lived it. Eagle faculty, staff, students, and parents chose positive multidimensional educational change and that has made all the difference.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**TOP PRIORITY STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS**

**Top Priority Student Performance Goals**  
PROJECTIONS 2000-01 To 2002-03

**INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: READING/LANGUAGE ARTS**

<b>OBJECTIVE: DECREASE the percent of students in the LOWEST quartile (1-25 percentile) on the Advanced Reading portion of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.</b>					
	Baseline	Actual	Projected Annual Targets		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3	56	50	47	44	41
Grade 5	48	66	56	45	34

<b>OBJECTIVE: INCREASE the percent of students in the HIGHEST quartile (76-99 percentile) on the Advanced Reading portion of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.</b>					
	Baseline	Actual	Projected Annual Targets		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3	6	1	5	9	13
Grade 5	3	0	2	5	8

**INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: MATHEMATICS**

<b>OBJECTIVE: DECREASE the percent of students in the LOWEST quartile (1-25 percentile) on the Mathematics Total portion of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.</b>					
	Baseline	Actual	Projected Annual Targets		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3	51	47	44	41	38
Grade 5	45	67	58	49	39

<b>OBJECTIVE: INCREASE the percent of students in the HIGHEST quartile (76-99 percentile) on the Mathematics Total portion of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.</b>					
	Baseline	Actual	Projected Annual Targets		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grade 3	13	7	11	15	18
Grade 5	5	4	6	8	10

**INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: ATTENDANCE**

<b>OBJECTIVE: DECREASE the percent of students absent 10 days or more.</b>					
	Baseline	Actual	Projected Annual Targets		
	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Grades K-5	50	46	43	40	37



APPENDIX B-1  
2005-2006 TITLE I DISTINGUISHED SCHOOLS

December 2, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** SETC Principals  
**FROM:** Carolyn S. Richardson  
**RE:** 2005-2006 Title I Distinguished Schools

Congratulations on your selection as a 2006 Title I Distinguished School. This recognition is authorized in Section 1117 of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and includes monetary awards for qualifying schools. All distinguished schools will serve as models for schools identified for improvement with similar demographics and may be contacted by other school systems for information or site visits.

Recognition is based on the number of consecutive years a school makes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools that have made AYP for three consecutive years will receive a certificate of recognition. Schools that have made AYP for four, five, six or seven consecutive years will receive a certificate of recognition and grant funds in the amount of \$10,540, \$15,500, \$20,000 or \$25,000 respectively for highest poverty schools or \$2,250, \$3,000, or \$10,000 respectively for lower poverty schools, and an invitation to the Georgia Department of Education Schools of Excellence Celebration. Additional details regarding the Schools of Excellence Celebration are forthcoming.

Each Title I Distinguished School must complete the attached *School Information Packet*. A hard copy of the *School Information Packet and Assurances*, with your original signature, must be received in the Office of External Programs no later than Wednesday, **December 14, 2005**. Additionally, please submit the School Information Packet and budget via email to your assigned Education Specialist. **The Office of External Programs is required to forward the packets to the Georgia Department of Education on or before January 7, 2005.**

Carefully review the procedures below to ensure prompt access to funds.

1. The LEA will review the *School Information Packet* to ensure the following:
  - a. Each school has answered all questions in the *School Information Packet*.
  - b. An assurance form is signed for each school.
  - c. All funds will be used for educational purposes only. Educational purposes are defined as expending funds for:
    - i. Monetary awards to staff
    - ii. Resources/instructional supplies
    - iii. Special schoolwide projects

APPENDIX B-2  
2005-2006 TITLE I DISTINGUISHED SCHOOLS CONTINUED

Schools choosing to make monetary awards to staff must include all staff. Schools may award different amounts for different personnel classifications, but the same amount must be awarded within a given personnel classification. (Example – All teachers must receive the same amount; all paraprofessionals must receive the same amount.) Please note that all monetary awards to individuals are considered to be personal income and are subject to appropriate state and federal tax guidelines.

Schools may use portions of the monetary award for any of the purposes described above. (Example – A school may choose to spend 50 percent of its funds as monetary awards to staff members and 50 percent of its award for a special schoolwide project.)

2. The Grant Period is July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2006. Funds must be obligated by June 30, 2006. All grant related goods and services must have been delivered and invoiced or performed by June 30, 2006.
3. Each school must submit a budget to The Office of External Programs. The budget format is attached.

Again, congratulations on your award. Please feel free to contact me at [redacted] or by e-mail, if you have questions or concerns.

CCR:mrm

Title I Distinguished Schools – Schools making AYP 4, 5, 6 or 7 consecutive years and highest poverty.

School Name	Award Amount
[redacted]	\$10,540
[redacted] Eagle Elementary	\$15,500

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project: Dissertation Research

Topic: A Case Study of An Urban Elementary School's Transition From Failing to Distinguished School Status

Principal Investigator: Carla Brice Ross, Doctoral Candidate, Georgia Southern University, 181 Saddlevue Trail, Riverdale, Ga. 30274, 770-473-1082, [ross7475@bellsouth.net](mailto:ross7475@bellsouth.net).

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Dan W. Rea, Georgia Southern University, P. O. Box 8144, Statesboro, Ga. 30460-8144, 912-871-1547, [danrea@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:danrea@georgiasouthern.edu).

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand how the multidimensional organizational function of an urban elementary school appears to have changed as it moved from failing to distinguished school status and to determine how school change may have contributed to the educational improvement of the institution.

Procedures to be followed: Participation in this research will include participation in audio taped interviews.

Discomforts and Risks: The probability of the harm or discomfort is no greater than that encountered ordinarily in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. There is minimal risk by virtue of the fact that participants will respond to interview questions and responses will be audio taped.

Statement of Confidentiality: All information will be treated to preserve anonymity and reported in the research documented with all identifiable attributes masked.

Compensation: Participants will receive no compensation.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and subjects may end their participation at any time. They do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer. Participants will receive a copy of this consent form for their records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND  
TEACHERS

INTERVIEWEES WILL BE INFORMED THAT THE INTERVIEW SESSION WILL BE RECORDED VIA A CASSETTE TAPE RECORDER IN ORDER TO INSURE ACCURACY IN THE RESEARCH REPORT; AND THAT THE INFORMATION WILL NOT BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEE PERSONALLY. INTERVIEWEES WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT UPON REQUEST.

Questions

1. How long have you been associated with this school and education in general?
2. During the transition from failing to distinguished school status, what were some of the positive changes, if any that contributed to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary School?
3. In what ways, if any, did changes in **leadership** involving the principal or faculty contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? In what ways, if any, did a group of informal leaders emerge and contribute to educational improvements? In what ways, if any, did informal leaders contribute to the development of relationships that fostered organizational learning?
4. In what ways, if any, did changes in the school's **purpose**, vision, or mission contribute to the educational improvements at Eagle elementary? Did the change have a clear moral purpose? Explain. In what ways, if any, are the educational changes that occurred during the transition directly connected to the **purposes** of teaching, learning, and caring in the classrooms in ways that matter for teachers and students? How did/does this contribute to educational improvement at Eagle Elementary?
5. In what ways, if any, did changes in **teachers' feelings** about the school reform efforts contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? In what ways, if any, did Eagle as a workplace during the transition promote positive **emotions** or negative ones? In what ways, if any, did **reform efforts** impact upon teachers' caring relationships with their students and colleagues?
6. In what ways, if any, did changes in the school **culture** such as the staff's shared belief about what is important, their collective sense of purpose or their group expectations contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? In what ways, if any, did/do the school staff and community have a shared sense of direction; assume responsibility and work together to achieve school goals and success?
7. In what ways, if any, did changes in the **professional learning** or development of the staff contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? During the transition how did teachers and others learn to cope with the particular changes that were being implemented as well as change in general? What supports were available to develop collective problem-solving skills and to assist teachers and

staff members in using conflict an opportunity for growth? How did this contribute or detract from the educational improvement at Eagle Elementary?

8. In what ways, if any, did changes in the school **structure** such as the school curriculum, school scheduling, or new educational programs contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary? How were spatial relationships altered to improve collegiality and improve instances of collaboration? During the transition from failing to distinguished school status how was time created for **collaboration** and to what extent did staff roles and relationships divide or unite staff?
9. **What, if anything, can be learned** from this school about educational improvement?

## APPENDIX E

## INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

INTERVIEWEES WILL BE INFORMED THAT THE INTERVIEW SESSION WILL BE RECORDED VIA A CASSETTE TAPE RECORDER IN ORDER TO ENSURE ACCURACY IN THE RESEARCH REPORT; AND THAT THE INFORMATION WILL NOT BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEE PERSONALLY.

## Questions

1. How long have you had children in this school? How many?
2. Are you aware that this school was on the failing schools list? What does that mean to you as a parent?
3. What were/are some of the positive changes, if any that contributed to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary since the 1999-2000 school year?
4. In what ways, if any, did changes in leadership involving the principal or staff contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary?
5. Are you aware that this school is now on the list of distinguished schools in Georgia? Are you aware that this school is a 2007 Georgia School of Excellence for Student Achievement? What does that mean to you as a parent?
6. In what ways, if any, did changes in the school structure such as the school curriculum, school scheduling, or new educational programs contribute to educational improvements at Eagle Elementary?
7. In what ways, if any, are the educational changes that occurred during the transition connected to the purposes of teaching, learning, and caring in the classrooms in ways that matter for teachers, parents, and students?
8. In what ways, if any did/do the school staff and community have a shared sense of direction; assume responsibility and work together to achieve school goals and success? How did/does this contribute to educational improvement at Eagle Elementary?
9. In what ways, if any, have parents become more involved at Eagle Elementary as the school transitioned from failing to distinguished school status and how has the involvement contributed to educational improvement?
10. How do you feel about this school?
11. What do you see as the strengths/weakness of this school?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about the changes that have occurred in your school?



## APPENDIX F

## RESEARCH SITE CONSENT FORM

Project: Dissertation Research

Topic: A Case Study of An Urban Elementary School's Transition From Failing to Distinguished School Status

Researcher: Carla Brice Ross, Doctoral Candidate, Georgia Southern University

Research Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Permission is granted for Carla Brice Ross to engage in dissertation research that will use \_\_\_\_\_ as a subject in the research. The research will include the analysis of institutional documents made available by the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability, the principal, and interviews of current and past staff members.

All information will be treated anonymously, and the identities of individual staff members as well as the identity of the institution will not be revealed in the writing of the dissertation or any other subsequent publication of the research. A pseudonym will be used for the school.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Research Site Principal

## APPENDIX G

## LETTER SEEKING APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

181 Saddleview Trail  
 Riverdale, Georgia 30274  
 September 8, 2005

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ School System  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue  
 \_\_\_\_\_, Georgia \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and a counselor at \_\_\_\_\_Elementary and \_\_\_\_\_Elementary. I respectfully request permission to conduct research in the \_\_\_\_\_ School System. The overarching research goal of my qualitative study is to understand how the multidimensional organizational function of my proposed research site appears to have changed as it moved from failing school status to distinguished school status during the 2000-2005 school years and how it has maintained its distinguished status to date.

I will gladly provide a copy of the study for your review and record keeping and would ask for any factual corrections to be made prior to my submission of the report to my dissertation committee. Every effort is being made to follow the guidelines that have been established for conducting research in the \_\_\_\_\_ School System. It is hoped that you will find all requirements in order.

Enclosed in this packet are copies of a letter from Georgia Southern University delineating my status as a doctoral candidate and my research prospectus, except for Chapter II – “Review of Relevant Literature.”

Thank you for your kind assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Carla Brice Ross

## APPENDIX H

STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS  
CRITERION-REFERENCED COMPETENCY TESTS 2001-2002

## INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: READING/LANGUAGE ARTS

Objective: DECREASE the percent of students NOT MEETING STANDARD on Reading portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	47 students	42	29	Yes

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Reading portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	17 students	20	12	No

Objective: DECREASE the percent of students NOT MEETING STANDARD on the Language Arts portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	34 students	30	34	No

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Language Arts portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	9 students	12	4	No

## INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: MATHEMATICS 2001-2002

Objective: DECREASE the percent of students NOT MEETING STANDARD on the Mathematics portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	51 students	46	42	Yes

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Mathematics portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2000-2001	2001-2002	2001-2002	Met Target?
Grade 4	3 students	6	7	Yes

STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOALS  
CRITERION-REFERENCED COMPETENCY TESTS 2002-2003

INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: READING/LANGAUAGE ARTS

Objective: DECREASE the percent of student NOT MEETING STANDARD on the Reading portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	29 students	29	35	No

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Reading portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	12 students	24	22	No

Objective: DECREASE the percent of students NOT MEETING STANDARD on the Language Arts portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	34 students	27	26	Yes

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Language Arts portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	4 students	14	9	No

INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY AREA: MATHEMATICS

Objective: DECREASE the percent of students NOT MEETING STANDARD on the Mathematics portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

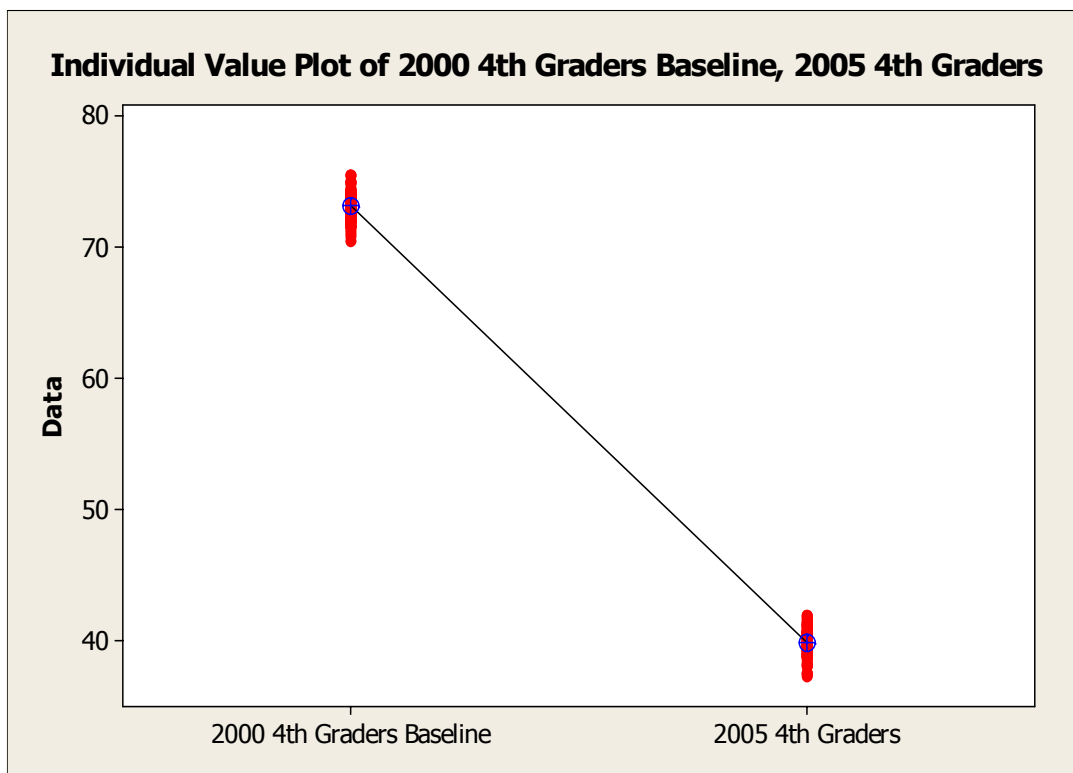
	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	42 students	42	33	Yes

Objective: INCREASE the percent of students EXCEEDING STANDARD on the Mathematics portion of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

	Baseline	Projected	Actual	
	2001-2002	2002-2003	2002-2003	Met Target?
Grade 4	7 students	9	11	Yes

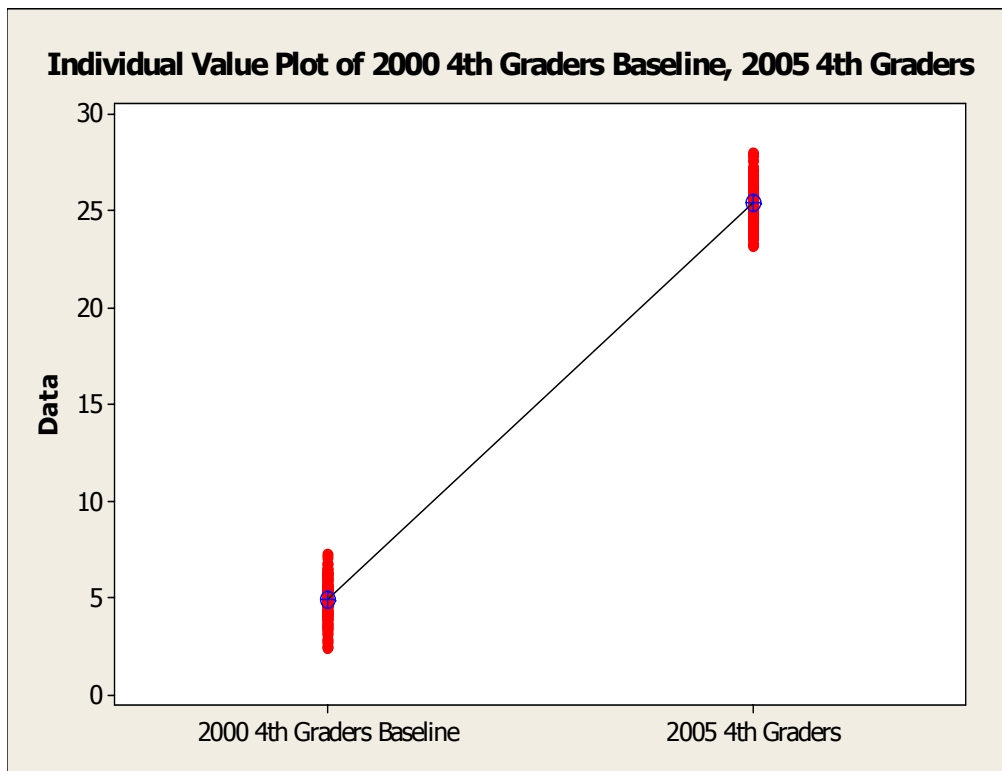
APPENDIX I

STUDENTS NOT MEETING READING STANDARDS ON CRCT



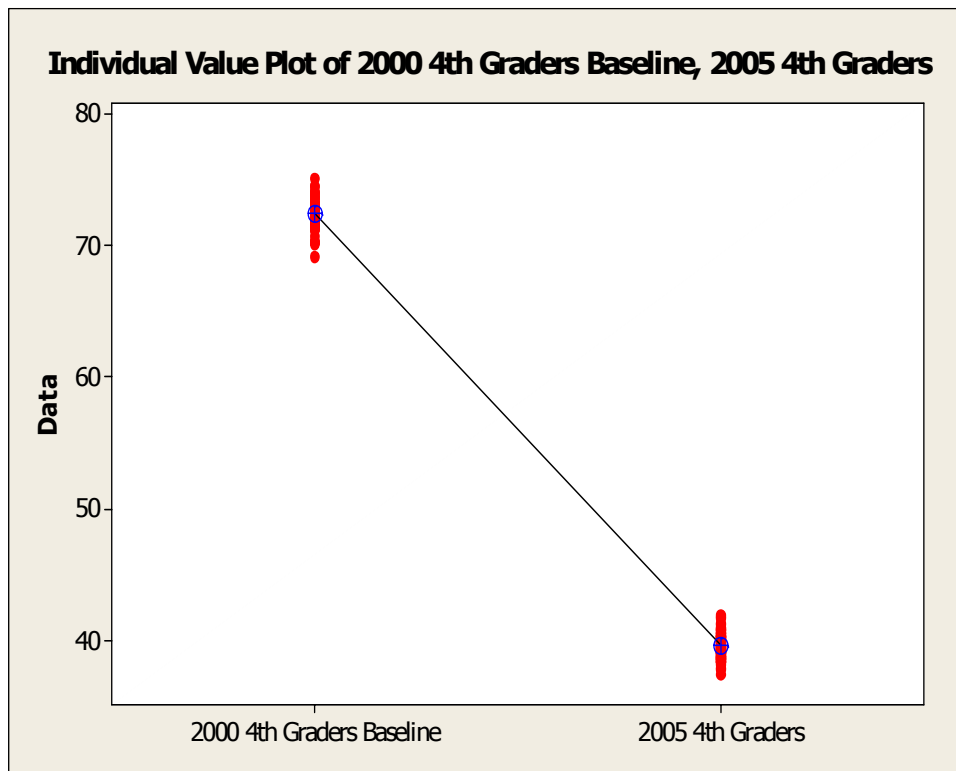
APPENDIX J

STUDENTS EXCEEDING READING STANDARDS ON CRCT



APPENDIX K

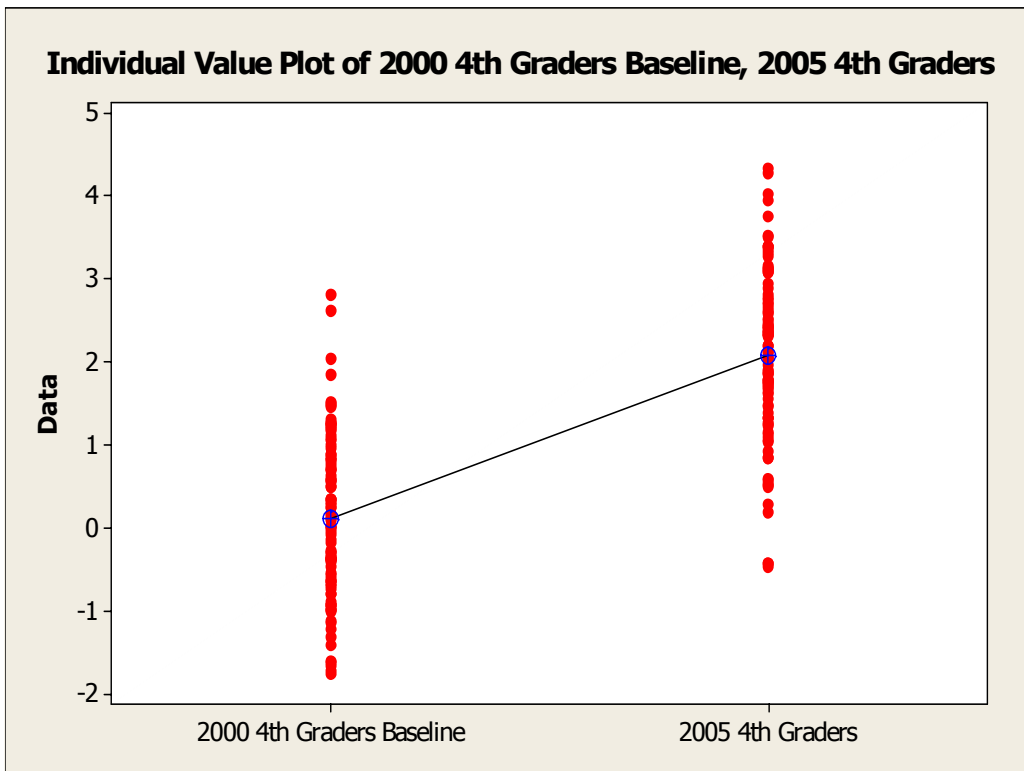
STUDENTS NOT MEETING MATH STANDARDS ON CRCT





APPENDIX L

STUDENTS EXCEEDING MATH STANDARDS ON CRCT



APPENDIX M  
IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-681-5465		Administrative Annex
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Carla Brice Ross  
181 Saddleview Trail  
Riverdale, GA-30274

**CC:** Dan W. Rea  
P.O. Box-8144

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(LACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** August 7, 2007

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07253**, and titled "**A Case Study of an Urban Elementary School's Transition from Failing to Distinguished School Status**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs