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Career Academy Implementation: School Leaders Perceptions

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CAREER ACADEMY IMPLEMENTATION: SCHOOL LEADERS PERCEPTIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

As educational systems are constantly challenged with public demands to decrease dropout rates and increase student achievement, school reform models are spreading as a form of school improvement across America. Educational reform moves in cycles, and the change has moved to smaller learning communities in an effort to improve education. Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) have attracted currency in the world of education, and many school districts have adopted this transformational model as a means to support students' academic success. Smaller learning communities alter the internal structure of a traditional high school to small schools within a school. One specific model of a smaller learning community, known as career academies, has populated many suburban school districts. School leaders are primary sources for implementing such school reform models. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school leaders who have experienced the implementation process of career academies. To produce the written research, data were collected, organized, transcribed, and analyzed into emerging themes and patterns through phenomenological interviews using open-ended questions with ten suburban school district leaders. This study yielded

factors and barriers experienced by school leaders as they implemented the school reform model: career academies.

The results from this study indicated that school leaders experienced many factors and structures towards the change process and several barriers that were challenges during the implementation process of career academies. With implementing the career academy initiative in this study, it is evident that barriers outweighed the factors. School leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia are faced with many challenges as they attempt to implement and sustain career academies. They endure scheduling, financial resources, building structure, changes in leadership, lack of support from superintendent and board members, teacher buy-in, communication, cultural changes, and the district integrating too many initiatives at the same time as issues they face while implementing career academies. As a result, effort to meet the challenges and demands our nation faces in education in the next decade, more emphasis must be placed on a plan to assist and support school leaders and their efforts to practice leadership roles for implementing or transforming schools into SLC models.

INDEX WORDS: Support, Factors, Barriers, Career academies, School leaders

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to many who have made a wonderful impact in my life. First and foremost, I would like thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the head of my life. It was his grace and mercy that brought me through. I give him all the thanks, glory, honor, and praise. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Ruben and Maxine Hughes for their financial support, encouragement, love and the belief in me that I could accomplish this milestone goal. Thank you both so much for being there when I needed you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As business and industries have changed in this country, schools remain virtually

unchanged, even though outcries for quality education from political arenas have created

a constant demand for change in the educational system. There have been new reform

movements since the 1960's. The 60's called for the New Progressive Era, the 70's

called for School Effectiveness Studies, and the 80's called for school reform (Bailey,

1992; DiBacco-Tusinac, 2000). According to WGBH Educational Foundation (2010),

the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) released *A Nation at Risk,*

a reform movement that developed a common core curriculum in the early 80's. By the

90's, the National Center for Education Statistics found that nearly 40% of high school

graduates achieved the required core curriculum recommended in this standard

movement needed to make progress based at the state level (WGBH Educational

Foundation, 2010). Although these movements centered on specific concerns, none

addressed the problems of the early 90's such as demographic changes, new state and

federal demands, increased community expectations, and a decrease in the quality of our

educational system (Bailey, 1992; DiBacco-Tusinac, 2000). However, in 1994, President

Bill Clinton signed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, designed to improve teaching

and learning by granting a national structure for education reform (USDOE, 2010). In

1999, the U.S. Department of Education introduced the Smaller Learning Community

plan to support schools with more than 1,000 students in implementing smaller learning

community structures. Despite budget cutbacks, the program continues and to date has awarded grants to nearly 1,350 high schools (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008).

Within the last decade, "the bipartisan support for President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind Act*, an extension and revision of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* of 2001, has managed to expand the role of the federal government while respecting state control over standards" (USDOE, 2010). In March 2010, President Barack Obama's administration proposed that the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),* the current educational federal law affecting grades kindergarten through high school, be amended to provide incentives for states to implement academic standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to create accountability structures that measure student development toward meeting the goal that all children graduate from high school and succeed in college (USDOE, 2010).

Recently, Brand (2009) reported state and local policymakers have taken the lead on high school reform and improving college and career readiness. Although national policymakers are focused on decreasing the number of high school dropouts and improving prospects for college and career success, President Barack Obama's administration has demanded new funding in the 2010 budget that supports educational initiatives. According to Brand (2009), the Administration's policy focus, is likely that lawmakers' interest to these issues will continue to grow. The economic situation currently gripping the United States and most of the world might make it easy to lose focus on educational issues; however, our future is dependent on school systems to produce not only a strong workforce, but an educated citizenry (Brand, 2009)

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Background of the Study

As economic development issues are continuing to dominate policy debates around the country, a constant call for more successful schools is repeated across the nation--from education reformers, from students and their families, and from governors, state legislators, and the U. S. Congress.   While many restructuring strategies have developed in our nation's schools, research to date has validated relatively few of them. One reform model that continues to hoard supporting research is the formation of smaller, more tailored high schools. Research and experience show that smaller learning communities (SLC) can improve academic achievement for most students by contributing to a safer, more humane environment and a more positive overall educational experience (Raywid, 1999; Cotton, 2000; USDOE, 2001).

To assist large schools and districts to specialize the high school experience, the U. S. Congress allocates funding for Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) initiatives. According to USDOE (2010), the initiative supports strategies that result in smaller, safer learning environments at the high school level. In 2001, the USDOE awarded up to $125 million in competitive grants to help local education agencies (LEAs) create smaller, more supportive learning communities as a foundation for their broader school improvement strategies.

Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) are categorized by multiple structures to expand the complete advantages of a smaller learning environment. According to the USDOE (2010), models have been identified, based on the amount of independence from the larger school in which they are housed. Many examples of smaller school structures include academies, magnet schools, house plans, and schools-within-schools (USDOE,

2010). An analysis of the various Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) models

indicates that the career academy model has become known as a strategy that works to

improve student outcomes (Brand, 2009). Originally formed forty years ago, career

academies are clusters within schools that are arranged around specific topics. The focus

is designed to prepare students for post-secondary education and employment readiness,

to incorporate academic and vocational instruction and to provide work-based learning

opportunities--within a smaller learning environment.

Several cities in the United States including Chicago, San Diego, and Boston have

supported career academy legislation. In the state of California, there is an abundance of

support through many funding streams from almost 500 partnerships at several high

schools. Many schools districts, frequently in large urban areas, also have systems of

academies or have broken all high schools into SLC's, many of which are career

academies. Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the New York City Department of

Education, and the Houston Independent School District are just a few urban systems that

have supported and promoted the career academy model as a major strategy of their high

school reform efforts (Brand, 2009).

According to the Georgia Career Academy Network (2010), in 2002, many

suburban school districts throughout the state of Georgia received grant funds to

implement Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's). Most of these districts employed the

Career Academy model. The framework used by practitioners in Georgia is designed to

partner local businesses, industries and school districts. These partnerships allow the

expansion of college-level and high school-level programs that train students for quality,

in-demand jobs and for success in higher education. Students discover the career

academies' challenging, hands-on programs provide better relevancy and worth. According to GCAN (2010), this supposedly has led to higher graduation rates, immediate employment opportunities, and greater access to college. The particular training for students is attractive to local businesses, and communities thrive from a highly-trained and skilled local workforce.

Since its inception, career academy implementation in some school districts in Georgia has been problematic. Literature of what school districts need to know and to do to support high school redesign is growing rapidly. Just a few years ago, the soundest generalization one could make about district support was that district staffs simply lacked knowledge about how to provide the redesign. The literature, however, reflects only a fraction of the knowledge that loose networks of district leaders, foundation staffs, and external technical assistance providers are passing among themselves (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). In Atlanta, Georgia, for example, consultants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Northwest Regional Educational Lab have come together at various points to coordinate high school redesign and learn from each other's career academy models.

According to Raywid (1999), restructuring of career academies bears challenges further than those related to starting a small school. It entails teachers and administrators doing more than one job at once: operating the old system while implementing the new one. Raywid (1999) also identified four main issues at the root of concerns about restructuring into academies: cost, staff conflict, student grouping, and conflicts with effective school principals. In one suburban school district in Georgia, leadership in most

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schools that have received the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) grant within the last five years has little or no experiences with restructuring their schools to follow the guidelines set by the SLC grant which includes five domains: (a) interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams, (b) rigorous, relevant curriculum and instruction, (c) inclusive program practices, (d) continuous program improvement, and (e) school/district support for SLC's. Though, with new mandates for accountability to meet guidelines from the *No Child Left Behind Act*, principals whose schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress requirements can now be held directly accountable under the law. New formulas for calculating AYP have raised the stakes for many principals narrowing the criteria for success and shining light on leadership areas that may have been less closely mentioned in the past (NWREL, 2005). In many cases, principals not meeting AYP year after year are being forced to accept lower-level positions. Although much has been written on the challenges principals face in juggling so many different roles, few publications have focused specifically on local principals and the processes they have undertaken to effect change both within themselves and their school communities (NWREL, 2005).

It is likely that additional career academies will be established in the future and that some currently operating may be modified; therefore, it would be wise to learn from those who have experienced the implementation process and use their experiences to inform others.

Statement of the Problem

In addressing the problem of school districts across the nation responding to state and federal mandates to meet the high demands of improving education with the *No Child Left Behind* initiative, each year high schools across America are choosing to transform schools from traditional high school models to Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) as one way to improve academic achievement for all students. Within the last decade, along with several school districts across the nation, many school districts in one of Georgia's largest metropolitan areas have implemented career academies, a Smaller Learning Community school reform model funded by a federal grant, as an agent of change for high school improvement. However, the implementation and acceptance of this educational change model has caused many school leaders across the state to unexpectedly be able to expand their experiences and responsibilities in leadership to include redesigning a whole school, changing managers, and implementing curricular change efforts.

As school districts transform schools to improve academic achievement, many principals are often expected to be able to implement career academies without prior staff development or training. Due to the *No Child Left Behind Act* requirements, accountability for schools has caused many school districts to move school leaders to other schools or to even demote them to lower positions if their schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This has caused a shift in new or changed leadership in metro area schools in Georgia. Many principals inherit career academies, some are advised with little time to lead by upper-level school district officials that their school

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will receive the SLC grant funds, while others are hired as school leaders with little experience and no knowledge of how to implement career academies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors and barriers experienced by select school leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia who implemented the career academy model and to determine what strategies and structures they found most useful in supporting the implementation process.

Research Questions

This qualitative study focused on school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors and barriers experienced by school leaders through the implementation process of career academies. Data was collected using phenomenological interviews where the researcher is utilized as the instrument for the study. The following research questions served as a guide throughout the process:

What were the key factors and barriers experienced by school administrators when undertaking the implementation of a traditional high school into a career academy model? The following were sub-questions that guided the study:

1) What factors experienced by school leaders support successful implementation of a career academy?

2) What barriers experienced by school leaders deter successful implementation of a career academy?

Research Design

This study was a qualitative research design. According to Gay and Airasian (2000), "qualitative research seeks to obtain understandings about the way things are . . . and how the participants perceive them" (p. 16). Qualitative research methods allow the researcher more flexibility in data collection than in the quantitative research methods. Ganty (2003) stated that a qualitative research design promises quality, depth, and richness of description that can explain the complexities of human interaction. A detailed analysis of these data yielded valuable explanations of school leaders' perceptions.

Although there are many types of qualitative approaches, according to Patton (1990), the phenomenology approach answers the key and direct question: "What is the experience of an activity or concept from particular participants' perspectives?" (as cited in Gay and Airasian, 2002, p. 202). Patton (2002) stated "the phenomenon that is the focus of inquiry may be an emotion—loneliness, jealousy, anger. The phenomenon may be a relationship, a marriage, or a job. He also states "the phenomena may be considered a program, an organization, or a culture" (p. 104). It attempts to explain phenomena as they are lived by human beings. According to Husserl (1931), one can know only what one experiences by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken the conscious awareness. While one's understanding comes from the sensory aspect of phenomena, in phenomenology, according to Patton (2002), it is important that the experience is described, explicated, and interpreted (as cited in Lawrence, 2010, p. 11).

According to Creswell (1994), the assumptions underlying the qualitative paradigm are vastly different from those of the quantitative approach. Unlike the quantitative view of reality, the qualitative view is that reality exists as constructed by the

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persons involved in the research project. Cohen & Manion (1994) revealed quantitative measures are deterministic and are not concerned with asking questions in order to explore how one creates the meaning of one's world. On the other hand, Omery (1983) described the qualitative method as inductive, descriptive research, the goal of which is to "describe the total systematic structure of lived experience, including the meaning that these experiences had for the individuals who participated in them" (p. 50).

This study described the experiences of school leaders in a suburban school district who were involved in the implementation process of a career academy. It utilized qualitative, phenomenological research methodology as outlined by Seidman (1991) and Creswell (2003). Semi-structured open-ended interviews were the primary means of data collection. The study took place in the second semester of the 2010-11 school year in a large urban school district in Georgia. The participants in this study were limited to select school leaders in an urban school district in Georgia who were a part of the 2005 and 2008 cohorts. Cohorts are identified as the beginning school year that schools were Smaller Learning Community grant recipients. Each cohort extends for a five year period. School leaders included district office deputy superintendent, district office career and technical education director, district office smaller learning communities' coordinator, principals, assistant principals, and school-based appointed career academy leaders. They all acquired leadership duties and responsibilities as outlined by the leadership guidelines within the SLC grant. This study sought a better understanding of the experiences of these school leaders during the implementation process for receiving the grant to implement a career academy. Further discussion of the research methodology can be found in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

Although school reform models, such as Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's), are being used as school improvement initiatives, an understanding of the effective leadership practices needed to restructure schools becomes a concern. Many school administrators inherit school restructuring models, and others are pressured to implement the process with inadequate support or training in school reform. It is assumed that implementing the SLC model career academies is a positive model for school improvement, but understanding how school leaders should effectively implement the career academy model correctly has been challenging for many school leaders in Georgia.

There is little research and very few school reform models to guide school administrators who have experienced, wish to develop, or are forced to implement career academy models in high schools; therefore, there was a need for further studies. Thus, the study provided a better understanding for other school districts and leaders who plan or already have implemented career academy models: the factors and structures experienced attitudes towards the change process, and experiences or barriers that were challenges during the process. This study also provided insight for school systems in the state of Georgia that wish to implement career academy models as a way to design appropriate professional development for inherited or aspiring school administrators to assist them in developing transformational leadership skills. By studying these leaders who have acted as the driving force in reshaping their schools into career academy models and by understanding the factors and barriers they encountered, it is hoped that there will be a better understanding of leadership support and training needs.

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Assumptions

Assumptions to the study included the following: (a) those selected to participate will be honest and open when responding to questions, and (b) the instrument developed will address the barriers and experiences of school administrators' perceptions of implementing career academies.

Definition of Terms

Smaller Learning Community (SLC) The Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program awards discretionary grants to local educational agencies (LEA's) to support the implementation of SLC's and activities to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students (USDOE, 2010). SLC's are separately defined, individualized learning units within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most of their classes (Sammon, 2000).

Career Academy Subgroups within schools, organized around particular themes. For example, career academies combine key principles of the school-to-career movement: integrating academic and vocational instruction, providing work-based learning opportunities for students, and preparing students for postsecondary education and employment (USDOE, 2010).

Reform The term is used to define the movement to transform or change schools.

Schools-within-a-School Subgroups that are administratively and fiscally autonomous units that share the same building with the larger school (USDOE, 2010).

School Leaders Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, District-Level SLC
Director, District-Level SLC Coordinator, Principals and Assistant Principals, Career
Academy Instructional Coach.

Summary

As political and social debates regarding education fill the media, an
understanding of school reform practices needed to restructure public schools becomes a
great concern. While new state and national mandates call for standards-based
educational reform, along with increased accountability for school leaders to implement
such standards, focuses on leadership practices are renewed. Few would argue that
school leaders in large urban school districts are critical in getting any reform effort to
take root and thrive in the school. Thus, reform efforts wither without good school
leaders to promote a clear vision and instill a constant sense of urgency about the work.

Early evidence suggests that implementing smaller learning communities as a
school reform approach out of one existing large school may require new forms of
distributive leadership. A strong support from the central office and innovative and
creative roles for teachers in leadership roles are necessary for the continual improvement
of teaching and learning**.** A small learning community model, career academies, which
were founded on the concept of academic-technical instructional integration, has been a
significant growth model in recent years. It has been estimated that only about 5% of
public high school students attend a career academy nationally, meaning there is an
immense amount of room for expanding this proven model in the future. If career
academies expand, efforts must be undertaken on both the local and national levels to
discover ways to assist and support school leaders with leadership intervention strategies.

The researcher studied the leadership practices and beliefs of school leaders who have experienced the implementation in shaping their school cultures into learning communities and discovered the difficulties they have encountered in the Smaller Learning Community (SLC) implementation. This study was a qualitative phenomenological examination of the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and practices of suburban school leaders involved in implementing the small school structure to create the career academy model. This study sought to understand how the shift of leadership and lack of support can affect the sustainability of a highly effective school reform model. There will be an introduction to the history of career academies before proceeding to a discussion of implementation in regards to school leaders and school reform, evolution and growth of career academies, career academy leadership roles, and barriers experienced by school leaders. The following chapters explain the literature review, the methods used to conduct the study and how the data were interpreted. The findings were reported and serve as a contribution to the literature recorded about school leaders' perceptions of implementing career academies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

As career academies surface in the nation, programs are being developed under

the Smaller Learning Community (SLC) model framework that consist of core

curriculum that integrates academic and vocational courses to provide a labor market

context for learning (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). This reform model is most commonly

associated with the high school years. The alterations in instructional strategies, career

guidance, and technological and academic core courses are integrated during this

educational period. Although they are designed to increase students' motivation to

achieve academically and to better prepare them for employment or for higher education,

it is too soon to fully assess how much long-term impact SLC's will have (Maxwell &

Rubin, 2000).

School districts of geographic region and urban and rural locations are attempting

to reform high schools into career academies. To the early system-wide reform mandates

of New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia are now added Boston, Los Angeles,

Nashville, San Diego, Oakland, and Atlanta to name a few, as well as statewide

initiatives in South Carolina and New Jersey (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008).

Leading a change so deeply embedded in the national consciousness requires

uncommonly competent and stable leadership, a resource that has not yet caught up with

the reform movement (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). With changes also derives challenge,

the challenge in making needed instructional improvements to maintain a simultaneous

focus on supported structural changes (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). Although schools are

redesigned to fit changing structural needs, school leaders must be able to implement procedures, and teacher teams are organized to improve focus on the student as a whole person and not just a piece of the classroom (Guarino, 2009).

Administrators take on leadership and teaching roles in career academies and also carry out building-level administrative tasks. Their roles as the high school leader is the "project leader," the supervisor who affords the variety of support that career academies need (CASN, 2010). They serve as spokespersons to the entire staff, encourage support from other administrators, as well as counselors and teachers; commit funding, equipment, and materials; oversee adaptations of classroom space; help remove impediments and resolve problems; encourage teachers; and ensure that the school-within-school has a chance to succeed (CASN, 2010).

This literature review will focus on career academies and how school leaders perceive the implementation process. It begins with a discussion of the leadership role and school reform, a current trend in schools in many school districts across the country. As part of the review, the following topics are discussed due to their importance of career academy implementation as means of school role and school reform, evolution and growth of career academies, the career academy leadership role, implementation structures and strategies, and barriers experienced by school leaders.

The School Leader's Role and School Reform

Across the country, there are major reform initiatives being funded by the state, local, and federal grants. *Goals 2000*, SCANS, NSTWOA, CSRD, SLC, and Breaking Ranks I and II all fueled a revolution in funding for the revamping of schools. Yet, almost forty years into reform, the national data tells us that we are woefully unskilled as

an educational community to meet the ever-demanding needs of a culturally diverse student population which must be prepared to take its place in a global society (Sammon, 2008). The literature suggests that high school reform is necessary in order for students to learn to think independently, to solve problems, and to be better prepared for the challenges of today's global economy. High schools, particularly large comprehensive high schools, have been faulted for operating as bureaucratic institutions that inadequately support students' academic and social needs (Lee & Smith, 1997; Aguilera, 2008). Richard (2005) stated "the United States could recoup nearly $200 billion a year in economic losses and secure its place as the world's future economic and educational leader by raising the quality of schooling, investing more money and other resources in education, and lowering dropout rates" (p. 5). The dropout rates, especially for African-American students, are high even when it has been reported that states tend to understate the problem (Aguilera, 2008). Economist Moretti (2005) found that a one percent increase in graduation rates nationally would correlate with about 100,000 fewer crimes annually in the United States. Such a step would save the nation $1.4 billion a year in law-enforcement and incarceration costs. Furthermore, Richard (2005) examined that an increase in graduation rates by 10 percentage points would correlate with a 20 percent reduction in murder and assault arrest rates. It would be most difficult to think of a better purpose for investing in public schooling.

There is a growing national commitment to reforming high schools, as evidenced in part by the commitment of the National Governors Association (NGA) to high school reform (Sammons, 2008). The origin of high school reform efforts to raise student achievement can be traced to 1983, when the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk,*

concluded that the decline in educational performance of students is a result of the inadequacies of the educational process itself. The report described the educational process using four components, including content, expectations, time, and teaching (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The recommendations include the following: (a) strengthening the high school graduation requirements, (b) adopting rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance, (c) increasing the length and quality for learning, (d) improving the preparation of teachers, and (e) requiring that educators and elected officials be held accountable for providing the leadership and fiscal support necessary to implement reform efforts. These actions called for needed change and increased control over curriculum and instruction (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983).

In addition, some research points to the overall effectiveness of small schools. Student achievement increases when small schools are created. Students in small schools are more motivated, feel a connection to their schools, and are more likely to be engaged in their work (Raywid, 1996; Lee & Smith, 2001). The "small is better movement" has increased by research indicating that not only do small high schools exhibit higher achievement levels, greater graduation rates, and lower dropout rates, but incidents of violence and disruption are drastically reduced, thus providing a safer learning environment. Research conducted by RAND, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), and Will Daggett's International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) all points to smaller learning environments bringing out improvements in student and school outcomes (Sammon, 2008). A purposeful and well- documented concept linked to high school reform is the Smaller Learning Community model (Smith, 2009). Institutionalizing better high school reform can help to identify students at risk

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and provide a smaller, more personalized learning environment that focuses on the whole child (Breaking Ranks II, 2004).

The importance of small school reforms grew in 1998 when Congress appropriated $150 million for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). This program awarded 3,000 schools at least $50,000 to implement whole-school reform models (USDOE, 1998). In a study of schools in four states, Howley & Bickel (2000) observed that small schools reduce the impact of poverty on student achievement. While the data are clear that small learning communities positively impact dropout rates, students who remain in school must be taught to high standards in an increasingly information age-driven economy (Sammon, 2008). The SLC model includes the combination and adoption of a personalized school learning environment, collaborative leadership and professional learning communities, and integrated curriculum, instruction, and assessment to support improved student performance and student achievement (Breaking Ranks II, 2004). The U. S. Department of Education has awarded over 542 grants totaling more than $275 million to hundreds of districts since 2000 to help local school districts promote academic achievement (USDOE, 2009).

In all districts and in every school, there should be advocates for effective reform (Cotton, 2001). These champions must battle the tide and the continuous spinning of a wheel that often keeps them from meeting the goals they set. These are *change agents* by job description: the state-level leaders, superintendents, principals, assistant principals, members of a school improvement team, or designees to assemble school improvement through SLC (Sammons, 2008). Few would disagree that school administrators in large urban schools are crucial in obtaining any reform attempt to take the core and thrive in a

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school. Reform efforts shrivel without leaders to endorse a clear vision and to inspire a continuous sense of importance about the work. However, early evidence suggests that creating of small learning communities (SLC) from one existing large school may require new forms of leadership, distributive in nature, featuring new roles for teacher-leadership focused on the continual improvement of teaching and learning (Wallach, 2005; Aguilera, 2008). Accordingly, if school leaders are to be successful in transforming large comprehensive high schools into sustainable small learning communities, a new theory and practice of leadership and work will need to be created to guide school leaders past the temptation to return to the bureaucratic models of leadership and operation that have proven ineffective in increasing student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2005; Aguilera, 2008).

Meeting the challenge of improving instruction and achievement in our nation's schools where students are often disadvantaged by economic and other circumstance will depend, in part, on school leaders who can effectively lead such improvement (Leithwood, 1994; Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, Sebastian, 2010). Developing principals who can lead teachers and students to a new level of performance is a daunting task (Barnes et al.). While many argue that instructional leadership is a key strategy for meeting the challenge of helping all students learn (Leithwood, 1994; Barnes et al., 2010), few principal development programs focus directly on the problem of instructional improvement (Tucker & Codding, 2002; Barnes et al., 2010).

While the school leader's role is vital in the achievement of a school reform model, researchers have found that normally the principal tends to not be actively and directly involved in the implementation process. However, the principals' role is to

support conditions in their school that will assist with the implementation process. According to Crawford (2004), the most common terminology associated with closing this gap is the concept of reshaping schools into learning communities in which administrators and teachers embrace adult growth and learning. The learning community structure is shaped around *learning leaders* who model lifelong learning as an avenue for continuous growth and improvement.

Klindworth (2008) reported that school leadership expectations have been affected by increased emphasis on accountability for student achievement. He also found that principals have many duties and responsibilities and are expected to provide leadership in all areas of instruction, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, stakeholder relationship, and faculty development and that the expectations of students, faculty and community members are increased as the standards-based view of educational excellence receives even more emphasis as we begin the twenty-first century. According to Crawford (2004), as political and social debates regarding education are prevalent, an understanding of the effectiveness in school leadership practices needed to reform a school becomes a concern. Crawford also reported that new educational policy and local, state and national mandates are calling for standards-based educational reform, with accountability for school leaders who are required to implement those standards.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is an austere reality for our schools today, and school leaders are viewed as the strong one who enables faculty, staff, students, and the community to realize their expectations. The whole-school reform is about a shared level of accountability. School administrators have the primary responsibilities of developing a school climate and the conditions that enable the school to meet the tenets and mandate

that state and district levels have set out to increase student performance as well as share responsibility with a cadre of professionals. The goal is effective reform that embodies a respectful, high-expectations climate for teaching and learning (Sammons, 2008).

Evolution and Growth of the Career Academy Model

According to the National Career Academy Coalition (2010), in 1968 our nation and our cities were in crisis from the losses of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Bobby Kennedy. The nation wanted solutions to how to address the concerns of the educational and career needs of students. The answer arrived from the business community with the creation of the first career academy created in 1968 by Charles Bowser, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Urban Coalition, in collaboration with Philadelphia Electric Company and Bell of Pennsylvania (NCAC, 2010). The two found it tough to find motivated and coachable entry-level employees due to Philadelphia's rising inner city problems of high school dropouts and increased youth unemployment rates. With this turmoil at the forefront, Brower drew together major forces in business, industry and labor to work in collaboration with the School District of Philadelphia to develop a model career education program (NCAC, 2010).

The first career academy, Edison High School, opened in Philadelphia in 1969 and was named the Academy of Applied Electrical Science. In 1974, the second Academy of Applied Automotive and Mechanical Sciences started at Simon Gratz High School, followed by the Philadelphia Business Academy, which began at University City High School in 1975. These Philadelphia Academies continued to spread further in the 1980's with a Health Academy at Martin Luther King Jr. High School.

By 1991, the Business Academy was functioning in five high schools, with eight different academy programs operating in sixteen Philadelphia high schools. The academies included secretarial work, electrical trades and automotive mechanics originally designed to prepare students for occupations not requiring a bachelor's degree and were structured with the traditional high school vocational education limitations. Stern, Dayton, & Raby (2000) reported by June 1991, the Philadelphia Academies enrolled 2,024 students in grades 9 through 12. These included 1,372 African-American, 128 Hispanic, and 49 Asian students. Projected enrollment by the beginning of the 1991 school year was 2,700, more than triple the number of students by June 1985 (Stern et al.).

In the early 80's, New York City created the first Academy of Finance, which was supported by the American Express Company. The company later joined with the National Academy Foundation (NAF), which was initially designed for grades 11 through 12 and provided academies with curriculum, technical support, and professional development for teachers (Stern et al., 2000). NAF was appended to the Academy of Travel and Tourism in 1987, Public Service in 1990, and Information Technology in 1999. The NAF academies' focus has been college-oriented since its inception. In 1981, the academy model was introduced in California, beginning with the Computer Academy at Menlo-Atherton High School and an Electronics Academy at Sequoia High School near Silicon Valley (Stern et al., 2000).

Several studies in California have found that academy students perform better than similar students in the same high schools who are individually matched with academy students on demographic characteristics and ninth grade records of grades,

absenteeism, and disciplinary problems (CASN, 2002). An evaluation of the first two academies in California in the early 1980's found that academy students in grades 10 through 12 had better attendance, earned more credits, obtained higher grades, and were more likely to graduate than their comparison groups (Stern et al., 1992; CASN, 2002). They also reported that based on a series of evaluations that exhibited improved student performance; California passed legislation in 1984 that supported ten replications of the career academy model. Evaluations of these academies continued the pattern of encouraging results, and in 1987, a second state bill was passed supporting approximately 40 more replications (Stern et al.). The legislation passed again in the early and late 90's are expanding its academy total of 290 students by the end of the decade.

Various school districts from around the country did institute such programs, but these usually served a relatively small percentage of students—e.g., 5% in Philadelphia, 7.3% in California's first established program (Stern, 1992; Maxwell & Kemple, 2001; Greenan, 2004). According to Greenan (2004), privately sponsored career academies also appeared in the early 1990's. For example, the National Academy Foundation (NAF) has sponsored career academies since 1982 and has recruited a higher academically performing group for the purpose of developing "future employees" for the finance industry. These career academies enrolled over 4,000 students in 74 different schools in the 1991-1992 school years (Bailey & Merritt, 1993; Greenan, 2004).

Until the 1990's, career academies existed only as separate, small units within larger high schools. For example, a career academy may have served 200 students in a high school containing 2000 (Stern et al., 2000). However, in the mid 1990's, a number of high schools decided to change completely into career academies or into various kinds

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of small learning communities (Stern et al.) Lee, Ready, and Johnson (1999) conducted

an informal national canvass to identify high schools divided totally into some kind of

small learning environment. They identified 55 such high schools, 80% of which were

using career academies as the model for the SLC's (Stern et al.). What differentiated

these academies was the school-within-a-school format, which was designed to build

more social cohesion among students and which also demanded that academic and

vocational teachers coordinate their curricula (Stern et al., 2000). The development of

basic computing, reading, and communication skills was linked to the development of

technical and attitudinal skills (Philadelphia High School Academies, 1991). This

connection enabled students to become motivated to learn and to help themselves see the

importance of learning.

Since its beginning in 1969, the growth of career academies has been steady but

gradual. A number of cities and states across America began to implement the career

academy model more in the 90's. For instance, the Illinois State Board of Education

started 20 California-style academies in 1994-95, expanding to about 50 in 2000 (Stern et

al., 2000). Today, career academies have expanded to more than 1,500 high schools

nationwide (NCAC, 2010). Cities with growing numbers of career academies include

Palm Beach, Houston, Oakland, Seattle, Chicago, Denver, Washington, D. C.,

Sacramento, Austin, Brooklyn, and Atlanta.

Career academies have also grown from an initial focus on traditional vocational

education to preparation of high school students for both work and college. In

accordance with federal law and historical custom, vocational education traditionally has

been directed toward occupations not requiring a bachelor's or advanced degree (Stern et

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al., 2000). Thus, it has often been viewed by students and parents as a less desirable

option than college prep. Stern et al. noted that growth in the proportion of jobs that

require at least some post-secondary education has further reduced the attraction of

traditional career and technical education programs. Similarly, career academies provide

extensive information about industry, which exposes students to a variety of careers

requiring various amounts of formal education and building a foundation on which to add

more advanced and specialized post-secondary preparation (Stern et al.). Many

academies offer a rigorous academic curriculum that qualifies students for admission to a

four-year college or university. By linking academic coursework to career themes and

workplace experience, academies motivate students to stay in school and attend to their

studies as a number of evaluations have demonstrated (Stern et al.).

Vocational or technical schools were once considered appropriate only for high

school students who were not academically proficient (Vail, 2007). Currently, career

academies or career and technical education have an entirely different image among

students and parents. One of Vail's main arguments is that these programs were once

considered to be a dumping ground for slow students but are now considered to be highly

desirable by parents and students. She also contends that after years of being considered

second-rate, career academies have gone high-tech and, as a result, current technical

education programs now find themselves in the center stage of high school reform.

Implementation Structures and Strategies

The move to "small" has grown steadily since the late 1960's with the start of the

first career academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The National momentum was brought

on by the U.S. Department of Education's redesign of the *Carl D. Perkins Act* and in

May 1994 when the United States Congress passed the *National School-to-Work Opportunities Act* (NSTWOA) with broad-based, non-partisan support (Sammon, 2008). The act called for dynamic change in American education. Furthermore, its mission was to build upon what was already finished by *Goals 2000* and the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).* The NSTWOA invited all states and school systems to apply for federal funds to develop the required school-based and work-based learning systems that would (a) address the school-to-career needs of all youth, (b) create the opportunity to learn in a school-based educational setting that provides in-depth career awareness no later than the seventh grade, (c) provide specific opportunities to interact with business and community members in a work-based career-focused program no later than the tenth grade, and (d) develop and sustain means of connecting these experiences through curricular changes and supporting community structures (Sammons, 2008). Brand (2009) noted that in order for educators to implement effective career academy strategies, they must have a shared understanding of the structures of the model and know how to plan and implement a high quality program. This will involve professional development for all stakeholders involved: administrators, teachers, counselors, college and community representatives, and employers. Brand also found that education and policy leaders also need to build public support for such models and engage a broader group of community members in planning and implementation of the academy.

The United States Department of Education (2009) reported that smaller schools tend to have lower dropout rates, better attendance, fewer incidents of violence, and more student participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, every student has the

opportunity to develop personal relationships with small groups of peers and teachers when appropriate structures and strategies are in place (USDOE, 2010). This portion of the review will identify structures and strategies that local education agencies and school administrators should consider when applying for Smaller Learning Communities grant funds.

The federal government has defined structural examples that encompass small schools (USDOE, 2001). Examples of small school structures include the following: career academies, ninth grade or freshman academies, house plans, schools-within-schools, and magnet programs. Success is valued when one of the structures is implemented along with a specific strategy designed to enhance student learning.

Career academies This is an SLC structure that enrolls students and teachers who self-select to be part of the academy (Sammon, 2008). These are subgroups within schools, organized around particular themes. Career academies, for example, combine key principles of the school-to-work movement, integrating academic and career and technical education instruction, providing work-based learning opportunities for students, and preparing students for postsecondary education and employment along with a personalized learning environment of a small focused community. In this structure, teachers and students integrate academic and career and technical education classes as a means to develop real-world relevance (USDOE, 2001). An example of structural change for career academies includes transforming from a traditional schedule to block schedule and restructuring into separate administrative units when multiple career academies, also called school-within-school, are created.

Career themes in this structure are used as a catalyst to garner student interest, to focus learning, and to build a coherent and relevant curricular experience. There is a nationally approved "standards of practice" for career academies that was agreed to in the spring of 2005 by leading organizations including Career Academy Support Network (CASN), the National Academy Foundation (NAF), the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC), the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), America's Choice, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) High Schools That Work, and Johns Hopkins University's Talent Development High Schools (Sammon, 2008).

Ninth Grade or Freshman Academies These structures of SLC develop students' academic and social skills by providing a strong orientation to the first year of high school, freshman transition courses, advisory support, and the opportunity to learn in teams that promote individualized supports for student success (Sammon, 2008). Although not all schools choose to create "freshman academies" units for their students, research suggests that the development needs of ninth graders need to include a specialized program of studies and services, regardless of the destination of a stand-alone ninth grade program within the regular school (Sammon, 2008). With specific structural, interpersonal, and curricular supports, the Johns Hopkins University's Talent Development High School Ninth Grade "Success Academy" has demonstrated student gains in reading and mathematics scores and lower instances of absenteeism and dropout rates (Sammon, 2008).

House plan This structure is a small school that divides students into large groups of several hundreds and allows these students to take their courses with a common set of

teachers and students. House plans typically personalize the high school experience by allowing each house to develop its own discipline plan, student government, social activities, and other extracurricular activities. The house plan is a form of internal organization, which is typically overlaid upon the departmentalized structure characterizing most high schools (Raywid, 1996). Grouping ninth-grade students into a separate house is one way to ease freshman transition to high school (USDOE, 2001).

School-within-a-school This is a small structured autonomous program housed within a larger school building. These "schools" have self-selected faculty and students identified as part of a small school or academy within the school complex (Sicoli, 2000). Schools-within-a-school is subgroups within schools, organized around particular themes (Sicoli, 2000). They generally respond to the district rather than to the building principal and are authorized by the superintendent or board of education. This structure has its own program, personnel, students, budget and school space and attempts to create personalization by grouping students together to take core courses (Cotton, 2001). Like an academy, the school-within-a-school structure supports constructive relationships between and among students and teachers by grouping students together to take core courses (USDOE, 2001). A school-within-a-school operates within a larger "host" school, either the only structure in that school or one of several (Cotton, 2001).

Magnet Program This structure uses a specialty focus, such as math, science, creative arts, or a career theme, to attract students from the entire district. Magnet students stay together to take their core classes and may take other courses with non-magnet students. Generally, the magnet program has competitive admission requirements for acceptance into the program (USDOE, 2001).

Magnet schools were begun as specialty and theme-based schools or schools-within-schools for the purpose of desegregation without forcing busing (Sammon, 2008). In many communities, it has become commonplace for the "magnet" programs to be elitist, serving only the best students. This was not the intent and should be discouraged; cultural diversity, common purpose, and building on student interest and abilities make magnets especially suited for SLC and career academies (Sammon, 2008).

When specific strategies designed to enhance student learning are combined with these structures, the positive impact of smaller environments can be achieved. A freshman transition program is one strategy that allows ease of difficulty of the move from middle to high school. Advisory teacher systems are strategies that are achieved when a group of students meet regularly with a teacher who can provide support, rapport, and academic guidance. These teachers should be teamed to share common planning time (USDOE, 2001). Academic teaming is a strategy that organizes a group of core teachers to share a common group of students. George and McEwen (1999) noted teams can build a sense of community into a school and enable students to meet higher standards.

The challenge for educators was to replicate these structures and strategies that were proven to be effective in small schools and learning communities. In order for these reform efforts of the current high school structure to succeed, education professionals encourage attention to several structural elements and strategies (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Researchers repeatedly find that implementation of the structural and strategy elements of smaller learning communities is incomplete (Oxley, 2001; NWREL, 2008). An inconvenient fact of small learning communities is that they cannot be simply added

onto the existing school organization (Cook, 2000; Oxley, 2001). The size of the school community, establishing an interdisciplinary team, and providing common planning time are key factors. Educators, who are otherwise enlightened about curriculum and instruction, may still underestimate the importance of the structure within which they work (Cuban, 1993; NWREL, 2008).

There is significant amount of time, effort, and funds in professional development and curriculum and instructional planning needed to transform small communities into career academies. According to NWREL (2006), SLC's must be supported by building and district-level structures and policies, which form the "tree trunk." Also, building and district practices constrain what teachers and students are able to do. A fundamental requirement for making the kind of adjustments necessary to support SLC's is to give teachers and their students a major role in decision making (NWREL, 2006, p. 5). For SLC's to flourish, the larger school and district must operate in a manner that supports them (NWREL, 2006). Without the proper implementation of key SLC organizational structures the investing in SLC's is quickly dissipated (NWREL, 2008). As a result, they overestimate the extent to which structural reforms have actually been made (Jackson, 1990; NWREL, 2008).

In some suburban Georgia school districts, the structure of the career academy serves high school students and has the following basic seven components: (a) students are prepared for college and career, (b) small learning community environments provide supportive atmospheres, (c) curriculum is sequenced and integrates academics and career-based learning, (d) dual credit courses give students the opportunity to earn high school and college credits, (e) each academy links high school to business, civic

community, and higher education, (f) each academy measures and shows impact on student performance and achievement, (g) career themes reflect local economy (GCAN, 2010). The Career Academy model widely used by large school districts in the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia, is very similar to the "school-within-a-school" model. This model includes grades 9 through 12 with a defined structure within a larger comprehensive high school. Georgia Career Academy Network (GCAN) (2010) reports that this model of career and technical-focused schools or learning communities can help students complete their high school diploma, earn college credit, and learn skills needed to successfully compete in today's workforce. Successful career academy models all seem to have the structural framework as indicated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation version of the Three R's: rigorous academic coursework, meaningful relationships with instructors who can help students meet high standards, and relevant learning opportunities through internships and community partnerships (GCAN, 2010).

The perception is that the principal is crucial in implementing school reform models across the country; they are valuable sources and can make or break the program (Sammon, 2008). Brand (2008) reports as career academies require a variety of structural support, principals often need to adapt to school wide change. Sammon (2008) noted Daggett, Pritchett, Senge and others all identify strong leadership as not only the key to initiating change but critical to sustaining the gains won by the process.

Career Academy Leadership Role

The role of the high school principal has expanded to include the responsibilities of designing, managing, and implementing curricular change (Praisner, 2003; Rogers, 2007). Furthermore, Hipp, Huffman, and Rogers (2000), and Rogers (2007) concluded

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that the principal's leadership is seen as the key factor in implementing any school change. As the high school leader, the principal has the major influence on resource allocation, staffing, structures, information flow, and operating processes that determine what shall or shall not be done in each high school (Rogers, 2007). Rogers also found that high school principals play a pivotal role in school decisions and that the decisions the principals make are based on their perceptions and attitudes (2007).

The administrative leadership role in the current climate of accountability provides unique challenges for many principals (Cochran, 2005; Klindworth, 2008). Administrative duties and responsibilities are relevant in making sure that the overall success of their schools is student achievement and to support faculty professionalism and to connect with the community. Klindworth (2008) found that many principals, however, do not have adequate time to spend on important administrative duties. He also found that the Smaller Learning Community (SLC) principal feels pressure from within the school and from outside the school. Therefore, the culture and climate of Smaller Learning Community (SLC) schools is increasingly creating tension and stress for principals. With multiple schools under one principal and teacher-leaders taking on some roles that principals have traditionally assumed, the principal's role can become ambiguous (Raywid, 1996; NCSL, 2006).

Many stakeholders are involved in establishing a successful career academy. Among the central ones who need to play a role are the administrators at the district and high school level (CASN, 2002). The district superintendent is the CEO of the educational organization and plays an important role by making initial contact with high level representatives of the organization the academy would like involved. Additionally,

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the superintendent can play a constructive role by giving strong public support to the academy and the principles it fosters. While the superintendent rarely has time to follow through on details or to be a part of the academies' Steering Committee, he or she may appoint another district administrator for this role (CASN, 2002).

The high school principal plays a critical role as the "project leader" the administrator, who provides the variety of support academies needs (CASN, 2002). The principal's role is to serve as a spokesperson and to encourage and motivate support from other administrators, as well as counselors and teachers. They should also commit funding, equipment, and materials, in addition to overseeing adaptations of classroom space and helping to remove any impediments and to resolve problems. Furthermore, the principal may identify other administrators, such as an assistant principal or other administrator, to handle the day-to-day matters related to implementing the academy (CASN, 2002). These individuals are responsible for working with academy teachers in relevant meetings; attending Steering Committee meetings when the principal is not available; making sure adequate supplies are provided; helping to coordinate the involvement of those from outside the school; ensuring that scheduling is done properly, including cohort scheduling for students and a common preparation period for teachers; and making clear to the academy teachers that the school administration is supportive (CASN, 2002). Allen, Almeida, and Steinberg (2001) found leaders of an SLC need to know how to forge a strong sense of purpose, a curricular identity, and a capacity to solve problems collaboratively. They also concluded that leaders need to make effective use of common planning time, collaborate with business and community partners to extend student learning outside the classroom, and involve faculty in looking at student work and

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instructional practices to improve student achievement. In the same study, Allen et al

discovered the headmaster and assistant headmaster are usually asked to establish and to

maintain a common vision of high standards and collective school identity throughout all

SLC's.

Furthermore, administrators often assume supervisory and teaching roles in career

academies in addition to carrying out building level administrative tasks. Allen,

Almeida, and Steinberg (2001) conducted research at five Boston Public Schools. They

found that Brighton High School's experience in the role of the SLC leader is instructive.

They reported that in the first year of restructuring, the pathways were led by program

directors who were administrators rather than teachers. The experiences varied, but

reports indicated that these administrators felt overwhelmed by the task of managing a

pathway in addition to their other responsibilities, and some felt that time constraints

hampered their ability to plan curricular connections with businesses (Allen et al.).

In schools that have successfully implemented smaller learning communities on a

school-wide basis, the principal facilitates a shared decision-making process and serves

as an integral member of an SLC team (Cook, 2000; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990; Oxley,

2008). In a study of a suburban school district in Georgia, administrator leadership for

Small Learning Communities, The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

(NWREL) (2007), reported that administrators of learning communities must meet with

staff on a regular basis to deepen participants' understanding of instructional leadership,

identify practical ways to assist teachers in improving the quality of student work,

critique one another's school improvement efforts, and learn important skills such as data

analysis and providing helpful feedback to teachers. NWREL (2006) reported

information from studies on SLC's has been organized into five domains of research-based practice. The five domains including (a) interdisciplinary teaching and learning, (b) rigorous, relevant curriculum and instruction, (c) inclusive program and practice, (d) continuous program improvement, and (e) school/district support for SLC's offer educators a comprehensive reference for transforming traditional comprehensive high schools into SLC's (NWREL, 2006). Findings from a study raised important issues for program planners and administrators to consider if they are to build successful career academy programs (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). They showed that principals and district administrators must support career academy development. Site administrators hold the key to scheduling teachers and classes and to providing funding and student enrollments and will do so in the manner that fits their vision (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). District administrators determine the focus of staff development days and set content standards, curriculum practices, and educational goals, partly based on past practice and partly on the current district-wide reform strategies (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). In contrast, school-based administrators can impede implementation by not scheduling students and staff into the required classes, and district office administrators can hinder programs by withholding staff development dollars and time needed for career academies to reach their potential. Both school-based and district-level policies can either keep the costs of implementing career academy programs high or can reduce their marginal cost; unless both levels of management work in conjunction, there will be major gaps in the support system for the program (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000).

Regardless of state-level leaders, superintendents, principals, members of a school improvement team, or one designated to marshal school improvement through SLC's, the

key practitioner's role will be the primary force in partnering other administrators, faculty, and stakeholders to build school and community commitment to a data-driven process aimed not at reform but at continuous improvement (Sammons, 2008).

Barriers Experienced by School Leaders

The advocating for small schools faces multiple barriers (Gladden, 1998). The beginning years of a school are enormously demanding on new career academy leaders. The tasks are uniquely taxing because founding leaders guide the transformation of the school from idea to reality by rooting it in the terra firma of administrative order while they simultaneously aim for the flexibility necessary for creative development (Cotton, 2001).

Significant investments of time, effort, and funds in professional development, curriculum and instruction planning are needed to transform small communities into smaller learning communities (NWREL, 2006). Researchers, practitioners, and external service providers caution those wanting to launch SLC's about various commonly encountered barriers, including (a) cultural expectations about how schools should organize and operate, (b) impatience for achievement changes on the part of those outside the school, (c) rigidity produced by the standards movement, (d) staff who have not fully understood and accepted why the school has chosen to downsize, and (e) large time and energy demands for staff (Cotton, 2001). Connell, Klem, Broom and Kenney (2005) found that meeting these barriers requires a system of leaders at the building and district level with differentiated skills set (e.g., use assessment tools and data to analyze patterns in student outcomes and teaching practices, model effective instructional strategies,

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facilitate professional development activities) and open communication pointed toward meeting shared instructional goals in every classroom, every day.

The challenge of designing, planning, implementing, and monitoring the full set of activities required to change teaching and learning at scale in large, underperforming schools is immense (Connell, Klem, Broom, & Kenney, 2005). Although SLC's may lead to benefits for students, implementing and sustaining them is not always assuring. Cotton (2001) noted that, for one thing, recruiting more teachers at a time when teacher shortages loom is a daunting task. She also concluded that research points to the need for professional development for teachers accustomed to teaching larger classes so that they may take full advantage of smaller classes. Allen, Almeida, and Steinberg (2001) also found in a 1998-99 case study on implementing small learning communities in five Boston High Schools that district-and school-level leaders were able to alleviate some of the pressures on teachers by better articulating the alignment between restructuring a high school into SLC's or pathways and preparing students for high standards and by targeting professional development to meet both mandates. They also reported that the level of purely administrative detail work was exhausting according to several program directors. Moreover, the challenge of managing a pathway coincided with the sharply increased focus on content standards, resulting in program directors being required to attend district-wide meetings as frequent as English language arts, math and curriculum frameworks.

Those with expertise in starting and maintaining SLC's have identified some additional problem areas which deserve mention. Many experience scheduling and spacing as constraints imposed by the larger school with which they share buildings

(Raywid, 1996; Cotton, 2001; Sammon, 2008). A study found that the lack of flexibility

procedures at the district and sometimes the state level stunted the successful

implementation of smaller learning communities. For example, insufficient autonomy

and separateness of the sub-unit and failure of cultural change to accompany structural

change resulted in these schools failing to yield positive outcomes (Raywid, 1996; NCSL,

2006). Moreover, in buildings with several schools, there are sometimes allegations of

favored treatment, as well as conflicts over enrollment and probation. Staff relationship

problems sometimes arise, especially between teachers who move to a school-within-a-

school and those remaining with the larger school (Raywid, 1996; NCSL, 2006).

Sammon (2008) noted that the ability to forge true linkages and partnerships between

groups and individuals committed to the organization requires that a climate be created

that reduces barriers to innovation and risk. The Career Academy Support Network's

(CASN) reported several problems commonly encountered in implementing SLC's.

These problems includes: (a) administrators, teachers, and counselors have to adapt,

often modifying long-established habits, (b) the integration of the curriculum with little

teacher training or experience, (c) classroom locations often change to allow teams of

teachers to be closer sometimes causing teacher resentment, (d) teacher or school leader

turnover requires orienting new administrators and teachers adjusting to SLC teams, (e)

master schedule is more difficult, as students need schedules that link their SLC classes

and teachers need more planning time, and (f) the need to be integrated with other school

initiatives already underway (Dayton, Tidyman, & Hanna, 2007).

Research conducted from 1999 through 2000 at three Boston High Schools

attempted to address the issues with school leadership by developing the Leading the

Change institute, which was designed to help school leadership teams address issues of instructional and operational leadership though after-school workshop sessions throughout a school year (Allen, Almeida, & Steinberg, 2001). The program was unsuccessful due to lack of consistent participation, and a new mandate on using formative assessment to inform instructional practice that is consistent with Boston's high school restructuring principles came with little guidance on how best to implement it (Allen et al.). Administrators and teachers were held responsible but were unprepared, which caused anxiety for institute participants, thus resulting in larger issues of instructional leadership because concerns of accountability skewed school leaders' perceptions and ongoing operational issues (Allen et al.).

Given the host of leadership challenges facing teachers and administrators in restructuring a school into an SLC environment and in an era of high-stakes testing, it is clear that professional development for leaders at all levels remains a critical issue (Allen, Almeida, & Steinberg, 2001). Thus, in every district, in every school, there must be champions for effective reform (Sammon, 2008). School leaders must battle the tide and the constant spinning of a wheel that too often keeps them from meeting the mission they set. These are the change agents by job description, by consulting assignment, or by passion.

Summary

Although there is very limited research on school leaders' perceptions of implementing career academies, research on what school districts need to know and to do to support high school redesign is increasingly growing. Researchers have supported the assurance of career academies, but they have also addressed the challenges of full

implementation. The literature suggests that if school leaders are to be successful in transforming large schools into career academies, a new theory and practice of leadership and work will need to be created to guide school leaders past the temptation to return to the bureaucratic models of leadership and operation that have proven ineffective in increasing student achievement.

The career academy structure is shaped around learning leaders who model life-long learning as a pathway for continuous growth and improvement. The literature on the career academy model is quite descriptive in regard to its possibilities for positive changes in school structure. However, there is still little information based on empirical evidence to guide school leaders who are change agents for school reform and modest research, and there are very few models to assist them on how to transform schools into career academies. This suggests there is a need for further studies of the leadership skills needed to change schools into effective learning communities.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

Introduction

In addressing the problem of school districts across the nation responding to state and federal mandates to meet the high demands of improving education with the *No Child Left Behind* initiative, each year high schools across America are choosing to transform schools from traditional high school models to Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) as one way to improve academic achievement for all students. Within the last decade, along with several school districts across the nation, many school districts in one of Georgia's largest metropolitan areas implemented career academies, a Smaller Learning Community school reform model funded by a federal grant, as an agent of change for high school improvement. However, the implementation and acceptance of this educational change model has caused many school leaders across the state unexpectedly to be unable to expand their experiences and responsibilities in leadership to include redesigning a whole school, changing managers, and implementing curricular change efforts.

As school districts have been transforming schools to improve academic achievements, many principals are often expected to be able to implement career academies without prior staff development or training. Due to the *No Child Left Behind Act* requirements, accountability for schools has caused many school districts to move school leaders to other schools or even to demote them to lesser positions if their schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This has caused a shift in new or changed leadership in metro area schools in Georgia. Many principals inherit career academies,

some are advised by upper-level school district officials with very little time that their school will receive the SLC grant funds, while others are hired as school leaders with little experience and no knowledge of how to implement career academies.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods used to collect and analyze data and to select participants for this study on school leaders' experiences during the implementation process of career academies. The researcher's role in this study was to create a comfortable, uncritical environment for school leaders to share their previous experiences. The researcher guided the participants during the interview process by using probing questions to gain a better understanding of the perceptions presented. This chapter conveys the research methodology, design and methods, population and participants, and instrumentation that will be used in the study.

Research Questions

This qualitative study focused on school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors and barriers experienced by school leaders through the implementation process of career academies. Data was collected by phenomenological interviews utilizing the researcher as the instrument for the study. The following overarching research questions served as a guide throughout the process:

What are the key factors and barriers experienced by school administrators when they undertake the implementation process of a traditional high school into a career academy model?

1) What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies?

2) What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation process of a career academy?

Research Design

The qualitative research design and phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study, as they emphasize the perceptions of multiple individuals rather than describing a life history or single subject matter. On the other hand, qualitative research emphasizes a phenomenological view from the perception of individuals. The phenomenological approach is selected for this study, as it will seek to understand the meaning of individual's first-hand experiences (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Therefore, the qualitative research design was selected because the research question sought to (a) illuminate the practices and structures of the sample, (b) investigate contemporary phenomena that are complex and embedded within particular real-life contexts, and (c) use multiple sources of evidence that illuminate the multiple perspectives characteristic of real-life phenomena and contexts and that provide a database for analytic generalization (Yin, 2003). While other research methods played valuable roles, to achieve the purpose of this study, the stories and perspectives of individuals needed to be taken into consideration.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) described the fundamental characteristics of qualitative research: "Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in natural settings, attempting to makes sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). Qualitative studies focus on meaning and understanding of situations that take place in naturally occurring

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situations (McMillan, 1996). Qualitative research seeks to explore and to interpret how

participants in a social setting interpret the world in which they live (Glesne 2006;

Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Data collected in qualitative research is most

appropriately reported utilizing words, not numbers (Johnson & Christensen, 2006).

Qualitative methods seek to gain understanding of situation, experience, or process,

learning from the detailed accounts that people give in their own words (Creswell, 2003).

It is a preferred strategy for studies that seek to answer "how" and "why" questions and

for times when the investigator has little control of the research setting (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative data is usually collected by interview, field notes, observation, or open-ended

questioning (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Conducting qualitative research is most appropriate to explore and generate

understanding about the experiences of a specific group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Creswell (2003) states, "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select

participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher

understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). Creswell (1998) also

observed that qualitative methods are best when creating understanding of an occurrence

through the interpretation of others. In order to explore, collect, examine, and analyze the

personal narratives and reflections of participants experiencing the transformation to

smaller units, an understanding of their experiences must be created (Creswell, 1998).

Phenomenology, originally founded by Edmund Husserl, stressed that the starting

point for knowledge was by the self's experience of phenomena, which are the various

sensations, perceptions, and ideations that appear in consciousness when the self focuses

attention on an object (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The phenomenological approach

described the individual experiences of the participants. The phenomenon of this study was the experiences of school leaders as they implemented career academies. The aim of a phenomenological study was to determine what an experience meant for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description. This understanding of the experience that the participants share is then transferred to other individuals who currently are experiencing, or have experienced, a similar phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological research has several advantages as an approach to qualitative research (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). First, it can be used in a broad range of educational phenomena: for example, how teachers experience a classroom lesson and how policy makers experience meetings about school reform proposals (Gall et al.). Secondly, phenomena procedures are straightforward, and for individuals who are able to suspend judgment and think afresh about any phenomenon, then, it seems likely that less training would be required to do a phenomenological study than would be required to do a study using qualitative research methods such as ethnography or semiotics (Gall et al.). Finally, the interview process used to collect phenomenological data is broad ranging and therefore, capable of detecting many aspects of experience that may prove to be important with no further analysis or as variables in subsequent qualitative or quantitative studies. Seidman (1991) describes interviewing as a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individual. Through phenomenological interviewing, participants described their experiences, explored their perceptions, and attached meaning to them. Phenomenological interviewing involves in-

depth, semi-structured interviews, at times requiring follow-up interviews to obtain a

deeper understanding of concepts (Creswell, 1998). In this study, the phenomenology

interview was a good fit to provide a big picture of the previous experience of school

leaders implementing career academies. Giorgi (1989) observed that a hermeneutic

phenomenological interview is an interpretive conversation wherein both partners

reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the

significance of the phenomenological question in view. According to Patton (2002),

using the interview method includes "distorted responses due to personal bias, anger,

anxiety, politics, and lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the

emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview" (p. 306). He also states

that interviews are subject to recall error, the reaction of the interviewee to the

interviewer, and the interviewees providing responses that are self-serving (i.e., socially

acceptable responses that place interviewee in a positive light). Thus, interviews were

scheduled with selected participants who provide insight into the text, such as

interpretations of transcripts of previous interviews to target as much interpretive insight

as possible. Since research question asks for "experience," then interviewing is the best

avenue of inquiry, as it is the most consistent with people's ability to make meaning

through language (Seidman, 1991). Interviewing, a basic mode of inquiry, provides

access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to

understand the meaning of that behavior (Tesch, 1990). At the root of in-depth

interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the

meaning they make of that experience. In this approach, the interviewer used primarily

open-ended questions. An interview guide lists the main questions or issues that are to be

explored in the course of an interview (Patton, 2002). The goal was to have the

participant reconstruct his/her own experience within the topic in study. Using personal

interviews, the researcher included a qualitative approach to describe the perceptions of

select school leaders in a large suburban school district in Georgia and the

implementation process of career academies.

Population

The study took place in the second semester of the 2010-11 school years in a large

urban school district in Georgia that met the following criteria: select schools in the

district were recipients of federally funded Smaller Learning Communities program

implementation grants during the 2005 through 2009 school years and school leaders

were involved with the implementation process. The school system is a large urban

public school system located in the second largest county in Georgia. It is one of the

most culturally diverse counties in the nation, has a student enrollment of approximately

102,000 students in about143 schools and centers, and nearly 13,285 full-time employees.

The district is currently composed of about 83 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 20

high schools, and 18 specialized centers. The school district is dedicated to giving every

student the best possible education through an intensive core curriculum and specialized,

challenging instructional and career programs. The Career and Technical programs offer

many opportunities for approximately 11, 428 students to refine their talents, skills, and

abilities. The school system applied for five Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's)

grants funded by the United States Department of Education and has been awarded all

five for a total of approximately $5 million by school year 2009. Two of the grants were

implementation grants, and one was a planning grant. The two implementation grants,

one for nine high schools received in July 2002 and the other for four high schools

received in July 2003 enabled the school district to begin its transformation of some of its

large high schools. The school district's mission for the career academy program is to

provide students with a sense of belonging and the opportunity to explore their interests

and aptitudes while receiving a solid foundation in academics. It has five major

initiatives for all SLC schools: Ninth Grade Transition Academies, Teachers as Advisors,

Career Academies for grades 10-12, Summer Bridge Program for rising ninth graders,

and Senior Project. The career academies in the school system are designed to address

the broad spectrum of student interests and career possibilities and to provide transferable

skills.

Participants

The participants in this study were limited to select school leaders in an urban

school district in Georgia which were a part of the 2005 and 2008 cohorts. School leaders

will include district office deputy superintendent, district office smaller learning

communities' coordinator, principals, assistant principals, and school-based appointed

career academy leaders. Cohorts are identified as the beginning school year in which

schools were grant recipients. Each cohort extends for a five-year period. Miles and

Huberman (1994) discovered that qualitative studies should not exceed 14 participants if

there is an expectation of in-depth knowledge. The researcher chose participants that had

sufficient knowledge and experiences with implementing school change models that

enabled them to provide depth to the investigation. Ten high schools (grades 9-12)

implemented career academies in both 2005 and 2008.

Qualitative research studies tend to have smaller sample sizes because the aim is to provide a wide description of phenomena. Participants were asked to take part in an interview that sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of school leaders who implemented career academies. They were listed as school leaders as described in the school's archival or current data and were actively involved in cohorts for both 2005 and 2008. Also, participants selected had educational leadership certification and experience. This allowed the researcher to examine the experience of the participant during the process.

Sample

Purposive sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research and was used in the selection of participants for this study (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting cases that are likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) asserted that purposive sampling is based on the researcher's knowledge of the participants being sampled. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) contended that the researcher must purposively sample participants who can provide them with the most insight about a particular topic. The type of purposive sampling used was convenience sampling; a convenience sampling is a group of cases that are selected because they are available and easy for access (Gall et al.). The researcher utilized convenience sampling because participants were readily available in the field. The researcher also utilized criterion because all participants met a certain criteria in order to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity. Thus, the intent was

to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals, not to select a sample that will represent accurately a defined population.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended and Taylor and Bogdon (1998) explained that the ideal research setting is one in which the observer obtains easy access, establishes immediate rapport, and gathers data directly related to the research questions. Thus, the interview site was selected in these findings. To gain a better understanding of school leaders' reflections of their perceptions as they implemented a new or existing program, selecting a site where school leaders were provided adequate time, comfort, and encouragement for reflection was important.

Instrumentation

The researcher was the primary instrument for this qualitative research (Mertens, 1998). Researchers are an integral part of the research process; many qualitative researchers become the research instrument (Moore, 2007). Through being the research instrument the researcher became intimately involved with the participants, their stories and their lives. The researcher used phenomenological in-depth interviews to obtain the wide descriptions from which interpreted and analyzed the meaning structures. Every description is essentially a selective reorientation to the phenomenon and contains recollection of fundamental meaning implicit to the experience (Kvale, 1996). Keeping within the tradition of phenomenological method, the semi-structured interview format encourages participants to explore their own lived experiences while providing the researcher with intense and exhaustive descriptions (Tesch, 1990). A primary purpose of using purposive sampling and the interview method is to try to reach "people who have

directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is they have 'lived experience' as opposed to secondhand experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

The secondary instrument was semi-structured interviews. This interview process was used to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants. The instrument contained both closed-and open-ended questions to collect the perceptions of the participants. Unlike other interview methods, phenomenological interviews are lengthy and in-depth. Thus, using open-ended questions allowed the participants to give an open and deeper description of the experience. Gay and Airasian (2000) observed that in a semi-structured interview the "questions and order of presentation are determined. Questions have open ends; interviewer records the essence of each response" (p. 221).

To obtain data for this study, the researcher utilized segments of the interview guide from a previous study conducted for Georgia Southern University on high school transformation and the previous experience of teachers moving to small learning communities. This was a qualitative study utilizing phenomenological interviews to conduct research on 10 participants. The researcher identified common factors and barriers among the participants and modified the questions to address those factors and barriers experienced by school leaders and the implementation of career academies in a suburban school district in Georgia.

The interview protocol was designed and revised to ensure face validity. The researcher conferred with methodologists from the dissertation committee from Georgia Southern University to review the interview guide questions for validity. The methodologists approved the interview guide. The researcher communicated via email to select school leaders requesting their participation in the research study. Participants

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were asked to respond within two days indicating their interest to participate in the study. An interview session was scheduled. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews held at a time and location of their convenience beyond their work hours and was followed by a shorter session to further explore the responses. All information obtained was treated confidentially. The participant's name and any other identifying information are not used in the data. The participant was informed that anything they shared or stated will not be shared with anyone outside the interview. The researcher used and maintained audiotapes and transcripts from the interview session with written permission from participants and pseudonyms were used to secure their identity. The researcher reviewed notes and used the transcription method for data collection. Questions that did not produce strong data on the previous experience of school leaders' perceptions of the implementation process in relation to the research questions for this study was modified or removed. The data was held in a secured and locked location for a period of three years after the study and then destroyed.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval from Georgia Southern University and Dissertation Committee members, the study was conducted. Moore (2007) contends that data are processed through the researcher, who makes decisions about what is regarded as data, how those data are collected, and finally how the data are used. Qualitative data was collected from participants through face-to-face interviews. Students or data unrelated to the study was not used. Utilizing a purposive selection process, the respondents meeting the criteria was selected as participants. Participants were asked to indicate their preferences for time and location for the interview to take place. Participants were

interviewed utilizing time that did not interfere with their work schedules. A request for

their participation was issued via email followed by a phone call to school leaders who

were actively involved with the implementation process of career academies in a

suburban school district in Georgia. A request was sent to 10 school leaders involved in

cohorts beginning both the 2005 and 2008 school year. A personally delivered letter of

informed consent was provided explaining the purpose of the study and with the request

to participate was provided to the participant of the study informing him or her of the

researchers' affiliation with Georgia Southern University's Doctoral Program. The

participants were asked to follow the directions indicated on the letter and to submit it via

email back to the researcher. With confirmed consent from participants, the researcher

used an audio recorder to collect data. Recorders have the advantage of capturing data

more accurately than hurriedly written notes and can make it easier for the researcher to

focus on the interview (Hoepfl, 1997).

Data Analysis

Roberts (n.d.) reports qualitative analysis is a creative process and requires

thoughtful judgments about what is significant and meaningful in the data. Bogdan and

Biklen (1982) defines qualitative data analysis as working with data, organizing it,

breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering

what is important and what is to be learned. To analyze, the interview data was coded

and analyzed to determine prevalent patterns and themes as recommended by Bogdan and

Biklen (1992). According to Hoepfl (1997), "the purpose of coding is to not only

describe but, more importantly, to acquire new understanding of a phenomenon of

interest" (p. 7).

The researcher analyzed data by first identifying the themes emerged from the raw data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to this as "open coding" (p. 7). During open coding, the researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed were grouped. Words, phrases, or events that appeared similar were grouped into the same category. The researcher gradually modified or replaced categories during succeeding stages of analysis. Afterwards, raw data was broken down into a large piece and devised in a scheme for identifying the data pieces based on the speaker and context. Qualitative research reports are characterized by the use of "voice" in the text: that is, the participant quote that illustrates the themes being described (Hoepfl, 1997). Next, the researcher re-examined the categories to determine how they were linked and compared and combined them based on casual events related to the phenomenon. Then, data was translated into a storyline. Additional data collection occurred due to gaps found in the data by the researcher.

Reporting the Data

All information obtained was treated confidentially. The participant's name and any other identifying information were not used in the data. The participants were informed that anything they share or say will not be shared with anyone outside the interview. The researcher used and maintained audiotapes and transcripts from the interview session with written permission from participants and pseudonyms were used to secure their identity. The researcher reviewed notes and used the transcription method for data collection. Questions that did not produce strong data on the previous experience of school leaders' perceptions of the implementation process in relation to the research questions for this study were modified or removed. The data was held in a secured and

locked location for a period of three years after the study and then destroyed. Data was reported for this study from transcripts of interviews from the participants. The researcher used a basic interpretive strategy for this phenomenological study. After the categories or themes were coded, the researcher related information regarding key events, chronology, various settings, and people related to the study and drew a conceptual framework. The researcher used tables to place notes from the interview sessions into like categories, then analyzed for similarities that formed into concepts. To respond to research questions, an outline was written of the findings from each participant. The outline identified perceptions of each participant in response to the research questions.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of schools leaders through the implementation process of career academies in a suburban school district in Georgia. This chapter was of a qualitative nature because it focused on people's experiences and meanings in a normal social setting while also focusing on processes and structures. The chapter covered the research design and methodology of the research study. It included an introduction to the research questions, research design, population, sample and analysis. It also described the instruments used, as well as data collecting strategies and data analysis methods used.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors and barriers experienced by school leaders through the implementation process of career academies. This qualitative study focused on school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia. This chapter will discuss perceptions that surfaced while the qualitative data collected through interviews with the school leaders described in Chapter 3 were analyzed. Data were collected through recorded face-to-face semi-structured interviews at locations after work hours. As the researcher analyzed the data, information was separated into emerging themes and codes to form major concepts. These concepts form the structure of the analysis in efforts to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study: What are the key factors and barriers experienced by school leaders when they undertake the implementation process of a traditional high school into a career academy model? This initial concept will be examined by addressing the following questions:

1) What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies?

2) What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation process of a career academy?

This segment begins with identifying participants' characteristics (see Table 1.1). The analysis will begin with a summary of the interviews with each participant, followed by an identification of the concepts addressed in the study.

Participant Characteristics

Table 1.1 expresses the characteristics of the participants of the study. The participants were selected through a purposeful selection process. Participants that met the criteria of the study were emailed a request for participation. Ten respondents were included in the study.

Table 1.1

Participants' Characteristics

Participants Name	Gender	Title/Position During Implementation	Leadership Experience	Year Career Academy Began
P1	Female	Principal	10	2008
P2	Male	Principal	12	2005
P3	Male	Director	8	2005
P4	Female	Principal	7	2008
P5	Female	Deputy Superintendent	15	2005
P6	Male	Principal	7	2008
P7	Male	Assistant Principal	4	2008
P8	Female	Coordinator	7	2005
P9	Female	Instructional Coach	2	2005
P10	Male	Principal	27	2005

There were 10 participants in this study, including (a) five females and five male school leaders, (b) five school-based leaders and five district office leaders, and (c) two female principals, three male principals, one male assistant principal, one male director for career and technical education, one female deputy superintendent for teaching and learning, one female district office smaller learning community coordinator, and one female instructional change coach. Three principals and one assistant principal were the initial school leaders during the implementation process; two principals and one instructional change coach were not. Three district office school leaders were involved at the beginning of the implementation process. Table 1.1 indicates the years of school leadership experience, position or title during the career academy implementation, and the year school leaders were involved during the implementation process.

Findings

Data for this study were collected from ten participants utilizing fifteen open ended questions. The questions were developed by the researcher based on literature reviews. The semi-structured interviews lasted no longer than one hour and were conducted at a location of the participants' choice beyond work hours. The researcher made an effort to create a safe environment where the participant felt comfortable and could engage in open discussion about implementing career academies. The participants were led through the interview process by the researcher, who asked questions from the interview guide to obtain rich data for the study. The researcher audio taped and transcribed the interviews for accuracy. The findings for this study were obtained from the transcribed interviews were placed into chart form to locate initial codes and themes.

Merriam (2009) indicated findings are these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived (p. 188).

The data for this study was derived with data taken from the transcribed interviews with the participants and presented to correspond with the research questions from this study. The participants were the single source of data. The researcher has considered presenting the perspectives of each participant in a logical and sequential order as guided by the research questions. Charts were formed to locate initial codes or themes, such as central ideas, unique responses or similarities. During the interview, the environment was friendly in an attempt to obtain as much data as possible, and once transcribed data had been obtained from participants, a synopsis was created for each as indicated in this section.

The researcher first analyzed data for patterns and commonalities between participants followed by reading each transcript and developing notes from each participant. The notes consisted of statements that formed patterns. Next, the researcher reviewed the patterns and divided the data into common themes. This process involved taking notes and placing them into categories of like patterns of statements. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data into thematic categories and reduced the data into one dominant idea.

Participant Interview Responses

RQ 1 What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies?

Each one-on-one interview was conducted using a sequence of interview questions (see Appendix C) from an interview guide. The participants are identified by

codes to protect their identities and to ensure confidentiality. School leaders were

identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10. The questions were used to

guide the discussion related to factors experienced by school leaders as they implemented

career academies. Several common themes emerged, including 1) an increase in

graduation rate, 2) support from the Smaller Learning Community (SLC) coordinator, 3)

local school staff support, 4) inconsistent professional learning opportunities, 5)

stakeholder support, and 6) the opportunity for autonomy. The responses to the

interviews varied slightly (see Table 2.1). The researcher identified and explained the

common themes through synopsis of excerpts directly from the participants' responses.

An Increase in Graduation Rate

In responding to the factors experienced during the implementation process, the

majority of the school leaders felt that career academies improved graduation rates. Six of

ten respondents felt that implementing career academies helped with decreasing the

dropout rate and increased graduation rates. They revealed that student performance

increased, and they witnessed them succeeding on the graduation test and graduating on

time. P1 stated "Career academies helped to keep some students who might have gotten

lost in school to stay engaged and on the right path to graduate." P2 felt that while

students were actively involved in career implementation, he did see some kids

matriculate, perform better on state mandated exams, and there were more to graduate on

time. P4 stated the following:

Graduation rates in all of the schools that implemented a career academy from

time of implementation up until now the graduation rate has gone up every year. I

do believe that SLC's have contributed as one of the factors of improving

graduation rates.

P5 stated the following:

Our graduation rate did improve and I will have to say that was one variable in

graduation rate, improvement. We had dramatic gains in our graduation rate in

the five years I was in the district. We begin to see more and more students

envision success by walking across the stage to receive a high school diploma.

P9 revealed that she analyzed graduation data as part of her leadership role and

within the five years that she was a part of the career academy implementation she saw

student performance and achievement increase and the graduation rate at her school

continued to grow and grow from year to year.

Support from SLC Coordinator

When asked "What was the greatest help for you while implementing career

academies?" Seven of the ten school leaders responded that they felt the support by

having access to a SLC coordinator, an individual hired by the district to oversee the

career academy implementation process. A few responded that both the SLC

Coordinator and CTE Director both played vital roles to support them. P1 responded to

the question by stating the following:

I received a lot of support. The way my district is set up, there is an area in our

learning and development that focuses on career academies, so they have a

coordinator that will come out and assist and they did come out and assist the

administrators and teachers. If it was not for the SLC coordinator's support, the

career academy implementation would not have been successful.

P2 revealed that the SLC coordinator helped him to develop the best practices surrounding the implementation of a SLC. P5 stated the following:

We had a great SLC Coordinator who oversaw all the SLC projects. She was hired by the district but paid through grant funds. She was fabulous and very dedicated to this work and had been a former high school principal, she believed in smaller learning communities, she believed in career academies and she was very knowledgeable of the work not only on the state level but also on a national level. So, she afforded me the opportunities to see on a national level the benefits of an SLC and career academies.

P6 stated the following:

The SLC Coordinator was so persistent in her craft. They gave principals the opportunity to get together frequently to discuss what was working and what was not working. As principals, we were able to dialogue about issues we had and both she and the CTE Director were able to listen and then offer some support to close some of those gaps that we had.

P7, an assistant principal revealed that his principal appointed him as the SLC administrator in charge of implementing career academies. He stated the following:

I had no prior knowledge about career academies and did not understand how the academies should operate. However, the district did assign someone to our school to oversee the process, she was the SLC leader. That person was just not an SLC leader for a specific academy, that person kind of oversaw or watched over the whole process. That person touched bases with us and worked closely with me as the administrator in charge to just give us feedback on how the process was going.

P10 revealed that as he implemented career academies at his school, he received a lot of support from the SLC Coordinator from the district. He stated "I received support from the SLC Coordinator. Although implementing career academies was new in the school system, they had done a lot of research. They were able to assist us with understanding career pathways".

Local School Staff Support

Some school leaders felt that due to all of their supervisory and management duties and responsibilities, being able to delegate the career academy guidelines to other designated school leaders was a good reason for support. One common theme that emerged was that school leaders could use assistant principals, SLC instructional coaches, or appointed academy leaders within the school to assist with duties and responsibilities. P1 revealed that she appointed a liaison to take her place in her absence from career academy initiatives. P2, one of the first principals to initiate a career academy stated the following:

> I asked select teachers to be leaders for those various career academies, so teacher leadership stepped up and that really worked out really well. Once I got those teacher leaders in place, they could kind of garner the support of other teachers in those SLC's. I was forced to be more considerate of the administrative team. I was one of the first ones to actually assign an administrator to each career academy, so I actually had a group of teachers that were charged with observations. Those teachers were held kind of accountable to them within the framework of our current duties and responsibilities.

P4 stated the following:

At the beginning of the implementation process, I was the Assistant Principal in

charge of Instruction. The principal appointed me to become the direct contact

person for anything that dealt with SLC's. I was primarily responsible for the

master schedule. Now as the principal, I have appointed my Assistant Principal in

charge of Instruction to oversee career academies to ensure that they are

implemented the way they should because of all the duties and responsibilities

principals are accounted for today, it is very challenging to try to implement

career academies alone.

P5, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning stated the following:

I believe that some principals knew how to implement career academies, but they

often complained about time and having too many other things to do. My

solution to that was to abandon some things you are already doing and delegate

some of the responsibilities to an appointed person in the building, for example an

assistant principal, a teacher, or other staff member with the credentials to be able

to effectively get the job done.

P6 revealed that he delegated SLC duties and responsibilities to an Assistant

Principal (AP). He stated the following:

I appointed a great administrator for the 9th grade career academy. She routed

teachers and students to where they were supposed to be. She was good in her

role. I originally had her over teaching and testing for an entire school year and I

had to pull her from that because her talents were being underutilized. Therefore,

I appointed her as the SLC administrator and that is one reason why we were able

to be successful.

Inconsistent Professional Learning Opportunities

Many of the school leaders had an inconsistency of professional learning or experience while implementing career academies. The common theme that emerged was inconsistent professional learning. Fifty percent of the school leaders responded that being able to attend SLC conferences was a factor that assisted them in the implementation process, but many others received no official professional development training in setting up a career academy. P2 felt they had really strong people, but there should have been more professional development offered from the district. However, P5, the district's deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, stated "The grant initiative allowed leadership teams to attend various conferences around the country to help them to improve their knowledge about implementing career academies."

P8, the district's SLC coordinator stated the following:

> Some of the biggest problems that we had with implementing career academies are just consistency, making sure we are consistent with what we are doing. Sometimes what we tend to do is actually give people staff development on a particular strategy one time and we never revisit it again. We expect for them to be able to continue on and do what we expect them to do and to do it without continuously giving them staff development, etc.

P9 revealed that there was a little professional development opportunity provided from the district and as a teacher at the time, she did not always get the chance to attend professional development. She states "The staff development while implementing career academies was very inconsistent. You did not always understand new changes. I just wished that it was a continuous process".

Stakeholders Support

Most school leaders responded very similarly to the question of how stakeholders responded to your career academy. Out of eight responses, four felt that stakeholders responded positively, and four felt that stakeholders did not understand the career academy concept. Six respondents felt that stakeholders were aware and responded well. P3 and P8 felt very compassion about stakeholder involvement. P8 stated the following:

During the beginning implementation process, the parents and the stakeholders in my opinion responded very well. They were very supportive of the career academies. I can think of one of our stakeholders in general made sure that buildings were equipped, and that would cause a lot of our schools within our district to start using the millions of money in the correct way by making sure we properly built our schools. For example, one of our schools got a lot of career technical labs put in, and now we can see that several of our schools are getting career technical labs put in; therefore, they were very supportive by taking millions of dollars to invest to help out the kids.

P2 revealed that the parents and students really supported the concept. He felt that if parents were knowledgeable about a way that will help their children leave high school with a skill, an interest, and internship opportunity sounded really great for parents and their children.

P9 felt that at the beginning, stakeholders were aware, but not actively involved in the process. She stated the following:

I had a meeting with the Parent, Teacher, and Student Organization (PTSO) President about how we could work together to make career academies work

within the school. And to my surprise the he did not have much knowledge about

our academies, but when I explained it to him, he was on board with our goals and

has been supportive throughout the process.

P10, the only school leader that was a principal for the full implementation

process stated the following:

I do not believe I would have made it without the support from our stakeholders.

We had a lot of support. Parents did not want their children to fail. They wanted

their kids to do well. Whatever role they were asked to play, they participated

and enforced it with fidelity.

Opportunity for Autonomy

Few respondents felt that autonomy was a key factor while implementing career

academies. P9 and P10 both felt that autonomy was a factor that contributed to the

success of the career academy. P9 revealed that the opportunity for autonomy was a

major factor. She stated "The independence is very important to me. If you have control

of what you are doing, you have support from people who are involved". P10 revealed

that he was an AP at the time and it influenced his duties because he was almost able to

have his own school-within-a-school. He felt that he was able to make all of his own

decisions for the academies and that it helped him in his preparation to become a

principal. He stated "Because I was already running a wing in the school, my principal

gave me a lot of autonomy when it came to making decisions".

Table 2.1

Factors Dominant Themes

Increase in Graduation Rate	Support from the SLC Coordinator	Local School Staff Support	Inconsistent Professional Learning	Stakeholders Support	Opportunity for Autonomy
Helped students who might have been lost stay in school and on path to graduate on time (P1)	Received a lot of support from SLC Coordinator (P1)	Had appointed a liaison to take her place in her absence (P1)	We were able to attend conferences for professional learning (P2)	Stakeholders were aware and responded well (P2)	There was some autonomy (P9)
Students begin to graduate on time (P2)	There was support from SLC Coordinator (P2)	Program designed to designate other staff to assist him with duties/responsibilities (P2)	We sent people to attend conferences for Professional Learning (P5)	Parents and community loved it (P6)	The autonomy was there (P10)
We saw an increase in the graduation rate (P3)	CTE SLC Coordinator Support (P5)	The use of an AP/Instructional Coach can assist with duties/responsibilities (P4)	Professional Learning was available (P6)	Most parents were aware and found it good for their children (P7)	
There was an increase in student performance. Students graduated (P4)	CTE Director/SLC Coordinator Support (P6)	Leadership teams were available to help support (P5)	Professional Learning provided---but needed more (P8)	Parents and stakeholders responded well (P8)	
Grant initiative improved graduation rate under grant (P5)	SLC Coordinator assigned to school from district office (P7)	Delegated responsibilities to AP (P6)	Professional Learning was very helpful (P9)	A lot of parental support (P9)	
Graduation rate increased (P9)	Support from Coordinator from district office (P8)	Instructional Coach Assisted with duties/responsibilities (P8)		Stakeholders buy-in (P10)	
	Had support from SLC Coordinator (P10)	AP assisted with process (P10)			

RQ 2   What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation

process of a career academy?

In order to answer question 2, the researcher reviewed the responses of the ten

school leaders identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10. The researcher

identified and explained the common themes through synopsis of excerpts directly from

the participants' responses. The researcher was able to identify many barriers related to

the perceptions of school leaders while they were implementing career academies. The

eight major themes identified, included 1) scheduling, 2) lack of financial resources, 3)

building structure, 4) change in leadership, 5) lack of upper-level school district support

exterior from SLC leaders, 6) teacher buy-in, 7) sustainability, and 8) too many initiatives

(see Table 3.1).

The structural change for career academies includes transforming from a

traditional schedule to block schedule and restructuring into separate administrative units

when multiple career academies, also called school-within-school, are created. This

independent transformation model is operated within a larger school. They function

under voluntary or appointed enrollment policies for students and teachers and are often

in a separate school space. The culture may be a unifying theme, special scheduling, or a

common student interest.

Scheduling

In responding to the barriers experienced during the implementation process, the

majority of the school leaders felt that scheduling was a major challenge. Nine of ten

respondents revealed that scheduling was one barrier. Six of the nine school leaders felt

that ensuring that teachers shared common planning time was difficult to integrate into

the master schedule. P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 shared that they spent a great deal of time on the master schedule to ensure that teachers were off at least one period together so that they would sit down and dialogue to analyze student data to work on programs and initiatives for students that were part of the career academy. P1 stated the following:

Clearly one of the barriers I experienced was creating the master schedule. It really required a lot of hands and thought with scheduling and a lot of attention to detail in order to not only be able to schedule the children with the career academy teachers but also schedule the teachers so that they would have common planning time because the teachers were at different grade levels and they were teaching multiple preps so that meant you really had to work diligently to get the students and teachers aligned so the career academy could be successful.

P2 stated the following:

Scheduling was a beast. We spent a lot of time trying to develop a master schedule to include common planning time. We had to be very creative in terms of instruction and scheduling because I wanted to try to schedule kids in a cohort so that they would be in the same content area for those core classes. I wished that I had more training in how to schedule quarterly. We spent a lot of time making sure that the students in the career academy had common teachers. A great deal of time was spent on the master schedule to ensure that teachers were off at least one period together. We really did not have money for staffing to be able to make a true academy; the purity level was really low.

P3, the Career and Technical Education Director for 6 years, shared that scheduling was a challenge, and how the district dealt with scheduling was an issue. He stated the following:

> I wish that we had more support from the upper-level administration on the scheduling piece. This was truly a barrier. The master schedule is a key piece. It can hinder the success of correctly implementing career academies. Currently, the district is more focused on ensuring that students are passing classes or prepared for standardized test. Although, I do believe in test but I do not believe the best way is to teach students to pass a class or do well on test. This is the way schools are graded on and with that in mind when you need to schedule and put groups of teachers together to serve a group of students, the schedule does not allow them to implement all of the strategies of a smaller learning community.

P4 and P6 both inherited the SLC grants at their schools as first-year principals. They felt that they did not have a true academy. They revealed that they were challenged with scheduling students in the correct pathways and that their teachers were not teamed to have common planning time. P7, an assistant principal appointed as the school leader responsible for career academy implementation stated the following:

> You had to have common planning time with other teachers who were a part of the career academy. Core teachers and Career Technology teachers made up a career academy; therefore, core teachers and career technology teachers had to meet at the same time because they shared the same students. This was a difficult change for teachers because no longer are you a Social Studies teacher, you are a part of the career academy; you are a part of the Freshman Academy.

P9 revealed that the teachers were teamed with the same planning period, but the students were not teamed which caused issues with common planning for both teacher and students.

Lack of Financial Resources

A partial of participants felt that lack of financial resources was a barrier while implementing career academies. Five of the ten respondents felt that financial resources were a barrier. They revealed that they wished they had more financial support for resources, staffing, professional learning, and sustainability for career academies. P2 stated "I wish I had more financial support so that I could have had more purity. It is extremely costly to fund a SLC." P5 stated the following:

One of our biggest challenges was funding. You really need money to effectively run a career academy. Once the funds were out, it was difficult to continue to provide resources to the schools that received the grant. Therefore, I needed assurance and support from the Superintendent and the Board of Education to provide extra funding. It takes money to hire staff, it takes money to monitor a program, and it takes money to keep people on the cutting edge of the work. So, I would say a deeper understanding so we could have leverage to get monies to sustain the work was our biggest challenge.

P4, P8, and P10 all felt that they needed more financial support to move the career academy forward. P8 stated the following:

It was really frustrating at the beginning. I did not feel we had enough financial resources to implement the career academy. As the principal, we could not set it up properly because the financial resources were not there. Although we received the federal funds, there is so much that you have to implement with those funds

such as, hiring additional teachers, providing professional development, and paying staff extra for time spent after-school hours. Therefore, we needed extra funding for resources like paying for students to go on field trips, providing study materials for students, and providing extra textbooks and learning materials for both teachers and students just to name a few.

Building Structure

Many of the respondents felt that building structure was a barrier. Seven experienced trying to place all career academy classes in the same area of the building along with other educational initiatives was a hindrance. P3 stated "SLC's are different types of small schools. They are different from the schools in the past and we are trying to fit a smaller learning community into the old model building and that was challenging". P4, P6, P7, and P10 were all school leaders within the school building during the implementation process. P4 stated the following:

At the beginning of the implementation process, it was really difficult because our school just did not have enough space to implement a career academy and our options were limited. There are certain things that are required to pull off a career academy with scheduling and placement of classes. Prior to us receiving the grant, we had to add trailers because we just did not have enough classroom space within the building to house all of our students at once. It was a nightmare.

P6 stated the following:

Unfortunately, the way my school is designed, there is no way that the students could actually have a true feel of the true school within a school. The school is just not designed for an academy. To make it become a true academy, it would be

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a challenge because of the way it is set up. You would have to renovate the part

of the school in order to say that we have a true career academy and that would be

very expensive to do that.

P7 stated the following:

I looked at our 9th grade academy program, I looked at the structure I was more

concerned about other programs that we had in the building, standing academies

but it was not a true academy per se because the displacement and the logistics

and scheduling teachers did not touch the same students.

P10 revealed that it was challenging for him at first. He felt that his building was

not structurally designed to correctly implement a career academy. He stated the

following:

The logistics of moving classes around was a barrier. It was tough trying to get

teachers who had been in a certain part of the building for 20 years to move to

other locations in the building and it was really a struggle because we did not

implement a wall to wall academy where all students were in an academy. We

only had two at the beginning and the building was just not structured right to be

able to effective implement a success academies.

Change in Leadership

Six respondents felt that change in leadership was a major barrier. P2 revealed

that the district was undergoing a lot of changes in leadership so they were not able to

effectively help guide them through spending the money as outlined by the grant. P2

changed leadership positions with a promotion during the implementation process. He

wished that he could have stayed longer to see the final results of the implementation

process. However, P3 revealed that there was a change in the Superintendent during the implementation process. He stated the following:

One of the biggest challenges in our school district is leadership turnover. As we educate one group of principals, a superintendent, and school board members, there are new people in place while the implementation is in progress. As it relates to SLC's, there is a different principal from the beginning of initiation until now. So, the turnover really causes a big problem.

P6 stated, "I am the seventh principal in 15 years which is a huge impact on teacher's attitudes, but when the academies were implemented in 2005, it was not formally presented." However, P7, an assistant principal, revealed that his principal came from another state and did not know very much about smaller learning communities. He stated the following:

We had a lot of changes in administration. I would say that I was at a school for

two years, and during that two year period, I had two principals who had no

experience with SLC's or career academies. So they really did not understand it

and understand the changes as well.

P8 revealed that the continuous changing of leadership hindered the success of implementing career academies. She felt that since the inception of career academies, one out of ten high schools that implemented the grant, only one had the same principal throughout the process. She also felt that stable leadership has been a hindrance for career academies. However, P9 stated the following:

As a culture, the leaders have been consistently changing. I worked at one high

school in the district for 15 years and I think I had about 8 different principals. Currently,

I am at a high school and have had the same principal for two years, but the seniors that are graduating this year have said that they have had a different principal since their 9ᵗʰ grade year.

Lack of Upper-Level School District Support Exterior of SLC Leaders

Six of the ten respondents felt that there was lack of support from the upper-level district leadership. Three of the respondents were district office school leaders. They felt that smaller learning communities were not a major initiative in the school district. P3 felt that the Board of Education and the Superintendent were not actively involved and did not seem interested in the success for career academies. He stated the following:

I received no support from upper-level administration in the district. We have changed superintendents while the implementation was going on. Currently, our Interim Superintendent does not know much about SLC's and she alleges that she is doing the job only until the Board of Education hires a new one. However, the previous Superintendent did nothing to impact SLC's existence.

P5, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, stated the following:

My biggest struggle and disappointment was that I was never able to successfully convince decision makers, including the Superintendent, Cabinet Members, Area Superintendents, and Board Members, of the importance of this work and its direct influence on grad rate on keeping kids in school, on the influence it would have on students' future. I felt disappointed as a leader because I was not able to do that.

P5 also felt that her staff did not feel like they had the support from the upper administration and that the Superintendent just did not have career academy

implementation as a priority on his radar, but that he should have because the data set

showed that they needed to work on improving their high schools and in improving their

graduation rate. P2 thought the district could have done a better of preparing for

implementation. P3 stated the following:

> If the School Board Members, Superintendent, the Principals really did not
>
> believe in the SLC's, they should just come up front and say, "I really do not
>
> believe that this initiative is going to help my school." He reveals that the district
>
> should not accept the federal funds if it will not be implemented correctly.

P8 is currently the SLC Coordinator for the school district. She stated:

> Some of the barriers that I felt existed within our district were the lack of
>
> knowledge and understanding of the SLC's and the benefits they can have on
>
> student achievements from our higher ups such as the Superintendent. Many of
>
> them did not support career academies the way that they should because most of
>
> them focused more on other things such as making AYP. In addition to that,
>
> many principals did not support it, but really there was no accountability held
>
> towards them not completing or doing something in reference to their SLC.

Teacher Buy-In

Another theme that emerged during the implementation process was teacher buy-

in. A number of respondents felt that teacher buy-in was a barrier. They shared that

teachers did not like team teaching and they felt that it was thrust upon them. There was

no money or funding, and they thought it was a lot of work. P2 revealed that he had to

work really hard with about 20% of his staff to get on board. P4 felt that teachers did the

embrace the change. She stated "The teachers did not like the idea of team meetings and

having to collaborative using their planning time. Teacher buy-in was really a

challenge". P6 also revealed that teacher buy-in was a huge barrier. He stated the

following:

> A major barrier is called buy-in barrier. Because you had some people if they had
>
> all the money they still would not buy-in. I am just going to be honest. Some
>
> teachers do not feel that academies work. It is sad to say but they don't.
>
> P7 felt that it was a cultural change for teachers and students. He revealed that a

lot of teachers did not know much about career academies and P9 felt that initially there

was a problem with faculty responding to career academies. She also revealed that

teachers did not believe or quite understood the implementation process and did not want

to change the way they taught. She stated the following:

> The teachers had been teaching for a number of years, and not only were they
>
> tenacious about their positions and methods of teaching; they were tenacious
>
> about the classroom they habituated. It was tough getting teachers to buy into the
>
> process.

Sustainability

Some participants responded that sustainability after grant funds were gone was a

hindrance. P2, P6, and P10 are principals who felt that sustainability was unclear and

that it was difficult to continue the implementation process once the SLC grant was gone.

P6 stated "The issue I encountered was sustainability. Now that all of my grant funds are

gone, it is difficult to sustain the academy with no money". P5 also believed that it was

difficult sustain SLC's. She stated the following:

Our biggest challenge frankly was how we were going to sustain the work. And

that is why we needed the support of the Superintendent and the Board. When

those grant monies ran out, I needed some assurance that monies were going to be

encumbered to continue this work. I never had that assurance, so that was a huge

challenge for us. If you are doing great work you want to continue doing that

work. It takes money to hire staff, it takes money to monitor a program, and it

takes money to keep people on the cutting edge of the work. So, I would say a

deeper understanding so we could leverage to get monies to sustain the work.

That was our biggest challenge.

Too Many Initiatives

A number of participants felt that the district had too many school reform

initiatives in place the same time of career academy implementation. Six school leaders

felt that the school district was implementing too many school reform initiatives at one

time. P3 felt that upper-level administration outside of SLC leaders did not support

career academy implementation. He reveals that it is not because they did not want to; it

was because they have so many other initiatives in the school district and SLC's were not

a major initiative. P8 stated the following:

Some of the barriers that I felt existed within our district we the lack of

knowledge and understanding of the small learning communities and the benefit

they could have on student achievement. Many of them did not support career

academies the way that they should because most of them were focused more on

other things such as making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), incorporating the

America's Choice initiative and other initiatives. They did not see how it all

connected in one transformation model.

P9 stated the following:

One problem that I experienced was that we had too many initiatives from the top.

We have America's Choice, Reading 180, and other reform initiatives. Teachers

were looking at all of these initiatives and thought that leadership was asking

them to do too much.

Table 3.1

Barrier Dominant Themes

Scheduling	Lack of Financial Resources	Building Structure	Change in Leadership
Scheduling was a barrier (P1)	Lack of funding and financial support (P2)	Structure of the buildings was not appropriate (P3)	Changes in leadership teams—principals moved around often (P2)
Scheduling was a beast (P2)	Lack of resources provided by grant (P4)	Building capacity was an issue—could not develop a true academy (P4)	Change in school leadership—principal turnover (P3)
A challenge was scheduling (P3)	District was in a budget deficit and lacked funding (P5)	Structure of the building layout (P6)	Leadership turnover 7th principal in 15 years (P6)
Scheduling was tough (P4)	Did not have enough funding to operate (P6)	Building layout---teachers were not housed in the same area (P7)	Too many changes in leadership—had two different principals in two years (P7)
Constraints on the master schedule (P6)	Needed more funding/financial support (P8)	Lack of building support(P8)	Too much change in leadership (P8)
Scheduling was hard to incorporate common planning time (P7)	Lack of funding to move academy forward (P10)	Building layout structure was not appropriate—was not a true academy (P9)	Changes in leadership (P9)
Needed help often with the master schedule (P8)		Building layout was not conducive for an academy (P10)	
Scheduling was very difficult (P9)			

Table 3.1 (continued)

Barrier Dominant Themes

Lack of Upper-Leadership other than SLC Coordinator	Teacher Buy-In	Sustainability	Too many Initiatives
Need more than one person from the county office to support (P2)	Need Faculty buy-in (P2)	Sustainability was hard especially after grant was gone (P2)	District did not prepare for SLC (P2)
Lack of support from Superintendent and Board Members (P3)	Teachers need not like team teaching (P4)	It was challenging sustaining after grant ran out (P5)	Too many district initiatives (P3)
Lack of support from Superintendent (P4)	At the beginning—it was tough getting teachers to buy in (P5)	Could not sustain because finances for grant diminished—it was hard trying to sustain (P6)	I was assigned to have too many initiatives at my school at once (P6)
Lack of support from upper level administration (P5)	It was really tough getting teachers to buy in (P6)	It worked while we had the grant—but it did not after the grant was gone (P10)	There were too many initiatives at once (P7)
Lack of knowledge and understanding from Superintendent and Board Members (P8)	Teachers did not want to relocate to other areas in the building (P7)		Too many initiatives from upper level (P8)
Lack of District Office support (P9)			There were too many initiatives from the district office (P9)

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions, key factors and barriers experienced by school leaders during the implementation process of a traditional high school into a career academy. This chapter discussed concepts that emerged while the qualitative data were analyzed. The data were gathered from face-to-face semi-structured interviews and revealed major factors and barriers relevant to school

leaders. The factors and barriers that were revealed by the data were explained using statements from each school leader to provide a realistic experience.

The researcher was able to determine that the factors and barriers from school leaders were very similar. Most school leaders perceived having more barriers than factors. There were six main factors discovered, including an increase in graduation rate, support from SLC coordinator, local school staff support, professional learning, stakeholder support, and autonomy. The barriers included scheduling, lack of financial resources, building structure, and changes in leadership, lack of upper-level school district support exterior of SLC leaders, teacher buy-in, sustainability, and too many initiatives.

School leaders as identified as principals encountered more barriers than those identified as district office leaders, though these leaders expressed that they received little to no support from the upper district office leaders. Most school leaders expressed how the career academy model improves graduation rates and the support from the SLC Coordinator and CTE Director were factors. However, scheduling, lack of school board members and superintendent support, and building layout were three main barriers that surfaced among most school leaders.

This study conveyed the perceptions of ten school leaders regarding their experiences while implementing career academies in a suburban school district. All participants were involved in either 2005 or 2008 cohorts. Further discussion about the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors and barriers experienced by school leaders through the implementation process of career academies The overarching research questions served as a guide throughout the process: (1) What are the key factors and barriers experienced by school leaders when they undertook the implementation process of a traditional high school into a career academy model? (a) What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies, (b) What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation process of a career academy? This chapter contains a summary of the study as well as conclusions and is divided into three sections. The first section represents a summary of the study, the procedures, and the researcher's findings based upon the research questions above. The second section presents review of the literature, conclusions, and implications that were obtained from the study. The final section includes the recommendations for further study.

Summary

As described in Chapter 2, many school districts across the nation have transformed high schools into career academies. This framework is a reform model developed under the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC's) model that consists of core curriculum that integrates academic and vocational courses to provide a labor market for learning and to increase student achievement (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). A growing body of research pointed to the overall effectiveness of SLC's. Student achievement increases

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when small schools are created (Lee & Smith, 2001; Raywid, 1996). Researchers have

found that not only did students learn better, but they attend more, behave better, and are

more likely to have lower dropout rates and graduate at higher rates than students in large

schools (Cotton, 1996).

Several case studies of SLC's described successful fundamental change efforts in

which large schools were broken into smaller schools within a school. These cases

demonstrated that substantial change is possible when political and community support,

financial resources, and strong leadership are aligned and committed towards a common

goal (Raywid & Schmerier, 2003). The structure of SLC's is based upon several

dimensions, including the school being organized into subunits, changes in the school's

technical core of teaching and learning, and support by district-level structures and

policies. However, early evidence suggests that the implementation of SLC's may

require new forms of leadership (Wallach, 2005). If school leaders are to be successful in

implementing large high schools into sustainable career academies, a new theory and

practice of leadership and work will need to be created to guide school leaders past the

temptation to return to the bureaucratic models of leadership and operation that have

proven ineffective in increasing student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2005). However, the

implementation and acceptance of this educational change model has caused many school

leaders across the state of Georgia to unexpectedly be able to expand their experiences

and responsibilities in leadership to include redesigning a whole school, changing

managers, and implementing curricular change efforts.

For the reason noted above, it is important to closely research the factors and

barriers experienced by school leaders through the implementation process of career

academies. This qualitative study focused on school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors and barriers experienced by selected school leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia who have implemented the career academy model and to determine what strategies and structures they found most useful in supporting the implementation process. The following research questions were addressed:

What are the key factors and barriers experienced by school administrators when they undertake the implementation process of a traditional high school into a career academy model?

1) What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies?

2) What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation process of a career academy?

Data was collected by phenomenological interviews utilizing the researcher as the instrument for the study. This study was conducted through semi-structured face-to-face interviews utilizing a sequence of open-ended questions. The population of the study consisted of ten school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia who had experienced challenges, concerns, and support during the implementation process of implementing career academies.

Questions from the interview guide were aligned with the research questions to ensure data collection was relevant to the study and was developed by the researcher based on literature reviews. A total of ten school leaders from a suburban school district in Georgia were interviewed. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and stored in

a secured location by the researcher. The names of participants, schools, and school districts were unidentified to ensure confidentiality. The data from the interviews were analyzed for common themes and patterns prior to reporting the findings.

The researcher's desire is that the information obtained from this study will provide a better understanding for school districts and leaders who plan or already have implemented career academy models and factors or barriers that were challenges during the process. This study will also hopefully provide insight for school systems in the state of Georgia that wish to implement career academy models as a way to design appropriate professional development for inheriting or aspiring school administrators to assist and support them as they become transformational leaders. By studying school leaders who have acted as the driving force in reshaping their schools into career academy models and by understanding the factors and barriers they encountered, it is hopeful that there will be a better understanding of leadership support and training needs. Based on interview data, the research questions were answered.

Analysis of Research Findings

The results from the study indicated six major factors that were supports and eight major barriers that were challenges while implementing career academies. Several specific findings emerged from this study:

- The findings indicated the majority of school leaders believed that career academies increased student achievement by decreasing the dropout and increasing the graduation rate.
- More than half of the school leaders revealed that a helpful factor was to be able to delegate duties and responsibilities to appointed people such as assistant

principals, instructional coaches, and teachers to support them while implementing career academies.

- The findings indicated a vast majority of school leaders reported that the support from the SLC Coordinator and Career and Technical Education (CTE) Director and support from local school staff support were main factors.

- Half of school leaders believed that there was inconsistency of professional development while implementing career academies.

- The findings indicated that only some school leaders believed that autonomy was a key factor.

- Although stakeholder support was perceived as a factor, only some strongly believed that it was a major factor.

Other major findings included eight barriers experienced by school leaders that were challenges during the implementation process. The major themes identified included scheduling, financial resources, building structure, change in leadership, lack of upper-level school district support exterior of SLC Coordinator, teacher buy-in, sustainability, and too many initiatives. Findings included the following:

- The vast majority of school leaders believed that manipulating the master schedule so that teachers and students could have common planning time is a major barrier.

- Several indicated that lack of financial resources to support staffing and professional learning were major challenges.

- Based on research results, many school leaders perceived their building structure attempting to house all career academy classes in the same area of the building was challenging.

- A majority of school leaders revealed that continuous change in leadership disrupts the implementation process.

- The support from the Superintendent and Board of Education Members was divided among school leaders, and therefore, posed issues of support for some school leaders.

- Teacher buy-in was tough by a majority of school leaders. They believed that it is difficult to implement a career academy without teacher buy-in.

- The results revealed that only some school leaders believed that it is challenging sustaining the career academy model after grant funds have diminished.

- Over half of school leaders perceived that it is not easy implementing career academies due to too many school district approved initiatives being implemented at the same time.

<div align="center">**Discussion of Research Findings**</div>

RQ 1 What factors do school leaders experience during the implementation process of career academies?

This study focused on the key factors and barriers experienced by school leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia who had experienced challenges, concerns and supports during the implementation process of career academies. Also, ten school leaders from the school district participated in this study. A qualitative analysis using face-to-face semi-structured interviews was conducted utilizing a sequence of open-ended

questions. All participants were asked the same questions which were from an interview guide (see Appendix C). The interview guide was aligned with the research questions to ensure data collection was relevant to the study and was developed by the researcher based on literature reviews.

In responding to the first factor of student achievement, the researcher found that a majority of school leaders revealed that career academies increased student achievement by decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate. This finding is similar to the literature from Chapter 2 that reported that "small is better movement" has increased by research indicating that small high schools exhibit higher achievement levels, greater graduation rates, and lower dropout rates (Raywid, 1996; Lee & Smith, 2001). Findings discovered in this study are also comparable to literature revealing that in a study of schools in four states, while data are clear that small learning communities positively impact dropout rates (Sammon, 2008).

Concerning the factors of support from the SLC Coordinator and CTE Director, the researcher found that a vast majority of school leaders reported that they felt highly supported by the minimal district level administration. Similarly, both school-based and district-level policies should work closely together during implementing programs; unless both levels of management work in conjunction, there will be major gaps in the support system for the program (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). However, six school leaders believed that a major factor that supported them in the implementation process was local staff support within the school. Klindworth (2008) and Raywid (1996) found that many SLC principals do not have adequate time to spend on important administrative duties with multiple schools under one principal and teacher-leaders taking on some roles that

principals have traditionally assumed. Career Academy Support Network (2002) also

revealed the principal may identify other administrators, such as an assistant principal, or

another administrator to handle the day-to-day matters related to implementing the

academy. The researcher also found that many school leaders depend heavily on support

from local school staff within the school. Many felt that this was a factor that supported

their efforts to successfully implement career academies.

Findings indicated that five school leaders felt that professional development was

supported in assisting with the implementation process. The literature showed that

district administrators determined the focus of staff development days and set content

standards, curriculum practices, and educational goals, partly based on past practice and

partly on the current district wide reform strategies (Maxwelll & Rubin, 2000).

There was a significant difference between school leaders and autonomy and

cultural change. In this study, few believed that independence and the change in culture

were key factors. Chapter 2 reveals a study that found insufficient autonomy and

separateness of the sub-unit and failure of cultural change to accompany structural

change resulted in schools failing to yield positive outcomes (Raywid, 1996).

Some school leaders felt that they had strong stakeholder support. The literature

by Vail (2000) found that recently, career academies have had an entirely different image

among students, parents, and the community. Programs that were once considered to be

a dumping ground for slow students are now considered to be highly desirable by parents

and students. Additionally, NWREL (2006) reported information from studies on SLC's

has been organized into domains for research-based practice. One domain included

stakeholders needed to build school and community commitment to a data-driven process aimed not at reform, but at continuous improvement (Sammons, 2008).

The findings indicated that school leaders believed CTE teachers and the teachers who have love and compassion for their career were best suited for career academies, although no current literature was found to support this notion.

RQ 2   What barriers do school leaders experience during the implementation process of a career academy?

This study sought to identify barriers school leaders experienced during the career academy implementation process. The following common barriers were reviewed in this study: scheduling, financial support, building structure, change in leadership, and lack of upper-level school district support, teacher buy-in, sustainability, communication, and cultural change. The findings indicated that the master schedule was the main barrier. The literature reveals that school leaders need to make effective use of common planning time, collaborate with business and community partners to extend student learning outside the classroom, and involve faculty in looking at student work and instructional practices to improve student achievement (Allen, Almeida, & Steinberg, 2001). Dayton, Tidyman, & Hanna's (2007) study implicated the master schedule is more difficult, as students need schedules that link their SLC classes, and teachers need more planning time. CASN (2008) also reported the integration of the curriculum with little teacher training or experience is a common problem encountered while they are implementing career academies.

The findings also indicated that school leaders felt challenged by the lack of financial resources to support staffing and professional learning. The literature in

Chapter 2 similarly found school-based administrators can impede implementation by not scheduling students and staff into the required classes, and the district office administrators can hinder programs by withholding staff development dollars and time needed for career academies to reach their potential (Maxwell & Rubin, 2000). According to NWREL (2006), significant investments of time, effort, and funds in professional development, curriculum and instruction planning are needed to transform small communities into smaller learning communities. Allen, Almeida, & Steinberg (2001) found that professional development for leaders at all levels remains a critical issue for school leaders.

Overwhelmingly, school leaders perceived that the building structure to house all career academy classes in the same area of the building was a huge challenge. Similarly, Allen, Almeida, & Steinberg (2001) discovered that classroom locations often changing to allow teams of teachers to be closer sometimes causing teacher resentment. Dayton, Tidyman & Hanna (2007) found that administrators, teachers, and counselors have to adapt, often modifying long-established habits.

The findings revealed the support from the Superintendent and School Board Members was divided among school leaders, and, therefore, posed issues of support among some school leaders. The literature found that while the superintendent rarely has time to follow through on details or to be a part of the academies, he or she may appoint another district administrator for this role (CASN, 2002).

While teacher buy-in surfaced as a barrier in the findings, the results revealed four school leaders believed that it is tough to effectively implement a career academy unless there is teacher buy-in. The literature revealed researchers, practitioners, and external

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service providers caution those wanting to launch SLC's about various commonly encountered barriers including (a) cultural expectations about how schools should organize and operate, (b) impatience for achievement changes on the part of those outside the school, and (c) staff who have not fully understood and accepted why the school has chosen to downsize (Cotton, 2001).

Conclusions

This study yielded factors and barriers experienced by school leaders as they implemented the school reform model; career academies. It has been revealed that school leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia perceived increasing graduation rates, lowering dropout rates, support from the district office SLC leaders, the ability to utilize other staff to assist and support initiative efforts, and some professional learning provided to an extent as supports that contributed to the implementation process. Although, many school leaders are committed to their craft, they are pressured and frustrated due to the number of factors and barriers they have to experience while implementing career academies. As their role is vital for success of this school reform model, it is evident that the school leader's position is a key factor.

The researcher discovered that school leaders with the most experience were those who provided the most feedback and those who inherited career academies had the most challenges. Also, the researcher found that the school leaders that were close co-workers were those who provided the most detailed information. School leaders at the district office level are valuable resources. However, the evidence revealed that upper-level school leaders such as the Superintendent and Board of Education members are not

supportive or do not have a clear understanding of the SLC concept, therefore it is difficult to effectively implement SLC's without their support.

This study also revealed that barriers outweighed the factors and school leaders in an urban school district in Georgia are faced with some support but there are many challenges they encounter as they attempt to implement and sustain career academies. Scheduling, financial resources, building structure, changes in leadership, lack of support from the Superintendent and Board of Education members, teacher buy-in and the district integrating too many initiatives at the same time are issues they have faced.

In an effort to meet these challenges and demands, there must be more emphasis placed on a new process to assist and support school leaders and their efforts to effectively understand their leadership roles as they implement or transform schools into career academies. Accordingly, the focus must shift to an improved support system for school leaders who may inherit or who are being appointed as in charge of leading a school or district that receives federal funding grants, such as smaller learning communities. Although, this study provided a small glance into the factors and barriers of school leaders in a suburban school district in Georgia as they implement career academies. There is a need for more extensive research to determine whether these concepts or other concepts are indicative of school leaders and perhaps how they impact the implementation of future reform models.

Implications

Based upon review of available literature and research findings of the study, the following implications can be drawn:

1. Although the vast majority of school leaders believed that career academies increase graduation rate and decrease dropout rates, many indicated more support needed from the district office regarding professional development, financial resources, communication, and knowledge.

2. Most school leaders need more training with the master schedule to assist with common planning for teachers within a traditional school along with other concurrent educational reform initiatives. They also need support and training on how to sustain a career academy especially when grant funds are diminished.

3. School districts should develop a leadership plan for new or experienced school leaders who inherit or are requested to implement career academies.

4. School districts should evaluate current initiatives and consider minimizing a few, especially if they are currently under the SLC grant.

5. School districts should research school reform models prior to planning new career academies. The building structure, stakeholder's involvement, and current leadership should be evaluated closely to determine if the school is adequately prepared for the implementation.

6. The literature is this study indicates that there is some concern regarding school leaders and the implementation process of career academies. The findings in the study indicated that there are a few gaps in the literature in regards to change in leadership, sustainability, and implementing too many educational initiatives.

7. Local school boards, superintendents, school district leaders, principals, and other school leaders may find this study helpful as they plan for future initiatives to improve student achievement.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the review of literature, the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn from this research, the following recommendations for further research are made:

1. This study should be replicated in other school districts currently implementing or planning to implement career academies or smaller learning communities in the state of Georgia and findings should be compared to those found in other states.

2. This study should be replicated using a larger population in each school district in the state of Georgia as well as longitudinal research to include stakeholders and/or student perceptions.

3. Since the data collection from the sample indicated gaps in teacher qualities, sustainability, and changes in leadership, school districts should focus attention on further study on these common barriers.

Concluding Thoughts

Reflecting on the experiences of school leaders during the implementation process has provided new insight for this researcher. School leaders are the sole of any change or reform in an educational setting. Educational leaders cannot be expected to transform schools and perform to their highest potential when issues and challenges exist. As a former Career and Technical Education coordinator and current principal of a Career and Technical Center who has a strong knowledge base about implementing career academies, the researcher believes that this study has been beneficial in an effort to make recommendations to the school district on how the implementation process can be improved for school leaders.

The researcher works in a school system which is located in a suburban school district in Georgia. The district has a vast number of different school reform models currently in place in attempts to find the most compatible one that will have a continuous impact on student achievement. It continues to be challenging due to many changes in structure and leadership within the district. With this study, the researcher has concluded that it is essential for the school district to closely examine each school and the leader prior to applying for SLC grant funds. After one examines the factors and barriers experienced by school leaders, it becomes necessary to share the findings with the school district. The researcher will communicate with the Superintendent and Board of Education members the findings and request a meeting to discuss how the district can improve the implementation of career academies for school leaders.

It becomes just as important to provide these findings at a professional development leadership training session to stakeholders, school district leaders, principals, assistant principals and other appointed academy leaders who are currently or plan to become involved with implementing career academies in the school district and across the state of Georgia. Furthermore, to raise awareness, to school leaders on a state and national level, this study may be disseminated by the researcher through presentations at both state and national SLC conferences. The findings in this study will further assist school leaders across the nation in developing a plan or improve the current implementation process of career academies.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University		
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
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To:	Vikki Williams
	Linda Arthur
	College of Education
	Department of Leadership Technology and Human Development
CC:	Charles E. Patterson
	Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College
From:	Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)
Initial Approval Date:	March 10, 2011
Expiration Date:	March 10, 2012
Subject:	Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H11313** and titled **"Career Academy Implementation: School Leaders Perceptions"** 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. You are authorized to enroll up to **10** subjects

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.

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. 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,

Eleanor Haynes

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

Dear Educator,

I am an employee of a Suburban School District in Georgia and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study of school leaders' perceptions involved with implementing the career academy model. The purpose of this study is to gain information about the perceptions of school leaders involved in the process. This study will gather information about the factors and barriers endured during the implementation process and advise of changes needed to improve for future implementations.

For the study, I will be conducting an interview in order to collect qualitative data. The interview will be held at a time and location of your convenience beyond your work hours and may be followed by a shorter session to further explore your responses. All information obtained will be treated confidentially. Your name and any other identifying information will not be used in the data. I will not share anything you say to me with anyone outside the interview. The researcher will maintain audio tapes and transcripts from the interview session and pseudonyms will be used to secure the identity of the participants. This data will be held in a secured and locked location for a period of three years after the study and then destroyed.

For the study, I will ask you some questions about your perceptions with implementing career academies. You are free to stop the interview and withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at vikwill1908@aol.com or call me at (678) 232-1678. I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with me. Thank you very much for your help.

Any questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Compliance Coordinator, ORSSP, Georgia Southern University, Box 8005, Statesboro, Georgia 30460, Telephone (912) 681-5465 E-Mail Address oversight@georgiasouthern.edu.

Sincerely,

Vikki H. Williams

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number <mark>H11313</mark>.

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda M. Arthur, PO Box 8131, GSU, Statesboro, GA 30460

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

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

_____   _____

Investigator Signature   Date

APPPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

RQ is a notation for Research Question and the alphabet refers to a sub-question.

1. What is current title or position?

2. Tell me about your educational background and experience and why you became

    a school leader? (RQ A)

3. Describe what happened at the beginning and how you became involved in the

    implementation process of career academies?

    a. Describe the process you experienced.

    b. What were your barriers? Can you give me examples?

    c. How has the process influenced your duties and responsibilities? (RQ B)

4. What has been the greatest help for you while implementing career academies?

    a. What role did the district office play in the implantation process

        Were you supported? Both inside and/or outside the district? (RQ A)

5. In your experience, how has the school's move to a career academy been worth

    the effort? (RQ A)

6. What support for the career academy do you wish you had more of? (RQ B)

7. What support have you received from the district/superintendent's

    office? (RQ A, B)

8. What type of teacher is best suited for a career academy? (RQ A)

    a. Do you or have you had those? (RQ A)

9. How have stakeholders responded to your career academy? Parents? Students?

   (RQ A)

10. What have been the biggest problems in moving to a career academy setting?

    (RQ B)

11. How has your faculty responded to the career academy setting? (RQ A, B)

12. What issues did you struggle with most while you were a school leader in the

    career academy? (RQ B)

13. What factors contributed to the success of the career academy during your

    leadership? (RQ A)

    What factors hindered the success of the career academy? (RQ A)

14. If you could change one thing from your experiences, what would it be? Why?

    (RQ A, B)

15. Is there anything else that you wish that I had asked you about---anything that you

    want to tell me about that I did not ask you about? (RQ A, B)

APPENDIX D

LITERATURE MATRIX

Research Question	Researcher	Contribution
2 (Restructuring-Barriers)	Rayvid (1999)	Four issues about restructuring into career academies
1, 2 (Change)	Oxley & Kassissieh (2008)	Competent and stable leadership needed for change
1, 2 (Barriers)	Lee & Smith (1997), Aguilera (2008)	Schools operate as bureaucratic institutions
1 (Factors School Reform)	Rayvid (1996), Lee & Smith (1997)	Student achievement in small schools
1, 2 (Effectiveness School Reform)	Cotton (2001)	Every district should be advocates for school reform
1, 2 (Change Agents, School Improvement)	Sammons (2008)	State-level leaders, superintendents, principals, assistant principals, members of school improvement team, or designee to assemble
1 (New forms of leadership)	Wallach (2005), Aguilera (2008)	New forms of leadership, new roles needed for implementation
1, 2 (Transforming into SLC's)	Sergiovanni (2005)	New theory and practice of leadership needed to create school leaders
1, 2 (Challenges)	Leithwood (1994), Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, Sebastian (2010)	School leaders meet challenges of improving instruction and achievement during school transformation
2 (Barriers)	Tucker & Codding (2002)	Few principal development programs focused on school improvement
2 (Issues)	Klindworth (2008)	School leadership expectations affect student accountability
1, 2 (Political & Social Debates)	Crawford (2004)	Support of school leadership practices
1, 2 (Development of Career Academies)	Stern, Dayton, Raby (2000)	Philadelphia Academies
1 (National Academy Foundation)	Greenan (2004)	Career Academy effectiveness

1 (Informal National Canvass)	Lee, Ready & Johnson (1999)	Identified high schools divided into career academies
1, 2 (Career Academies)	Sammon (2008)	Career academies are SLC structures
1, 2 (Vocational Schools)	Vail (2007)	Dumping ground for slow students
1, 2 (NSTWOA/ Change)	Sammon (2008)	Act called for change in American Education
1, 2 (Career Academy Implementation)	Brand (2009), Cook (2000), Ratzki & Fisher (1990), Oxley (2008)	Implementation for effective career academy strategies and structures
1 (Career Academy Implementation)	Sammon (2009)	Career academies, ninth grade academies, house plans, school-within-a school, magnet programs,
2 (Challenges)	Cooper & Jordan (2003), Oxley (2001), Cook (2000)	Implementation structural elements and strategies
2 (Challenges)	Cuban (1993)	Structure and strategies of implementation
1, 2 (Career Academy Roles)	Praisner (2003), Rogers (2007), Hipp, Huffman & Rogers (2000), Nwanne (1992), Cochran (2005), Klindworth (2008), Raywid (1996), Allen, Almeida & Steinberg (2001)	Roles and responsibilities of high school principals
1 (Support)	Brand (2009)	Public support needed to implement career academies
1, 2 (Issues)	Maxwell & Rubin (2000)	Strategies and structures implementing career academies
2 (Barriers)	Gladden (1998), Cotton (2001), Connell, Klem, Broom & Kenney (2005), Allen, Almeida & Steinberg (2001), Raywid (1996)	Small schools face multiple barriers

APPENDIX E

MAJOR RESEARCH STUDIES

Studies Related to Factors and Barriers Experienced by School Leaders

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ANALSIS	OUTCOMES
Aguilera (2008)	An examination of the experiences of urban school leaders	1 principal 4 academic deans	Qualitative: Interviews	**Personalized learning environment:** Stressed importance of knowing their students and eliciting the support of parents **Relationships:** School Leaders emphasized that SLC's structure allows them to form relationships with team members **Areas of Autonomy:** SLC administrators reported they have little to no autonomy in terms of budget, classroom space/location, and staffing decisions **Shared Decision-Making:** District requires campuses to establish a Campus Leadership Team (CLT). District must ensure that structures, policies and procedures support teaching & learning, positive school climates and sound professional development opportunities as these are the cohesive elements binding leadership and instructional practices.
Bristo (2010)	An examination between principal and faculty perceptions of change implementation	Schools from seven districts	Qualitative: Case Study Quantitative: Surveys	**Principal and teacher perceptions of second-order change:** Schools had statistical differences. Therefore, leaders should create strategies that will align perceptions through improved communication input, collaboration, and relationships throughout change process. **Principals models for role and performance:** Indicated great differences

Herrera (2007)	Identify the perceptions of principals of smaller high school learning communities regarding degree of school autonomy.	33 high schools from 22 school districts from 12 California counties	Qualitative: Interviews	**Perceptions of principals of SLC's regarding staffing:** 44% reported that their school did not receive a satisfactory level of autonomy in hiring, assigning, and transferring school staff for SLC
White-Smith & White (2009)	An examination for principals' perceptions on their leadership role and high school reform implementation	4 principals in their last year of implementing the High School Collaborative (HSCC)	Qualitative: Case Studies Observations Semi-structured Interviews Focus groups Documents Artifacts	**Understanding of the principals' roles in school transformation:** Principals' actions were informed by training opportunities **Principal's interaction:** In new development of school reform model did not relieve the principals of their duties in existing school prior to implementation of structure Principals experienced that starting an academy from scratch would present less of an organizational challenge as would be evident if they had to lead only one school. Principals at start-up sites experienced resource issues from district office **Layers of accountability:** Decisions are influenced by many factors, including outside pressures.
Maxwell & Rubin (2001)	An examination of the district's capacity to implement nine career academies at six high schools using seven years of data on operations and interviews of academy directors and principals	3 Cohorts of public high school students (about 10,000); 14% were in career academies	Qualitative: Interviews Quantitative: Surveys	**Performance in high school:** The career academy increased the academic knowledge and skills taken from high school **Strengths and Challenges:** The greatest strength identified was sense of community that academy created among teachers and students. Many directors and administrators described a fundamental asset of the academy as being the network of social support that leads to better educational outcomes Problems faced were scheduling, administrative support and leadership. Additional issues included operational costs and extra time for teachers to plan and design curricula

Smith (2009)	An investigation of the effect of the SLC model on student achievement, attendance and discipline, and teachers' instructional practices	1 large high school in New England All ninth grade high school students surveyed, 2 separate focus groups with students and teachers, and discipline and attendance records were observed	Mixed Methods: Survey Interview Analyzed documented data	**Implementation of SLC model improves student achievement:** Personalization and positive relationships within the SLC model support the achievement and success of students Successful implementation of personalized learning relies upon the vision and collaboration of the leadership team, starting with the building principal.