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# Strategies And Techniques Used By Exemplary Georgia Middle School Principals To influence The Achievement of Students With Disabilities And Meet Adequate Yearly Progress Goals

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STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES USED BY EXEMPLARY GEORGIA MIDDLE

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO INFLUENCE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS

WITH DISABILITIES AND MEET ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS GOALS

by

LINDA DIANNE CLARK

(Under the Direction of Walter Polka)

ABSTRACT

This study investigated and defined effective strategies and techniques that four exemplary principals from Pacesetter middle schools used to promote the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP goals. A qualitative triangulated case study was employed, utilizing data from one-on-one interviews of principals and teachers, school and classroom observations, and review of school documents. The four exemplary principals were found to embody the principles of charismatic distributed leadership, to be pro-active in determining the most effective strategies and techniques to promote achievement, and to rely heavily on research to inform their decisions regarding the implementation of school policies and procedures.

INDEX WORDS:     4MAT, achievement, AYP, CRCT, Disabilities, Exemplary, Inclusion, Leadership, NCLB, Pacesetter Award

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DEDICATION

*It is with great excitement*

*along with a sigh*

*of relief that I dedicate this dissertation to my loving companion*

*my fiancé Vincent M. Davis,*

*my muse and greatest supporter*

*and*

*to my son, Brandon*

*my greatest inspiration*

*and the very best part of me.*

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*"The will to conquer is the first condition of victory."*

~Ferdinand Foch

Writing a dissertation is a long and arduous process. It is the final result of years spent working tirelessly toward what seems at times an unachievable goal. It requires perseverance, a strong work ethic, and a team of supporters beyond compare. My support team has played such an integral role in my life during this process; without them, I don't know if I would have made it this far.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

From the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) to the No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a call for education reform has been at the

forefront of American consciousness, with the top priorities driving school improvement

today being raising the bar and closing the achievement gap (Fullan, 2004). The No Child

Left Behind Act of 2001, legislation intended to improve student achievement and

change the culture of America's schools, is based on four key principles:

> Stronger accountability for results; greater flexibility for states, school
>
> districts and schools in the use of federal funds; more choices for parents
>
> of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; an emphasis on teaching
>
> methods that have been demonstrated to work (United State Department of
>
> Education, NCLB *2001*).

According to Egnor (2003), the enactment of NCLB has had significant

implications for school principals in terms of special education policy and practice, most

notably in the areas of personnel certification and accountability. Educators have been

mandated to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for students with

disabilities (SWDs) and to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing

advantaged and disadvantaged students so that all children are afforded the best

opportunity for academic success (Lashley, 2002; NCLB 2002). Maintaining flexibility

and choice to meet increased expectations for schools to become more inclusive has been

a continual challenge for all educational stakeholders (NCLB 2002). In recent times, as a

result of federal mandates, our nation's schools have been becoming more and more inclusive. According to Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz (2006) and the Office of Special Education Program's IDEA Report to Congress (2003), in 1999-2000 95.9% of students and in 1993-2003 96% of special needs students received services in the general education setting respectively. Additionally, almost half are in a regular classroom for most of the day (OSEP, 2003).

While a school may be doing all that can be expected to effectively teach a specified curriculum, some students may not master the content for reasons that are entirely beyond the control of the educators (Forster, 1999); however, regardless of the circumstances, the principal is held accountable to ensure equitable and effective learning for all students. One measure of accountability is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, a series of performance goals aimed at requiring all students in grades three through eight to achieve 100% proficiency in reading and math within twelve years. Every school, local education agency, and the state as a whole has been mandated to achieve the AYP goals within the time frames specified by law (Georgia Department of Education, 2003).

The accountability mechanisms of the No Child Left Behind Act are addressed through AYP goals by reviewing the types of instructional strategies that would yield progress (Browder, Cooper-Duffy, 2003). Egnor (2003) notes that one of the most significant implications of NCLB for principals in terms of special education policy is the set of graduated accountability measures that flow from assessment that a student has failed to meet AYP goals. In addition, federal grantees are required to use their funds on scientifically-based research practices: NCLB references more than 100 scientifically-based research initiatives, placing an unprecedented educational spotlight on evidenced-

based strategies for educating students with disabilities (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002; Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003). States receiving NCLB funding must use the funding to implement a comprehensive school reform program that has been found, through scientifically-based research, to either significantly improve the academic achievement of students participating in such programs as compared to students in schools who have not participated in such programs, or has been found to have strong evidence that such programs will significantly improve the achievement of all students (U. S. Congress, 2002).

However, according to the National Council on Disability (2004), one of the many challenges schools currently face is a scarcity of research meeting the federal criteria set for evidence-based research strategies. Vaughn, Klingner, & Hughes (2002) note that until recently research on special education has largely been in the form of self-reflective essays. In their meta-analysis of research-based instructional practices for students with disabilities, Gersten, Chard, and Baker (2002) located only one empirical study by Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes and Arguelles (1999) of reading approaches in the classroom.

In order to address these issues, school leaders need to promote a culture in which educators select programs and strategies based on solid research that yield exceptional results for students with disabilities (Fullan, 2003; Johnson & Uline, 2005). According to Clark & Clark (2000), recent high-stakes accountability initiatives have forced middle school principals to become more informed about effective instructional strategies and techniques that meet the needs of all students. School leaders have been challenging teachers to become reflective in their practices regarding academic achievement of

students with disabilities by highlighting data that reflect the successes of those students, demonstrating how their instruction influenced that success, and describing instructional improvements that could influence greater achievement (Fullan, 2003; Johnson & Uline, 2005). Administrative leadership is a powerful predictor of the academic success of all students in schools, as effective leaders implement inclusive education practices for students with disabilities (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff). Leaders must use data to identify the most effective routes for facilitating high achievement for all students, and the school principal is an important agent for completing this change within the schools. Principals observe that academic outcomes for at-risk students improve when leaders and teachers focus on instructional issues (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005).

Simpson, Myles, and Simpson (1997) have argued that more effective strategies are needed for the special education learner than are needed for his or her normally-achieving peer who can often learn the material regardless of teaching strategy. Students with special needs often require accommodations in both instruction and assessment (Rieck & Wadsworth, 2005). Smith and Smith (2002) have stated that teacher training for both special and general education teachers, in tandem with local administrators, is an integral part of a policy of responsible inclusion. Taking a proactive approach through the development of an inclusion plan can assist schools in designing better programs for all students both with and without disabilities.

Because teacher and principal attitudes are directly related to the success of inclusion programs, the administrator's attitude toward inclusion is critical for the success of the program. Sindelar, Shearer, Yendo-Hoppey & Libert (2006) have noted that school administrators often do not understand inclusion programs and as a result are often not

supportive of inclusive education. Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham (2000) investigated the experiences of elementary teachers, both general and special education, and of building administrators towards inclusion education. The perceptions of the group were mixed. The researcher found that if teacher perceptions of students with disabilities are negative, then the experiences for the students may not have a great impact on the student with the disability. The social benefits of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom were significant, but academic success continues to be an area of concern. The authors noted that an effective school leader must provide solid growth experiences for teachers that will enable them to provide effective instructional practices when working with students with disabilities.

## Statement of the Problem

The 1987 reauthorization of IDEA required that students with exceptional learning needs have access to the general education curriculum. The passage of A-Plus Education Reform Act in Georgia, the No Child Left Behind Act, and subsequent regulations makes it clear that states and their school districts must do everything possible to foster success for all students. If students with exceptional learning disabilities are to succeed, there need to be meaningful changes in practices, strategies, and educational equity.

The principal is viewed as the instructional leader for all programs in a school, including special education services. Consequently, effective principals need to understand and comply with special education laws and regulations, be knowledgeable about children with disabilities, supervise both programs and the instructional personnel in those programs, conduct program reviews and assessment, and report progress and

concerns to parents. It is quite probable that as the concept of inclusion shifts to the forefront of the special education movement and the idea of educating students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers becomes more prevalent, practiced, and accepted, principals will begin to take more active roles in implementing more inclusive programs in their schools.

Since principals play such a pivotal role in what occurs in the school, it is easier to hold the principal accountable.  However, principals appear to have divergent ideas and attitudes about inclusion. To date, the comfort level of principals in implementing inclusion programs has not been closely investigated, and additional research on evidence-based research strategies for students with disabilities is warranted. Further investigation in this area could improve policy and decisions affecting students with disabilities**.** An extensive examination of the organizational structures, skills, and programs (instructional support and methods) needed by principals is necessary to create inclusive learning environments. Given that successful principals purposefully work with their faculties to increase student learning (Uchiyama and Wolf, 2002), it is important to understand the correlation between strategies and techniques used by the principals in restructuring schools in order to meet the demands of leaving no child behind. In the final analysis, the principals determine how to implement strategies, they decide what to emphasize, and they determine what to omit as they focus on school improvement.

The Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement reported that 43,330 students were enrolled in special education classes in grades six through eight in 2004-2005. These students were tested in the subgroup of students with disabilities on the state's performance test and were included in the 2004-2005 adequate yearly progress

(AYP) report. States must submit these scores in their annual performance report, which determines whether or not a school meets AYP goals. Of this population of students in the subgroup of students with disabilities, 50% of 13,984 students in the eighth grade met expectations in the academic area of reading; 27% met expectations in math. In the seventh grade, 61% of 14, 461 students that tested in reading met expectations, and 41% met expectations in math. Finally, in the sixth grade, with a student population of 14,882, 57% of the students in the academic area of reading met expectations while 37% met expectations in math.

During the 2004-2005 school year in Georgia, 100 school superintendents learned that their district did not meet AYP goals. Of those systems, 364 school principals learned that their schools did not meet AYP goals. In total, 181 middle schools did not meet AYP goals, and of that 138 were middle schools that did not meet AYP goals solely in the subgroup of students with disabilities. When AYP goals are not met, NCLB requires states and local educational agencies to develop accountability plans that must be submitted and approved by the federal government for improving the academic achievement of all students.

The researcher proposes to examine strategies and techniques used by principals in schools that promote the achievement of students with disabilities (SWD) in exemplary middle schools that have been awarded Pacesetter recognition for leadership and success in achieving AYP goals for students with disabilities. The overarching research question for this study is, "What strategies and techniques do middle school principals use to promote student achievement and to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?"

Research Questions

1. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote the achievement of students with disabilities?

2. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?

3. How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques that their principals promote?

4. How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary principals make?

5. What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary school leaders?

Significance of the Study

The accountability system required by NCLB demands that schools and districts improve the achievement of various demographic groups so that gaps in achievement narrow and ultimately disappear. Court decisions and accountability mandates have called for a more inclusive setting of students with disabilities, creating more pressure for leaders to properly employ strategies and techniques that will place students with disabilities into the general education classroom setting. Leaders must believe that every student can succeed: a change of heart, mind, and habit is needed in education to generate achievement across various student populations.

Ensuring appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities is one of the greatest challenges that public schools face in the era of accountability resulting from NCLB. Effective educational leaders create schools in which there is continuous

focus on ensuring the academic success of every student. The principal must employ leadership attributes, strategies, and techniques that promote the success of all students. He or she should set the vision for the school, be a role model, advocate nurturing, sustain an inclusive school culture, and promote instructional programs conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

This study may influence how principals and district administrators as well as practitioners facilitate and evaluate strategies and techniques that will aid in implementing inclusion practices in schools. It may also assist policy leaders and stakeholders in identifying, disseminating, and aligning evidence-based outcomes, thereby producing practices committed to leaving no child behind and meeting AYP goals in the state of Georgia. Furthermore, the study may contribute to the extent evidence-research based strategies are being used to make decisions affecting the instruction of students with disabilities. This study could also provide a framework for school improvement that best meets the diverse needs of all students, and it may have a direct effect on the instructional strategies used by inclusion teachers as well as the future practices of administrators in the state of Georgia. As the roles of teachers and administrators change, collaboration will likely emerge as the only variable that predicts positive outcomes for the achievement of all students. The findings from this study may provide a better understanding of the gap in literature that exists in the few evidence-based research strategies of students with disabilities in the middle school setting.

*Delimitations*

The study was limited to five school districts in Georgia that met AYP goals in the school year of 2004 -2005 and received the Pacesetter Award for recognition of their

leadership and success with students with disabilities. These middle schools are from districts that have received the Pacesetter Award in elementary and high schools as well. However, for this study the researcher purposively sampled from the five middle schools in those districts.

*Limitations*

This study was limited to five northeast Georgia middle school principals and five teachers. Demographic makeup of the school systems in Georgia may not be similar to other school districts, so the findings may not be able to be generalized to other state school districts. The population sample may also limit the findings of this study.

Procedures

This study used unstructured guided interviews to explore how five exemplary middle school principals have influenced the achievement of students with disabilities (SWDs). The researcher reviewed the results of the Georgia Department of Education's *Criterion Referenced Competency Test* to identify Pacesetter schools in the subgroup of students with disabilities and selected five schools to study. Focusing on a qualitative case study approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of complex variables governing school accountability as well as provided insight into effective strategies and techniques.

The Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (GCIMP) promotes continuous, equitable educational improvement for students with disabilities while ensuring continued procedural compliance. Its data collection system measures improvement in performance goals and indicators to rank schools both nationally and statewide. During the 2004-2005 school year, five Georgia school districts, with a total of 14 middle schools, received Pacesetter Awards for leadership and for raising the

achievement levels of special needs students. These systems' performance data placed them in the top ten percent of comparably sized systems, and they received recognition as high achievers and most improved compared to similar systems in Georgia.

A letter was sent electronically to the 14 Georgia Pacesetter principals commending them on their success, requesting that the principal consent to participate in the study, and requesting permission to include one teacher selected by the principal to be interviewed. The researcher selected one middle school principal from each district, and each principal selected one teacher from his or her building to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted separately, using unstructured guided interviews, and the schools' identity was strictly guarded by those involved in the study. Each principal was asked to discuss specific actions that improved SWD achievement and helped the school meet AYP goals. Teacher interviews and observations provided additional information to determine how strategies and techniques are implemented in the classroom.

Triangulation, the process of utilizing all of the information gathered from a variety of sources, was used to establish internal validity and analyze data collected from interviews and document analysis. Field notes were used to record significant points made during the audio taped interview, and the tapes were transcribed after the interviews. Interviews, categories, and the assessment of the category set allowed the researcher to validate findings. Data was reviewed, labeled, and categorized, and the researcher identified similarities in the data to define emerging themes. The participants were mailed materials for review and requested to clarify and/or interpret observations, then return them to the researcher in a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Definition of Terms

- *Accountability*: Refers to the decisions made and actions taken as a result of student performance on formal assessments (e.g. standardized tests) (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

- *Adequate Yearly Progress*: A series of performance goals that every school, local education agency and state as a whole must achieve within time frames specified in law to meet 100% proficiency goal of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

- *Criterion Reference Competency Test*: A state-mandated end-of-year assessment designed to measure how well students have mastered content skills which are aligned with Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum (math, language arts, science and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

- *Exemplary*: For purposes of this study the term *exemplary* is used to describe both schools and school leaders that have received the Pacesetter Award as defined by Georgia Department of Education.

- *Inclusive Education:* A value-based practice that attempts to bring students, including those with disabilities, into full membership within their local school community; providing specially designed instruction and supports for students with special needs in the context of regular education settings (Moore, 1998).

- *Pacesetter Schools:* "Schools that are recognized for their leadership and success in increasing the percentage of students with disabilities who met or exceeded the standards on statewide achievement tests and decreasing the gap between the achievement of students with disabilities. Their performance data placed them in

the top ten percent of comparably sized systems, and they received recognition as high achievers and most improved based on progress compared to systems of a similar size in the state of Georgia" (Georgia Department of Education, 2004, Georgia Council for Administrators of Special Education, 2004).

- *Schools that met AYP goals*:  Middle schools that have achieved above similar schools' scoring on both reading and math assessments on all tests administered in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

## Summary

In an era of increased accountability and educational equity, principals are at the front line of the movement driven by federal and state policies that encourage them to work together to meet standards and to help all students achieve. While the literature on the debate about inclusion in our public schools is extensive, and the history of special education, successful components of inclusion, and the impact and outcomes of inclusion are critical to this study, a rethinking of the learning paradigm must go beyond the inclusion concept and begin to address effective instructional strategies in the classroom that empower and engage all learners. Connections between research-based strategies and the closing of the achievement gap must be examined if school leaders are to promote a school culture in which educational equity is at the forefront of school improvement and if educators are to meet the needs of all learners. It is time for instructional leaders in schools to strategically plan for success by investigating and employing effective evidence-based research strategies.

This chapter discussed several aspects of meeting accountability goals for NCLB such as school funding, teaching strategies, and school improvement. Principals need to identify and employ evidence-based strategies and techniques that will increase the percentage of students with disabilities who meet or exceed the standards on statewide achievement tests while decreasing the gap between the achievement of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The chapter also discussed the need for school improvement and educational reform as districts create schools that meet AYP goals. It is important that failing schools know which specific strategies and techniques are successful in creating and sustaining improvement in diverse student populations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*If anything concerns me, it's the oversimplification of something as complex as*

*assessment. My fear is that learning is becoming standardized. Learning is idiosyncratic.*

*Learning and teaching is messy stuff. It doesn't fit into bubbles.*

~Michele Forman, 2001 Teacher of the Year

The purpose of this study was to define and examine strategies and techniques used by exemplary principals from middle schools that have received the Pacesetter Award for success with students with disabilities. The researcher sought to interview and observe five Pacesetter middle school principals and one teacher from each school in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that contributed to the success of these schools, including examining how accountability reform has impacted the principals, and if this reform has changed their approach to implementing strategies and techniques that influence the achievement of students with disabilities. The findings from this study may provide the foundation for a framework for school improvement that best meets the diverse needs of all students. In addition, the findings could encourage principals to fully inhabit their roles as transformational leaders. Lastly, the results of this study could strengthen understanding of effective strategies to use with students with disabilities in key areas such as assessment, instruction and behavioral supports and could have a direct effect on the instructional strategies used by inclusion teachers as well as on the future practices of administrators in the state of Georgia.

Background of Pacesetter Recognition for Middle School Leaders

The Georgia Department of Education Division of Exceptional Students monitors compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by implementing the Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (GCIMP). The GCIMP was developed to ensure ongoing equitable educational improvement for students with disabilities and ensure continued compliance with mandated procedures. The GCIMP concentrates on accountability and is based on policies adopted by the United States Department of Education and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) which call for a continuous review of procedures that compares present functioning against specific standards and develops a profile that details areas of compliance as well as areas where the implementation of new procedures may be needed to meet compliance. The GCIMP performance goals and indicators for students with disabilities are to improve services, availability, outcomes, and compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. Each district chooses indicators and district targets based on available data, and a data collection system measures improvement of each goal and indicator, making comparisons to both national and state data.

The State Advisory Panel (SAP) is made up of statewide stakeholders who annually review and analyze this data to determine the top goals for focused monitoring for the following fiscal year and to rank districts of similar size. In 2006, the priority indicator was to narrow the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities; districts were monitored in either mathematics or reading. The Georgia Department of Education issues an annual report evaluating each district and identifying schools where students with disabilities have shown improvement on standardized tests.

By 2014, districts that have not met or exceeded state targets will need to develop and

implement strategies for improvement.

Each August, each school district receives an annual summary report detailing its

status regarding each component being monitored for continuous improvement. School

districts that rank in the top in each of the performance goals and districts that show the

most improvement earn statewide recognition in the form of the Pacesetter Award. The

Pacesetter Award evolved from recognizing improvement in OSEP's central themes of

"continuity, partnership with stakeholders, local education accountability, self

assessment, data driven process, public awareness, technical assistance, rewards, and

sanctions."

<div align="center">Accountability Reform</div>

The United States, as well as many other developed countries, currently sees

accountability as the primary concern in education policy (Linn 2000; Popkewitz, 2000),

and high stakes accountability has had a profound impact on the culture of education

(McGhee & Nelson, 2005). Whereas the reforms of the 1980s encouraged schools to be

more structured, better managed, and focused on basic skills and subjects (Gutek, 2000),

current national and state educational reforms stress the importance of schools being

more responsive to the needs of all children (Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998).

Academic success and fiscal stability of our schools and school districts are

widely held to be the primary concerns of education leaders today (Paulen, Kallio, &

Stockard, 2001). The No Child Left Behind Act, based on "stronger accountability for

results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more

choices for parents" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), heralded a renewed interest in and focus on equity in education for all students (McNeil, 2000, Lashway, 2001).

The ability of students with disabilities to achieve NCLB mandates is dependent on a host of factors such as access to the general curriculum and the ability of teachers to reach diverse learners (Nagle, Yunker, Malmgren, 2006). Implementation of effective strategies, combined with the proper resources, would be the principle formula for a school to achieve maximum efficiency in educational practice; however, it must be noted that limited resources could hinder the implementation of sound educational strategies. Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* explores the socioeconomic factors of educational inequality in poor rural and urban settings. Kozol believes that racial segregation in the nation's schools has continued and even intensified since 1954 and that racial and class bias are evident within certain facets of the educational process (Kozol, 2002). He also points out that there is a high propensity for special education students to fall behind in these districts. In theory, the No Child Left Behind Act would assuage such conditions by forcing districts in rural and urban poor districts to be accountable for their educational standards. However, while NCLB addresses policy, it does not necessarily improve the conditions that influence resources. Advocates for educational reform are

> becoming increasingly frustrated with the pace of progress in school
> districts across the United States, especially those in urban communities.
> Low student achievement appears to be a fact of life in most of these
> districts, particularly among poor students and students of color. For
> instance, recent analyses of student performance in the nation's largest

urban districts reveal persistent and daunting gaps between the

achievement of white students and students of color, and between the

existing and desired performance levels of all students (Simmons et al,

2006, p.189).

Unfortunately, the No Child Left Behind Act has not proved to be a magic cure-

all for this complex situation. One of the first major flaws of the act emerged when it was

found that parents could remove their children, at the district's expense, to districts with

higher educational standards. With state accountability and standards coming in the form

of test scores, the disproportionately high population of special needs students in these

districts made it almost impossible for these schools to meet minimum standards crafted

by a fluctuating bar. As a result, these types of districts are now not only at a

disadvantage for testing, but also for funding.

Because many poor rural and urban districts with disproportional special

education populations were found to be at a severe disadvantage in state systems

(Browder, 2003), in 2005 the Bush administration was forced to amend the No Child Left

Behind Act to allow schools to exempt students with disabilities from state testing

programs. Clearly accountability, perhaps one of the most important functions in a

modern school district, is by no means a simple issue.

<center>Strategies of Successful School Leaders</center>

When it comes to successful school reform, leadership counts. Recent research

cites leadership as second only to teaching among school-related factors impacting

student achievement (Marzano, 2003).  High-performing schools are commonly found to

be led by strong instructional principals who foster a shared vision, communicate a clear

direction, support their staff in multiple ways, and encourage growth through professional training and collaboration. In schools where learning needs are the greatest, the effects of strong leadership can be the most profound (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004, p.7).

Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a quantitative study examining the characteristics of effective leaders and their impact on student achievement. Using meta-analysis, 27 studies were examined that included 2,817 school districts and the achievement scores of 3.4 million students (1).  The results yielded a positive correlation (.25) between effective leadership and increased student achievement (6). Additionally Waters and Marzano found 21 building-level leadership responsibilities were statistically significant in relation to student achievement; these responsibilities were shown to be directly related to improving student achievement.

A *strategy* is defined as "a pattern or behavior designed to gain the cooperation of followers in accomplishing organizational goals" (Lashway, 1998). Research has found that effective school leaders examine pertinent research to determine how to incorporate sound strategies and decision-making practices in their work; each strategy they develop highlights specific features and favors specific actions. (Torrence, 2002). Principals who have been shown to be skillful instructional leaders ensure that their actions promote a culture of disciplined professional inquiry dedicated to research-based practices and data-based decisions (Fullan, 2003): they keep up with current research and stay informed about both academic and behavioral interventions, they set knowledge and skill goals for faculty, and they support authentic contextual learning opportunities to promote ongoing professional improvement (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas 2004).

In a meta-analysis of understanding how principals use data, Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn & Michael (2004) sought to reach a better understanding of assessment and accountability practices and policies that principals implement and determine how those practices and policies influence student achievement or school improvement. Their descriptive study presented information about the needs of schools and how they effectively used data, about how the schools/districts used data to guide classroom practice, and about whether differences in data use were evident based on the level of school proficiency. The study consisted of 121 principals from Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota, and it found that principals of high-achieving or improving schools use data to inform their decisions and support teachers in using data in the classroom. It also found that principals who rated their schools as improving were much more likely to use most of the elements of effective accountability systems. These elements include holding high expectations for all students, using high quality assessments that are aligned with standards, aligning resources to support and assist school improvement, utilizing both district and school data, and keeping parents and the community informed.

Collaborative goal-setting was also found to be an effective strategy that exemplary school leaders employ. Goal-setting that included all relevant stakeholders had a demonstrably positive impact on student achievement, especially when the goals focusing on student achievement and classroom instruction were non-negotiable (4). Continual monitoring of these goals ensured that the goals that were set remained at the forefront of the leaders' and stakeholders' actions. Waters and Marzano (2006) also noted that the use of "defined autonomy," that is, granting school leaders the authority and

responsibility to decide how to meet goals, yielded a positive correlation of .28 with average student achievement.

Knapp, Copland, & Talbert (2003) suggest five areas of action that leaders can take to not only set the stage for learning but also to support student, professional and system learning. School leaders can promote powerful and equitable student learning through

1) establishing a focus on learning,

2) building a professional learning community that values and supports members' learning,

3) developing external environments that have a positive influence on learning by building relationships with and securing resources from groups outside of the school that can foster both student and teacher learning,

4) acting strategically and sharing leadership by distributing leadership across levels and among individuals operating from different vantage points, and

5) creating coherence by bringing student, professional and system learning into relationship with one another and with learning goals.

Richard Dufour (1999) examined the challenges effective school leaders face and observed that

Principals must live with paradox: They must have a sense of urgency

about improving their schools, balanced by the patience to sustain them

for the long haul. They must focus on the future, but remain grounded in

today. They must see the big picture, while maintaining a close focus on

details. They must be strong leaders who give away power to others.

Dufour further stresses the need of a school to envision itself as a "learning organization" (1997) where everyone on staff is part of a collaborative team. He maintains that effective school leaders schedule regular collaborative meetings, facilitate the identification of key questions for research, hold teams accountable for their work, stress the importance of working to increase student achievement, and act as a resource for guidance and data.

Leadership Theories

*Principals face turbulent change and high levels of uncertainty reflecting their evolving roles, unclear expectations, escalating demands of high stakes accountability, and competing priorities from multiple stakeholders. Such challenges create near impossible job conditions for those who go it alone. Effective principals recognize the power and promise of engaging and focusing the leadership potential of all teachers through distributed leadership structures in order to create collaborative cultures, a school wide collective will for student learning and a sustainable legacy of continuous improvement.*

~Dr. Gale Hulme, 2006

Researchers have been debating theories of school leadership for over fifty years, and both the theory and the practice of instructional leadership are continually evolving. Current theories of transformational and distributed leadership are particularly useful for describing the complex array of leadership qualities that exemplary school leaders demonstrate.

*Transformational Leaders*

Yukl (2002) has described the transformational leadership paradigm in which "the followers feel trust, admiration and loyalty towards a leader, and they are motivated to do

more than they are originally expected to do." Avolio & Bass (2002) have asserted that transformational leadership has four components: (1) idealized leadership; (2) inspirational leadership; (3) intellectual stimulation; and (4) individualized consideration. Transformational leaders are able to motivate their followers to accomplish great things through employing each of these four components. Transformational leaders serve as role models, coaches, and mentors: the relationships they have with their followers provide the catalyst for motivation and achievement.

Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood (2004) have suggested that leaders who exhibit transformational traits focus on the following six areas: (1) providing individual support by considering staff opinions when making decisions, giving moral support, and showing appreciation for a job well done; (2) cultivating a culture which demonstrates and promotes respect and trust among staff and students and adapts new practices based on solid research; (3) building a structure which establishes shared decision making, supports delegation of authority and distributed leadership, and encourages teacher autonomy in making decisions (4) facilitating vision and building consensus regarding school improvement and goals, thus giving students and staff a sense of purpose (5) demonstrating accountability; (6) providing intellectual stimulation and encouraging ongoing professional development.

*Distributed Leadership*

Distributed leadership cultivates collective ownership of successes, problems, responsibility, and results. School leaders who practice distributed leadership see leadership as the job of the entire education community and learning as the focus and primary value for every member. Bennett, Wise, Woods & Harvey (2003) describe

distributed leaders as "creators of conditions for professionals to work and learn together to create a synergy greater than the sum of individual efforts." They have also noted that in a successful distributed leadership culture, individuals contribute their various expertise, build their knowledge and skills, and work collectively towards realizing shared school improvement goals.

Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2001) suggest that distributed leadership calls for employing the expertise of all stakeholders to lead when needed; a successful distributed leader understands the expertise of the group members and matches teacher leaders with the tasks that match their knowledge base. According to Neuman, Fisher, and Simmons, while there is no one single definite model of effective school leadership, there are some common leadership strategies that will improve student achievement. These strategies include developing a shared vision, defining clear priorities, promoting continuous professional learning, linking schools to community resources, providing a strong accountability system, and reorganizing the school and/or district structure when needed. Distributed leaders utilize strategies such as establishing a strong network of teachers who meet on a regular basis to share their own or their students' work, forming study groups that focus on understanding particular issues, and analyzing summative data regarding student performance.

<div align="center">Empirical Research Instructional Practices</div>

Until recently, research has been used as one of many tools to facilitate decision making (Boardman et al., 2005), but NCLB has elevated the importance of educational research, provided funding for rigorous research studies and effective research-based practices, and promoted research-based decision making by requiring school

administrators to seek out and identify effective methods and instructional strategies that

enhance achievement of all students (Chval, Reys, Reys, Tarr & Chavez, 2006). As a

result, educators across the country are striving to base their decision-making practices on

the best research available (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klingerner, 2005):

"We certainly expect no less than evidence-based decision making in medicine,

engineering, pharmacology and other mature professions in which decision making is

based not on personal beliefs but on objectivity and research findings" (Carnine, 2000).

The time when educators made choices for students because those choices "felt

right" has passed (Howell & Nolet, 2000). Contrary to what many might think would be

true, a study conducted by Ysseldyke & Keogh (1999) shows that in even when research

findings demonstrate that a practice is not effective, practitioners persist in implementing

the ineffective strategies; further, even when other techniques and strategies are shown to

be demonstrably better, old methodologies continue to be used. The authors concluded

that while everyone seeks accountability, few actually want to be held accountable for the

achievement of students with disabilities.

This long-acknowledged gap between research and practice has become a national

concern, and the traditional professional development model of teachers attending brief

workshops has been criticized for underestimating the time and effort needed to produce

meaningful changes in practice and for having minimal lasting effect on classroom

instruction (Abbott, Walton, Tapia, & Greenwood, 1999). A four-year longitudinal study

conducted by the University of Kansas called the Juniper Gardens Children's Project

(JGCP) model involved three inner city Title I elementary schools in Kansas City where

the teachers worked in collaboration with University of Kansas researchers. The JGCP

model supported researchers and teachers working together in a continuous problem solving process. The four components of the model were 1) partnership and 2) professional development, linked in action with 3) collaboration and 4) consultation in real-world classrooms. The JGCP model is quite promising, as it promotes dissemination of new research and accelerates teachers' ability to implement validated researched practices.

<center>Differentiated Instruction</center>

One of the key modalities employed by effective principals and teachers is differentiated instruction.  Differentiated instruction is formally defined as the creation of multiple learning paths so that students of different abilities, interests, or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to absorb, use, develop, and present concepts as a part of the daily learning process. This approach moves into the spectrums of different learning styles and intelligence types, allows students to take greater responsibility and ownership for their own learning, and provides opportunities for peer teaching and cooperative learning (Diamond, 2006). Differentiated instruction theory is based in part on the widely accepted understanding that the right and left sides of the brain control different functions; some students favor the left side of the brain, others favor the right, and some fall somewhere in the middle. Building from this innate truth, a system of differentiated instruction called 4MAT was used to develop lessons that involve both sides of the brain as well as meet the discrete needs of four different types of learners: innovative learners, analytic learners, common sense learners, and dynamic learners.

*Innovative learners* are primarily interested in personal meaning. These individuals are motivated for personal reasons and need to have a clear reason for learning (4MAT,

2001). For instructors working with innovative learners, it is generally best to combine

lessons with personal experiences to establish the information's applicability to daily life.

Innovative learners do not easily accept theoretical concepts and variables for later

application. *Analytic learners*, on the other hand, are interested in acquiring facts to

broaden their understanding of a subject (4MAT, 2001). They benefit most from the

traditional teaching methods of lecture, drill, and practice. In previous educational models

that did not differentiate instruction, analytic learners were found to be the only people

receiving maximum benefit from the educational process, which means that those

systems operated at a maximum of 25% efficiency.

C*ommon sense learners* need a hands-on approach so they can figure out how

things actually work. For them, learning is a kinesthetic experience. Kinesthetic learning

has been found to be very meaningful and tangible for many special needs students, and

kinesthetic methodology has also been found to be successful in vocational education

programs. The last type of learner, self-directed *dynamic learners* are frequently the

most gifted students educationally. They rely heavily on their own intuition, are self-

guided, and demonstrate a propensity for role-playing, simulations, and theoretical

applications (4MAT, 2002).

While 4MAT is not the only form of differentiated instruction, it has been around

long enough for researchers to evaluate it. After gaining widespread usage throughout the

mid-1990s, the 4MAT approach demonstrates that differentiated instruction in practice

matches its theoretical component. One of the major successes of the 4MAT modality is

seen in teachers' positive attitudes toward students who respond to creative learning

approaches. While the creative approach has until recently perhaps been an anomaly in

traditional classroom settings, school districts who implement this program are demonstrating its benefits for diverse student populations.

In a study conducted at Florida Atlantic University, researchers sampling 459 individuals found that those using 4MAT techniques of differentiated instruction had a more positive outlook about the role of student creativity in the classroom (Klinetsky, 2000). The control group, which utilized non-differentiated instruction, had significantly lower attitudes toward multiple styles of learning exhibited by students. In all capacities, this study can be considered a victory for a differentiated education approach that proves effective implementation and practice is in alignment with the theoretical component.

Differentiated instruction is also in alignment with theories regarding the dynamics of multiple intelligences. In the past century in traditional educational settings, intelligence has simply been regarded as an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Score, and was thus placed in a purely hierarchical framework. Although IQ scores do not reflect the full spectrum of the aspects of learning, they have proved beneficial, as widespread use has demonstrated that IQ stays fairly consistent throughout a learner's life and provides a framework for categorization (Sternberg, 2000). However, a deep understanding of intelligence, like learning, reaches far beyond this narrow notion: differentiated instruction approaches appear to explain another important piece of this extremely complex puzzle.

One of the leading theories of multiple intelligences is found in the Howard Gardner Model. According to Gardner's model, intelligence can be classified into seven individual components: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Gardner, 2004). His model is not necessarily

hierarchal; instead, it reveals the direction an individual's intelligence leans toward. In

order to maximize a learner's potential, specific methods for differentiating instruction

must be utilized to foster positive and effective learning environments. Clearly, looking at

intelligence from a linear numeric value is very limited; incorporating differentiated

instruction in the classroom is as much about an attitude change in education as it is about

implementation. In a study conducted by Van De Weghe entitled "Expert Students,

Successful Intelligence and Wisdom," the author quotes Paul Guilford:

> There are many individuals who long for the good old days of simplicity, when we
>
> got along with one unanalyzed intelligence…. Humanity's peaceful pursuit of
>
> happiness depends upon our control of nature and of our own behavior; and this, in
>
> turn, depends upon understanding ourselves, including our intellectual resources
>
> (Van De Weghe, 2004, p. 91).

> In terms of accountability, the proverbial "good old days" of education are over.

The new age of education requires a highly flexible dynamic to respond to an era of

increased accountability where diverse students embodying multiple learning styles and

intelligences can be empowered to unlock their full potential. As educator attitudes

change, one of the first innate indicators and triggers for this change occurring

authentically in practice is greater utilization of the modalities of differentiated

instruction.

<div align="center">Inclusion</div>

Schools and classrooms of the 21st century serve a diverse student population that

is representative of our larger society. Some of that increased diversity reflects a growing

number of students with disabilities who are included in general education class

environments (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). Inclusion is perhaps the newest and most promising trend in special education for fostering the least restrictive environment for these students. Based on sound academic theory and research, the inclusion model in practice encompasses both the proverbial "good" and "bad" aspects of educational practice. In perhaps its most important dynamic, however, inclusion can quite efficiently accomplish its purpose if implemented with the proper instruction, preparation and resources. On the other hand, hasty implementation, lack of resources, and a general misunderstanding of how the practice actually works in the classroom have been the cause for much criticism surrounding the practice of inclusion. At this point in the process, there are just as many ill-equipped uses of inclusion as there are effectively functioning models.

Fostering the least-restrictive environment for students is now a legal mandate in the public schools. Public Law 94-142 (Education of All Handicapped Children Act), also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), has parameters that establish the least restrictive environment to maintain and guarantee educational placement for students with disabilities that is as close to the regular classroom as feasible (IDEA, 2002). Essentially, districts are forced to implement inclusion models to conform to IDEA. However, forced implementation does not necessarily guarantee a positive educational dynamic. The legality and forced implementation of inclusion in educational settings can be described as minimalist (Fessenden, 2006), which is not a strategy that will ensure a successful or a sustainable model. Even in the best case scenarios, districts have struggled to keep inclusion doctrine sustainable.

Even though it is still considered one of the newer and theoretical components of special education, inclusion is not a truly new concept; the practice is almost 30 years old (Parker & Pardini, 2006) and numerous studies exist that examine proper implementation and sustainability of inclusion. University of Florida researchers recently conducted a study regarding the Socrates Middle School, generally regarded as a successful model of inclusion, and their efforts to sustain that successful model. Even with well-publicized and reported results, sustaining this progress was a challenge for the district. The researchers found that inclusion was not truly sustained due to "leadership change, teacher turnover, and state and district assessment policy change." The program's sustainability was also adversely affected by reduced support, which was seen as a by-product of the primary factors impacting sustainability (Sindelar et al. 2006). Even in the best-case scenario, the theoretical components of inclusion have trouble thriving in the long run in the daily realities of a district. For most of the studies, factors such as leadership change, turnover, and district policy are not usually regarded in the inclusion model; these often overlooked components are integral to a successful educational model of inclusion.

In the same regard, the role of the general education teacher in inclusion is often beyond his or her scope of understanding. In most training programs for general education teachers, one class regarding exceptionality is all of the theoretical experience teachers have with special needs individuals. In addition, when hasty district inclusion practices lead to poor preparation, a general disdain for a proven methodology is fostered in general education educators. To illustrate this phenomenon, this researcher conducted two personal interviews with general education instructors; the teachers' names were

change to ensure confidentiality. The qualifications for selection included veteran status (at least three years teaching) as well as a current position instructing in a secondary school. In both circumstances, the teachers had somewhat negative attitudes toward inclusion based on their experiences.

Mr. Whitman was a 10th grade general science instructor with six years experience in the public schools. When asked about his general thoughts on inclusion, he cites a common example of a situation he experiences each year:

When I first came into the public school, my exposure to special education was one course I had in college called "The Exceptional Child." Prior to my first day of teaching, I had meticulously planned out my lessons for basic 10th grade science, but nothing could have prepared me for what was in store. My first class was comprised of 25 students, 15 of whom had IEPs. Comparatively speaking, my classroom had more special education students in it than the pure special education class (Whitman, 2006).

When asked about the role of the special education teacher in this process, he went on to explain:

We are a poor rural district with a high concentration of special needs students. I never even saw the overworked special education teacher. My classroom became a survivalist dynamic. The first concern was behavior management, and the next was finding some sort of meaningful curriculum. Individualized approaches were basically out; I didn't even see the IEPs for half of these kids (Whitman, 2006).

It could accurately be stated that Mr. Whitman had a negative feeling about inclusion, though he understood the difference between theory and the reality he was experiencing

in the classroom, stating, "Inclusion is not broken, inclusion is broken at my school…and I think you'll find this in all the surrounding districts in this demographic" (Whitman, 2006).

Mrs. Barrows had a similar outlook regarding inclusion; in her experience as a 9th grade Civics teacher, she encountered a situation with one included girl who was left behind before she even began. In her words,

> I had one young girl who always comes to mind when I hear the word *inclusion*. We'll call her Jenny. Typically, Civics is a class with a very heterogeneous grouping – to the extent that we did it, this was a bad thing. In one class of 25, I had five gifted students, eight special needs students, and the rest were general education students. Jenny was one of the eight special needs students. Jenny couldn't read at a 4th grade level, and her comprehension was non-existent. I felt like a dumping ground; if Jenny got the education she needed from me, I lost the attention of the rest of the class. If I moved at the pace the five gifted students needed, I would have lost the rest of the class. I basically was forced to work somewhere in the middle. For Jenny, she was a casualty of this. I can't imagine she got much from my course (Barrows, 2006).

When asked about the role of the special education teacher, Mrs. Barrows explained:

> The special education teacher was overworked. I saw her only on test days. I would give her Jenny's tests and she would administer them in the special education classroom. One week later, I would get the test back and Jenny would always get an *A*. In the whole year I had her, Jenny never got one question right in class (orally or written), nor did she ever show any sign of information retention. I don't know if

they worked magic in the special education room or if someone just did the work

for her in lieu of time constraints (Barrows, 2006).

Proponents of inclusion would no doubt cringe at the realities found in these case

studies, but the problems with the situations presented by these educators are very

revealing about the true attitudes toward and implementation of inclusion in our public

schools. Accountability must be more than just a number for least restrictive

environments (LREs); it has to bring about real results for inclusion. Like differentiated

educational tactics, the road toward true accountability begins with an authentic shift in

attitude.

Rogers & Sailor describe a new school-wide approach to inclusion. They explain

that inclusion has traditionally been regarded as the placement of special education

students in a general education setting (Sailor and Rogers, 2005). For the two individuals

interviewed, inclusion never extended beyond this narrow capacity; cases such as theirs

demonstrate the necessity of a results-based school-wide approach to inclusion. A school-

wide approach is not a variation on the older "pull-out" model; rather, under emerging

school-wide models, students with IEPs are not removed from general education

classrooms to receive one-on-one therapies and tutorials or to go to "resource rooms."

Instead, following the logic of integration, all services and supports are provided in such

a way as to benefit the maximum number of students, including those who have not been

identified for special education. Learning strategies, positive behavior support, and

transition planning are three excellent examples of effective services (Sailor and Rogers,

2005).

Inclusion is the key to unlocking the theoretical connotations of least restrictive environments; it needs to be embraced and implemented by schools not merely because of legal mandates, but because it works. Functioning in legality only results in minimalist efforts, and meeting the bare minimum for inclusion is actually more problematic than not having it at all. Even though it is still found to be challenging to sustain over time, inclusion on a school-wide level that is embraced and understood as a plausible dynamic is a recipe for success.

## Co-Teaching and Cooperative Grouping

Co-teaching can best be defined as the process of looking at education as a team endeavor rather than an individual pursuit on the educator's level. In a typical traditional model, the teachers are the masters of their classrooms. In this capacity, they are responsible for the learning, discipline, and other dynamics that go into the parameters established in the classroom. This model, while true to a certain extent, is insufficiently narrow. Educating individuals with special needs has to take place on a district-wide level, with a team of educators being responsible for tangible results that prove the accountability of the district. Though individual contexts come into play, working effectively with challenged special needs populations must be a holistic team effort (White et al., 2000).

In practice, utilizing the team approach is comforting to teachers, as they find they are not alone in their endeavors:  a team provides support and the best possible education scenario for the students. In a related study conducted for *Education*, teachers responded to items regarding team formation, compensation, and administrative and parental participation on teams. Findings suggested that the majority of teachers received training

on the purpose and function of student support teams. Results also indicated that teachers were actively involved in the student support team process particularly when they themselves referred a child (Lee-Tarver, 2006, p. 525). Specifically speaking, the environment and willingness to utilize co-teaching strategies exists within the positive dynamics of team functions. Like all of the parameters mentioned in this work, the strategies of educational accountability should not be viewed in their individual contexts. Instead, they should be seen as function of a whole model.

Co-teaching can take many forms. In many contexts it is directly equated to team teaching, where two or more instructors are in the same room. This particular style of teaching has shown solid results within the context of business education. The results of success are based more on group dynamics than content, so it is safe to take the results from business courses and apply them to other classrooms in general. This issue extends beyond public schools and can even be adapted to the highest forms of education. For example, many MBA programs blend separate functional courses to show how the different disciplines interact. Team teaching, in practice, is a way to integrate the core of these interactions (Helms et al., 2005). This dynamic is particularly necessary when dealing with secondary education, as subjects and classrooms in this dynamic can quickly become isolated. This isolation can be problematic, as education should be a holistic function and not the pursuit of individual subjects.

By teaching within these ideological standards, students see the value of teamwork firsthand in practice as well as in theory. It is one thing to stress the importance of collaboration and cooperation; it is quite another tangible endeavor to demonstrate it through team teaching. Team teaching has been shown to provide a positive cooperative

support system for teachers, and to provide a positive environment for students as a demonstrated function of holistic education. One beneficial result is that testing in co-teaching environments has been linked to decreased test-taking anxiety. In addition, co-teaching also presents a unified educational front where teachers are seen as a collective unit for information fostering rather than as individuals working alone on their particular subjects (Goinpath, 2004). Since special education teachers traditionally rarely come into contact with general education students, a co-teaching approach can help increase visibility and understanding, all of which create a non-intimidating culture where student success can have the highest chance of being fostered. In addition, co-teaching also provides contexts where true measurements of accountability can be ascertained due to the ability of one teacher to observe while the other one interacts with the students in the classroom.

At the helm of all accountability indexes stands testing. As a result of this and other contingencies of testing, testing is viewed as a high stakes function which many researchers believe creates anxiety among all individuals involved in the process. With this anxiety comes the propensity for districts to score lower on tests than they should, thus reflecting incorrect notions of progress. If it has been identified that teachers should use an array of strategies to address the needs of diverse learners and so improve student learning, why then do educators not use similar methods and strategies when assessing student progress (Hurren et al. 2006)?  In terms of cooperative groupings, this observation was made by researchers:

> For Matt, the idea of team testing grew out of an observation he made in 2003,
> while he was teaching English classes for grades 5 through 8. Matt noticed that his

students could readily discuss any given grammatical or mechanical idea, so long as

they were "talking about" it or could speak their minds in the classroom. When

students were asked to read a sentence aloud and locate its direct object, the

majority could accomplish the task with relative ease. When students were asked to

identify the characteristics that distinguish a concrete noun from an abstract noun,

most of them could do that as well. However, as soon as written tests were

distributed, the students' knowledge simply vanished (Hurren et al. 2006, p. 443).

With this phenomenon in mind, this teacher began doing lower-level informal testing

evaluations based on cooperative grouping. In terms of cooperative grouping in general,

the results have been very positive.

In cooperative grouping, also known as cooperative learning, several dynamics

can be attributed to maximizing the positive effects of the practice. By using a

cooperative incentive structure and a cooperative task structure, researchers have shown

the process to be quite efficient (Veenman, 2000). Cooperative incentive structure is

formally defined as a dynamic wherein two or more pupils work interdependently for a

reward to be shared by them if they succeed as a group. This structure has been divided

into three types of categories: 1) whether or not the reward is given to the groups, and if

so, whether the reward is based on 2) individual learning or 3) single group products

where all members contributed equally (Veenman, 2000).

Researchers have concluded that cooperative learning is most effective when the

groups are recognized or rewarded on the basis of the individual learning of the members.

Group goals and individual accountability stimulate pupils to help each other and

encourage maximum effort. Studies of cooperative learning methods incorporating group

goals and individual accountability show a much higher median effect size than studies of other methods. The median effect size across 52 studies including group goals and individual accountability was + 0.32 and only + 0.07 across 25 studies not including group goals and individual accountability (Veenman, 2000, p. 281).

As a result, the propensity for students to cooperate and help each other is a very strong and unifying structure. Much in the same way that teachers benefit from collaboration, students also benefit from the same contingencies as teamwork. As a result of this dynamic, co-teaching and cooperative grouping were discussed under the same subheading in this work. While one is a function of teachers and the other is a function of students, they both draw from similar ideological perceptions that are backed by strong research modalities.

<div align="center">Instructional Scaffolding</div>

In terms of education, the term *scaffolding* is used to describe the process of supporting learners while they acquire new skills. When utilizing instructional scaffolding, the skilled instructor establishes the task and fits the level of assistance to just one step beyond what the learner can do independently (Purdue, 2006). Once mastery is accomplished through the skilled individual providing a scaffold, the scaffold is gradually removed until the individual can perform the operation independently without any instruction or assistance.

Like inclusion, scaffolding is not necessarily a new strategy. It was first specifically described by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in a 1976 study, though most educators understand agree that the process is probably as old as mankind itself (Purdue, 2006). In this capacity, it can be considered a tried and true methodology that works and provides

results. When it comes to ensuring accountability, successful scaffolding can lead to high

results for retention and application.

   While scaffolding has been used with great success in secondary schools, its true

strength lies in its timeless versatility. In a particular 2006 study, the practice was used to

show how effective scaffolding equated to positive experiences for young children in day

care. Though all young children show some stress behaviors when dropped off in day

care settings, those institutions that utilize age-appropriate scaffolding methods have a

higher success rate for minimizing those stressors than their counterparts who do not use

scaffolding techniques. A study for *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* explores certain

stress behaviors, such as tantrums and aggressive actions, which are potentially harmful

or disruptive to the self and others. When these behaviors occur, children should quickly

receive guidance to help them manage future stress behaviors in less disruptive ways.

With guidance (scaffolding), children can learn what is less socially acceptable and at the

same time receive mentorship in self-regulation skills. Learning does not always co-occur

with development, but when it does, children can practice skills on a new developmental

level. When learning and development do not co-occur, learning is stagnant and often is

only a reminder of what is already known (Chang, 2006, p. 159). The learning scaffold,

in this model, is the critical component for helping the process of learning and

development. The same modality can easily be transferred to general and special

education parameters.

   In educational contexts, scaffolding can best be described as the pursuit of

independent functions. In all fundamental aspects, educational accountability can best be

demonstrated through students accomplishing desired tasks without the aid of teaching

instruction, with full autonomy being the ultimate goal. The practice can essentially be paired with proper implementation of inclusion. In the problematic inclusion model mentioned by Mrs. Barrows, Jenny's inclusive LRE did not provide scaffolding with attainable results. In this context, at the year's end, the student did not retain any autonomy, and as a result, the scaffolding being used for inclusion was unsuccessful.

Successful teachers and cooperative teaching teams can skillfully use scaffolding to accomplish their desired goals. In a study conducted in the journal *The Reading Teacher*, the process of scaffolding in this context is thoroughly explained:

> Successful teachers help to create independent learners – in the case of reading teachers, independent readers. We do not want to produce children who can read only in the presence of adults. We want children who can read for enjoyment and knowledge on their own [this goal is the function of mastery learning and the destination of scaffolding] (Beed et al., 2000, p. 648).

While this is just a reading example, the same could easily be said of mathematics or any other tangible dynamic of instruction or desired behavior.

## Summary

When examining the factors behind the success of exemplary middle school principals and teachers in Pacesetter schools, the sub-contexts of practical educational implementation strategies are firmly in place as a key component of their success and tangible accountability.  Implementing a sound balance between the theoretical and the practical can give schools the ability to these methodologies effectively while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls less successful districts have fallen victim to.

In this capacity, particularly in the contexts of individuals with special needs, innovative approach to education begins on the ideological level. Essentially, before implementation can occur, the attitude and sincerity behind it truly fuels effective methodology (Booth, 2003). A sincere positive attitude from an effective leader can play a key role in creating and providing the necessary support to accomplish school-wide goals.

By differentiating instruction, schools can cater classroom instruction towards all the varieties of learning styles as well as to the different variables of human intelligence. It is here that the theoretical and the practical converge to create the most dynamic setting to maximize learning potential. Successful models utilize positive inclusion structures that are fueled with the proper planning, support, and structure to truly provide a least restrictive environment. Using team-centered development and ideology at both the teacher and student level through co-teaching and cooperative groupings, autonomy through successful scaffolding can be created. In all capacities, the adaptability and seamless interaction of all of these methodologies can allow school districts to lead the way toward positive accountability and to truly leave no child behind.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methods used to examine strategies and techniques implemented by exemplary Pacesetter middle school principals that promote the achievement of students with disabilities. The chapter is organized into seven sections: (a) introduction, (b) research questions, (c) research design and strategy, (d) population/sampling, (e) instrumentation, (f) data analysis, and (g) summary.

Introduction

The rationale for choosing one method of study over another is related to the underlying goals of the research and the nature of the subject to be examined. The underlying goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of what contributed to the successes of these schools by examining the strategies and techniques used by exemplary middle school principals who promote the achievement of students with disabilities. This chapter discusses how the role of the principal and the principal's methods helped increase the achievement of students with disabilities and helped the schools to meet AYP goals. The exemplary northeast Georgia middle schools selected all received the Pacesetter Award for 2004-2005.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is "What strategies and techniques do middle school principals use to promote student achievement and to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?"

1. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote the achievement of students with disabilities?

2. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?

3. How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques that their principals promote?

4. How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary principals make?

5. What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary school leaders?

<div align="center">Research Design and Strategy</div>

The researcher sought to examine the strategies and techniques promoted by exemplary middle school principals that have proven to be successful in influencing achievement scores of students with disabilities in middle schools that meet AYP goals. A qualitative study was carried out though the use of unstructured interviews of principals and teachers. A qualitative case study approach is appropriate for this type of study because it allows the researcher to delve in depth into the complexities of school accountability while examining strategies school principals have identified that have proved to increase achievement on test scores. A case study method was used, aimed at providing what Merriam (2001) refers to as "intensive descriptions and analyses" (p. 19). Because research on special needs education is often complex, qualitative approaches offer a useful avenue for understanding how leadership is defined and implemented, how leaders are shaped by external factors, and how teachers are influenced by leaders' behaviors.

Qualitative research elicits the contextualized nature of experiences and actions, and attempts to generate detailed analyses (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Crabtree and Miller (1999) note that qualitative designs are usually used for identification, description, and explanation. Data triangulation is essential for establishing the validity of a qualitative study; according to Ghesquiere, Maes & Vandenberghe (2004), triangulation or the use of different angles to find a meaningful structure is always part of the process of qualitative analysis.

One strength of a qualitative study is that it allows the researcher to seek and explore why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds (Marshall, 1985). The researcher in this study sought to understand how accountability reform has impacted the principal and if this reform has changed his or her way of implementing strategies and techniques that influence the achievement of students with disabilities. In selecting this methodology, the researcher seeks an understanding of the processes in the natural school setting. Qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to study change from the principals' perspectives and gain in-depth understanding of the participants' concerns regarding AYP and school accountability.

The focus of the study was on discovery and exploration of the strategies and techniques used by middle school principals that influence student achievement. Furthermore, the study allowed the researcher to gain insight into how accountability has affected instructional strategies for all students. This research offers great promise for making a significant contribution to the knowledge base and practice of education.

Population/Sampling

The selection of schools for this study was based on the AYP status and Pacesetter recognition of Northeast Georgia middle schools. The researcher consulted the Georgia Department of Education and reviewed the results of the *Criterion Referenced Competency Test* to determine the number of schools recognized as Pacesetter schools that met AYP goals for school year 2004 - 2005 in the subgroup of students with disabilities.

The Georgia Department of Education Division of Exceptional Students meets the mandate to monitor compliance with the national Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by implementing the Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (GCIMP). The GCIMP promotes continuous, equitable educational improvement for students with disabilities while ensuring ongoing compliance with procedures. The GCIMP methods are based on the United States Department of Education and the Office of Special Education Programs'(OSEP) approach of continuous improvement and focused monitoring via a data collection system that uses the performance goals and indicators to measure improvement and make comparisons nationally and within the state.

Pacesetter schools are schools that have received state recognition for leadership and for raising the achievement levels of special needs students. The Georgia Department of Education's Division for Exceptional Children and the Georgia Council for Administrators of Special Education recognizes Pacesetter schools with students with disabilities as most improved in the following areas:  "increasing the time students with disabilities spent in the general education classroom, increasing the percentage of

students with disabilities who met or exceeded standards on statewide achievement tests, and decreasing the gap between the achievement of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers." These school systems' performance data placed them in the top ten percent of comparably sized systems; they received Pacesetter recognition as high achievers and as most improved based on progress compared to Georgia school systems of a similar size.

The population of this study consisted of the five schools/districts that received recognition as Pacesetter schools in the 2004 -2005 school year; there are 14 middle schools in this category of Pacesetter schools. The researcher sampled one school from each of the five districts participating in the study. The study consists of interviews and observations with five principals and five teachers from each district during the school term 2004 - 2005 that received the Pacesetter Award who received recognition for leadership and for raising the achievement levels of special needs students (see Table 1). The 2004-2005 school year was selected because it yields the latest available data on a consistent statewide basis. The scores used in the selection process are reading and math scores from grades six through eight.

Prior to collecting any data, the researcher was cleared by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University to interview Georgia middle school principals to examine strategies and techniques they used to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet adequate yearly progress goals (see appendix I). The sample population that consisted of five principals and five teachers was appropriate for the study because it was representative sample from the total population of Pacesetter schools in Northern Georgia. The interviews were scheduled with the participants at their

respective schools and at a time that best suited them. The unstructured interviews were conducted in the confines of each principal's office, and the teacher interviews were conducted in the confines of each teacher's classroom during their planning sessions. Each interview took approximately sixty minutes to complete. The research design for the study was qualitative in nature.

The researcher's role in the described study included determining which Georgia school principals were selected for the study, gathering their consent to participate in the study, interviewing and observing these principals and teachers regarding the strategies and techniques that influenced the achievement of students with disabilities, conducting an analysis of the responses to the interview questions, relating them to the initial literature, and presenting the findings.

Table 1

*Northeast Georgia's Pacesetter Middle Schools 2004-2005*

| County/ City | Number of Pacesetter Schools | Number of Teachers | Number of Students with Disabilities Tested |
|---|---|---|---|
| District A | 1 | 41 | 59 |
| District B | 5 | 85 | 128 |
| | | 99 | 115 |
| | | 65 | 107 |
| | | 62 | 147 |
| | | 71 | 153 |
| District C | 5 | 77 | 140 |
| | | 73 | 105 |
| | | 63 | 111 |
| | | 81 | 112 |
| | | 74 | 117 |
| District D | 2 | 59 | 89 |
| | | 40 | 54 |
| District E | 1 | 17 | 38 |

Source: Georgia Department of Education/Governor's Office of Student Achievement
Total Number of Pacesetter Middle Schools: *N=14*
Total Number of Pacesetter Schools in Georgia: *N=76*
*Title I Schools

Instrumentation

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), a researcher must follow basic steps in

the construction of an instrument:  designing the research objective, designing the

questionnaire format, field-testing the questionnaire, writing a cover letter, distributing

the questionnaire, and analyzing the data from the questionnaire. For this study, a letter

was sent electronically to the 14 Pacesetter principals commending them on their

successful strategies employed in raising the test scores of students with disabilities and

congratulating the school for being recognized by the Georgia Department of Education's Division of Exceptional Children and by the Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education for their high performance data on standardized testing and for receiving the Pacesetter award in recognition of their leadership and success with students with special needs. The letter requested that the school participate in a study to examine the strategies and techniques employed by exemplary Georgia Pacesetter middle schools principals to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and meet AYP goals. The letter also requested consent from the principal to participate in the study and request permission to include one teacher selected by the principal to be interviewed.

Participation in the study required that principals were employed at the Pacesetter school during the school term of 2004 – 2005. All interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher. These five schools were sampled from those consenting to participate in the study. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the project. The letter of request for participation in the study can be found in the Appendices.

According to Thorndike (1997), establishing validity necessitates a set of reviewers who have knowledge of the subject; in this study, these knowledgeable reviewers were the selected principals and teachers. An unstructured guided interviewing technique created an environment in which, as e. Yin (1989) has observed that "the interviews will appear to be guided conversation rather than structured queries" (p. 87). Each principal was asked to discuss specific actions he or she took to improve the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP goals, allowing the researcher to uncover emerging trends and shifts in the real-world application of leadership

strategies, especially those that have a positive measurable result on the achievement of students with disabilities.

The interviews with the principals addressed a more complex focus, and the interviews with the teachers allowed the researcher to engage in a broader level of study. Interviews with the principals focused on uncovering useful insights into the ways accountability issues influence principals' choice and implementation of strategies that increase test scores of students with disabilities. Interviews with the teachers focused on exploration, discovery, and validation of effective strategies and techniques in the classroom. All data was labeled and categorized, later to be summarized. This triangulation of the data provided the researcher with a better understanding of the study, and the unstructured technique allowed other information to emerge which may yield recommendations for further research on increasing student achievement. The four principals of the Pacesetter middle schools sampled in the state of Georgia were sent an electronic letter of introduction delineating the purpose of the study, the involvement of the participants, confidentiality protection and the consent process. They were also asked to send out the letter/email to their staff. The interviews focused on the research questions of the study: (1) What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote the achievement of students with disabilities? (2) What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities? (3) How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques that their principals promote? (4) How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary

principals make? (5)What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary

school leaders?

Informed consent was obtained via the respondents reading the informed consent

form and agreeing to participate in the research project. Participation was be completely

voluntary. The participants in this study remained anonymous at all times, and their

identities were strictly guarded by those involved in the study.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a variety of sources, with the method guiding the

examination being triangulation of data, or the process of utilizing all of the information

gathered from a variety of sources; in this case, that meant incorporating data collection

from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Field notes were used to record

significant points made during the audio taped interview; all interviews were transcribed,

and triangulation of the data and member checking was used to establish internal validity.

Each piece of data was reviewed, labeled, and categorized. Interviews, categories, and

assessment of the category set allowed the researcher to validate the findings and seek

similarities in the data to uncover emerging themes in school leadership. The participants

were mailed the transcriptions, quotes, and/or paraphrases for their review and asked to

clarify and/or interpret observations to be mailed back to the researcher in a self-

addressed stamped envelope.

*Delimitations*

The study was limited to five school districts in Georgia that met AYP goals in

the school year of 2004-2005 and received the Pacesetter Award for recognition of their

leadership and success with students with disabilities. These middle schools are from

districts that have received the Pacesetter Award in elementary and high schools as well; however, for this study the researcher purposively sampled from the five middle schools in those districts.

*Limitations*

The limitations of this study include the ability to generalize the findings to other state school districts. This study was limited to four northeast Georgia middle school principals and four teachers. Initially five principals were asked to participate in this study, but only four principals agreed to participate; the other school declined interviews and observations due to extenuating circumstances beyond the researcher's. Demographic make-up of the school systems in Georgia may not be similar to other school districts, which may limit findings. The population sample may also serve to limit the study.

Summary

The population of the study and procedures for data collection were described. The study's design and methodology was based on gathering material from a variety of sources, with the largest source for the study being interviews with four participating principals and four teachers aimed at discovering and defining specific strategies and techniques employed to positively influence achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP goals for 2004-2005. Triangulation allowed the researcher to ensure validity and reliability, as well as search for convergence of evidence, emerging trends, or consistency among evidence from multiple and varied data sources (interviews, observations, documents).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The myriad students populating our nation's classrooms today come from many different backgrounds and have a wide variety of learning styles. Meeting the needs of this diverse community in this age of increased accountability is a challenge, and Georgia schools that receive the Pacesetter Award are leading the way to discovering truly effective ways of reaching our diverse student populations. This research study examined the strategies and techniques used by principals in Pacesetter schools that yielded positive measurable outcomes in the achievement of students with disabilities and met adequate yearly progress goals for the entire school. Four schools were selected based on their Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) results from 2004 -2005 and on their receipt of the Pacesetter Award for recognition of their leadership and success with students with disabilities.

The researcher collected and analyzed three primary types of data for this qualitative study:  review of school improvement plans, transcriptions of principal and teacher interviews, and field notes on school and classroom observations. The names of schools, principals, and teachers were changed to protect the privacy of the participants of this study.  The findings stem from the study's research questions:

1. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote the achievement of students with disabilities?

2. What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?

3. How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques that their principals promote?

4. How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary principals make?

5. What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary school leaders?

This chapter presents evidence from the collected data that define and document the strategies and techniques that exemplary Georgia middle school principals employ to influence the achievement of students with disabilities. The case study method proved effective in gaining a valid picture of the strategies and techniques used to influence student achievement. All interviews of both principals and teachers were audio taped and later transcribed, field notes were kept on each participant, and walk-through observations of classrooms were made at each school site. The interviews and observations were later analyzed for their evidentiary value. The collected data were analyzed to draw on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998) including both informal discussions and more formal transcribed interviews with each participant in the study. The process of networking referred to as "snowball" or "chain sampling" was used to identify information-rich teacher participants as a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990, p. 176). Each principal at each school selected a teacher for further interviewing and classroom observation.

By utilizing a constant comparison approach to analyzing data (Glaser, 1978), emerging themes led to the formulation of five characteristics (Stake,1995) that define and illustrate the strategies and techniques Pacesetter principals employed to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and meet adequate yearly progress goals.

The data analysis involved five steps, as suggested by Stake (1995): (1) managing data in a format that would facilitate analysis; (2) reading the data throughout the process of data collection to get an overall sense of it and to note emerging themes; (3) describing the case in detail; (4) classifying the data; and (5) synthesizing and interpreting data to identify emerging themes about the study. Presenting the findings as a set of emerging themes is an accepted way of reporting the lessons learned from a case study (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995).

<div align="center">School Portraits</div>

*Southside Middle School*

Southside Middle is located west of Atlanta in a rural farming area, and is one of five middle schools in its home county.  It serves sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, with a student population of approximately 1000. The demographic profile of the student population is 87 % White, 3% African American, and 10% Hispanic. Approximately 17 % of the student population qualify for free or reduced lunch, and approximately 10% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. The teaching staff is 95% White and 5% African American. The average educational level for faculty is a Master's degree, and the average length of teaching experience is 16 years. The principal, Mr. Sims (a pseudonym), has been at this school for over fifteen years. According to principal Sims, "the social needs of our kids are generally the same." He sees a shift in socioeconomic factors in the community contributing to a shift in the demographics of the populations his school serves. The school is located in a rural area with a growing population of Hispanic students migrating to the area. The principal attributes this increase in population to an increase in Hispanic families finding

employment in neighboring counties; most of the families reside in rental properties. In addition, he observes that the number of African American families in the area is diminishing due to the types of homes being built in the area; many African American families cannot afford the increasingly expensive housing of the area, so they move to another area that is closer to their place of employment and where the homes are more affordable.  His assessment of the current changes in population concludes, "We are still a rural area and most of our kids' families are working class, but over the past ten years we are becoming more affluent."

During the interview principal Sims said he knew of several teachers who he would identify as potential participants for this study. Principal Sims suggested that Ms. Taylor (a pseudonym) would be an excellent teacher participant for my study.

*Northside Middle School*

Northside Middle school is one of two middle schools in its home county and serves sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, with a student population of approximately 1000. The demographic profile of the student population is 85% White, 10% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. Northside Middle is located east of Atlanta in a rural area. Approximately 18% of the students receive reduced or free lunch and 13% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. The teaching staff is 95% White and 5% Hispanic. Fifty percent of the faculty has Master's degrees, and the years of teaching experience vary widely, with the average teacher having 15 years of experience. The principal, Mrs. Jones (a pseudonym), has been at this school for over ten years; she describes the schools' culture as "a melting pot of all diverse learners." According to the principal, the school has a large population of both gifted and

special education students. Principal Jones shared how she challenged her teachers to develop programs or implement programs that would help students who were struggling to pass the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) that Georgia has implemented as part of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 to assess students' mastery of the skills and knowledge described in the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). Principal Jones suggested Ms. White (a pseudonym) as a teacher participant for the study.

*Eastside Middle School*

Eastside Middle is one of five middle schools in its home county and serves sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, with a student body of approximately 1400. The demographic profile of the student population is 12 % African American, 82% White, 4% Hispanic, and 2 % multiracial. Eastside is located east of Atlanta in an affluent rural area. Approximately 5% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch, and approximately 10% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. The teaching staff is 99% White and 1% African American. The educational level ranges from a Masters to an Educational Specialist Degree, and years of teaching experience range from three years to 30 years. The principal, Ms. French (a pseudonym), who was interviewed has been at this school between 10 and 15 years. According to principal French, the population is quite affluent, but over the past few years the needs of the students have began to change. During the interview, she discussed strategies and techniques she uses to empower her faculty to work together to collaboratively address the changing needs of the students they serve. Principal French selected Mrs. Brewer as the teacher participant for the study.

*Westside Middle School*

Westside Middle School is located in a rural area with a large farming population. It is one of five middle schools in its home county that serves sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, with a student population slightly over 1000. The demographic profile of the student population is 49 % African American, 37% White, 7% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, and 3% Asian. Approximately 18% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch, and 12% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Sixty percent of the teaching staff is White, and 33% is African American, with faculty educational levels ranging from a 4-year degree to a 6-year degree. The years of teaching experience range from one to thirty years, and the principal has been at this school between ten and fifteen years. According to principal Parks (a pseudonym), the population of students has remained the same over the last ten years. In the interview, principal Parks discussed how data determine which specific instructional practices are implemented. Principal Parks observes, "Demographics, data and research are the driving force of every facet of the school improvement process at our school." Principal Parks, selected Ms. Hitchcock as the teacher participant in the study.

<div align="center">Observations</div>

*On-site Observations*

Unity and harmony were evident at each school, with the mission and vision statement clearly posted on every hall, and a high level of collaboration, with teachers working together on lessons plans at the end of the school day. Each principal noted that teachers meet weekly to collaborate on future plans, reflect on past lessons, analyze student work and progress, and engage in trouble shooting and problem solving

discussions. Inviting graphic organizers adorned the walls, student work was well displayed, visually appealing word walls were in use to promote group learning, and awards that the school had received were also on display. The students were actively engaged in learning in the classrooms, and a majority of the students were working collaboratively with each other.

Several of the schools had a special room designated to facilitate professional learning for the teachers. Essential questions, word walls, concept maps, graphic organizers were displayed from previous trainings, and the school mission and vision as well as the school improvement plan were displayed prominently on the walls. Teachers had displayed pertinent data regarding class progress in the form of graphs and had created a competitive spirit within the school from team to team. Pictures of the faculty were also displayed, as well as pictures of students from previous years, giving the schools an inviting family atmosphere where it seemed that everyone was welcome and encouraged to learn and grow.

Students greeted the principals by name with genuine affability; clearly, the principals were very visible in their schools, and the students knew them well and felt comfortable speaking to them. The classrooms were orderly and attractive, and the work displayed on the walls demonstrated an evidence of different types of student learning, expression, and achievement.

*Southside Middle School Classroom Observation*

On March 19, 2007, several collaborative, inclusive classes were observed; the featured class for Southside Middle school was a third period sixth grade science class, with students ranging from 11 to 12 years old. The class meets for 55 minutes each day,

and there are 28 students: one Mexican male, four black females, four black males, seven white males, and twelve white females. On the day the class was observed, five students were absent, and two students were pulled out to work with the speech therapist and a psychiatrist. The children in the class were classified as learning disabled students, students with emotional behavior disorders, gifted students, and slow learners. During the observation the teacher used an oral questioning technique that required the students to collaborate in order to generate a meaningful response. The students worked in cooperative grouping as the teacher taught a whole class lesson, and she frequently engaged all learners by asking them to think, pair and share what they had learned with a peer. Evidently the relevant characteristics of students with exceptional needs and abilities clearly influenced the decisions the teacher made when planning the lesson. Scaffolding was evident during this lesson as the students built on concepts from earlier lessons; throughout the lesson, the teacher repeatedly referred to the word wall to encourage students to visualize and connect the new concepts being taught to previously mastered concepts.

*Northside School Classroom Observation*

On March 20, 2007 an eighth grade inclusive classroom was observed. Students were working cooperatively in groups to deepen their understanding of the methods scientists use to solve problems. The students participated in a interactive lesson on inquiry entitled, "Jelly-Side Down--Or Is It?" during which they were predicting, communicating, observing, formulating hypotheses, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions based on the data collected in the investigation. It was evident that students were applying concepts across the curriculum; one student called out, "We are making

graphs in math today." The class ran so smoothly and was so inclusive that it was not possible to tell which students had disabilities and which students were designated as gifted. The class clearly embodied the concept of "learning community" with teachers as facilitators. Students were actively engaged and helping each other learn concepts that they may not have been able to master on their own.  When different groups of students met with stumbling blocks in the assignment, the teacher went about offering assistance by asking probing questions and encouraging students to use collaboration, critical thinking skills, and creative problem solving techniques.

To meet the special needs of the slower learners, the teacher or the team teacher would ask preliminary guided questions that would allow those particular students to participate in a way that gave the support they needed to contribute to the conversation as well as increase their self-confidence. For example, for one student, B.J. (a pseudonym), the teacher asked a question that was solely an opinion question; this effective strategy allowed the student with the disability to participate fully and experience success in the classroom. The students in this classroom all displayed a mutual respect for each other's opinions and ideas and seemed to truly appreciate diversity. In a number of cases, students who were experiencing difficulty comprehending the questions were assisted by their peers.

*Eastside Middle School Classroom Observation*

On March 21, 2007 the teacher began this inclusive class with a science lesson that demonstrated the concepts of properties of matter. The purpose of the lesson was for the students to understand particle movement and the molecular aspects of the states of matter. The teacher made the lesson relevant to the student's daily experience by

beginning the demonstration by boiling a pot of water. The teacher then poured the warm

water in a plastic sealed milk jug. One student observed, "The jug is going to expand

because the particles are moving around." Another student replied, "No it won't--the jug

will melt!" This real-world opening activity allowed the teacher to quickly assess the

students' previous knowledge and allowed her to quickly group the students

heterogeneously with regard to ability. She and the collaborative teacher worked one-on-

one with the students who were struggling, and the more advanced students moved on to

the lab station. The teacher skillfully differentiated instruction for all ability levels and

engaged in a wide range of learning styles. At the conclusion of the lesson, she asked

each student to demonstrate the class's key concepts as his or her "ticket out the door."

The teacher later explained that this strategy allowed the students to communicate their

understanding of the concept in their predominant learning style in a creative way. Some

students acted out the movement of a gas molecule, some of the boys made up rap lyrics

about the lesson, while others drew pictures to demonstrate what they learned. The two

teachers did an admirable job of working together as a team to meet the needs of a

diverse group of learners and ensure a successful and positive learning experience for

each student.

*Eastside Middle School Classroom Observation*

The Eastside Middle School classroom observation on March 22, 2007 took place

in a consumer science connections class serving students with severe disabilities; the

class was designed to allow students with disabilities to be actively involved with general

education students in activities that required social interaction for the tasks to be

completed. In this class the students were actively engaged in a hands-on activity of

baking cookies, and general education students and special needs students were collaborating as they were busily measuring and stirring ingredients. The teacher facilitated the instruction by asking questions as the students were working at their stations. Principal French commented that she felt that allowing the profoundly severe students to participate in connections classes allowed these students to experience success and gave the other students a deeper understanding of diversity as well as taught them to accept all students and to treat them with respect.

<div align="center">Emerging Themes</div>

Effective leaders understand the need to balance pushing for change while at the same time protecting important aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving. They know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align with each other and also how to align them with organizational priorities. Each of the principals in this study demonstrated an open, caring, approachable persona, a strong belief in equity and the power of the democratic process, and a strategic approach to the evolution of school improvement.

*Emerging Theme 1: The exemplary principals' pursuit of professional development influenced the achievement of students with disabilities and the meeting of adequate yearly progress goals.*

Principal Sims described himself as a "leader of leaders" who continues to develop and learn over time; he adds that he realizes that expertise is not centralized, but rather is generally distributed among many participants. Principal Sims discussed how his and his teachers' pursuit of professional development led him to focus on the achievement of students with disabilities through the implementation of Learning

Focused School model; this model helped teachers understand the need to teach with the end in mind. By sharing specific book studies that fit the needs of the school community, the principals were each able to provide their faculties with research that supported the actual needs of their school. Research has shown a direct correlation between improving teachers' instructional practices and increasing student achievement, (Marzano, 2003), and the teachers at these schools mirrored those findings: Ms. Taylor commented, "We began to operate more like a learning community," and Mrs. White believed that professional development modalities such as differentiating instruction, collaborative teaching, and Learning Focused Schools contributed to the improved achievement of student with disabilities and to the meeting of AYP goals.

Principal French demonstrated how research specific to the needs of his school help moved them forward. She observed, "Our students come from affluent backgrounds, but their needs were totally different 20 years ago. We addressed this concern through a book study that focused on how to address the needs of students with disabilities that come from wealthy families. Our parents may give their children monetary gifts, but when it comes to assisting them with their learning, they are often not available. We developed an intervention pyramid to address these needs and one strategy employed was offering a study hall class in which those students would receive the help and assistance needed by providing them with peer tutors to assist with homework." Principals' sharing of pertinent research with their faculties was evident in other schools as well; Mrs. White commented that Principal Jones often placed articles in their mailboxes, and that they later discussed the information during grade level meetings.

Principal Parks commented that since the implementation of the Learning Focus School model, teachers now understand the importance of meeting the needs of all students and "to do this they must work closely together to meet the students where they are." In several inclusive classrooms, students were seen working collaboratively together and were engaged in active learning that allowed them to use multiple avenues for success in the classroom. For example, in one inclusive classroom, the students were engaged in a cooperative group activity in which they were studying inertia. The teacher introduced the students to the lesson, and then instructed the students to work together to move to the lab tables to apply the concept. The students had to cooperate to apply the previously learned concepts, and several of them referred to the word walls for assistance in completing the lesson.

Ms. Taylor commented, "Our principal models effective classroom lessons. During all professional development workshops, an essential question is posted, word walls are displayed, and we collaborate. We take this back to our classroom and employ these techniques; they are wonderful, and the kids actually get it." Principal Jones summed it all up by saying, "I must continue to seek ways for teachers to be lifelong learners, and I must guide, lead, and monitor their progress. I must continue to help teachers with planning and implementing differentiated instruction, and increase higher-order thinking questions to move all students to exceed standards."

In summary, these exemplary school leaders fostered effective professional development for their teachers that was designed to raise cultural awareness and better prepare staff members to provide differentiated instruction to all students. The training these teachers received went far beyond simple handouts and directions about how to

meet the instructional needs of a diverse population; rather, the staff development was systematic and continual. Each principal empowered his or her staff teachers to demonstrate what they learned during professional development at faculty meetings. The use of employing new instructional practices through professional development, as well as connecting these practices to the overall goals of the school, helped contribute to the schools' success in meeting AYP goals and in improving the overall achievement of students with disabilities. Principal Parks attributed his school's success at meeting AYP goals to the teachers learning how to focus on the diverse learning styles of students and making sure students with disabilities were acclimated to the regular education curriculum. Other techniques and strategies that helped student achievement were the use of study groups, diversity groups, and professional reading groups that the schools had participated in.

*Emerging Theme 2: The development of the exemplary schools' mission and vision was aligned with the schools' improvement plan and guided the schools' principals as they employed strategies and techniques that influenced the achievement of students with disabilities.*

Principal Sims discussed how the school improvement plan and the mission guide the instructional practices of the school;  as he states, the first step to achieve equity in learning is to employ a mission where every student in the school feels valued. Mrs. Brewer commented that the principal formed a mission and vision committee in which the stakeholders collaborated to create the vision and mission that met the needs of all students and that addressed the need to celebrate accountability. Principal French felt that by allowing the teachers to collaboratively develop the mission and vision, the culture of

the school shifted from teaching to learning. Mrs. White commented, "We meet weekly to discuss any strategies that we have used in our classroom. Through our collaborative meetings, we have identified strategies that yield successful results. Sometimes we also find out what does *not* work, but this is all done through a rich dialogue, and we keep in mind our school's mission, which is teaching and learning--with an emphasis on learning."

Principal Parks shared that he and his leadership team, which was made up of administrators, parents, students and stakeholders, challenged the entire faculty to follow one single vision which focused on discovering why students were not learning. With this in mind, teachers began to dialogue, they began to experiment with different designs when planning lessons, and they were empowered to make thoughtful decisions regarding instructional practices. They soon came to abandon inefficient or unsuccessful strategies that they once thought worked, and to adopt new strategies that had proven results through research. Principal Parks commented, "Our school improvement plan was designed based on the specific needs that were identified by the test data for students with disabilities," and Ms. Hitchcock added, "We are an empowered faculty tackling school improvement."

In summary, whole study groups provided a common language and a shared vision for these schools. The leaders from each of these schools did not overlook the power of teacher leaders in impacting student achievement. All of the principals felt that working with the leadership team to develop a school improvement plan that catered to the specific needs of the school was an efficient and effective strategy.

*Emerging Theme 3:  Exemplary schools used data analysis and solid research to drive decisions regarding instruction.*

All four principals and teachers shared how they used research data to influence instruction. Principal Jones shared how data analyses determine areas of focus, and how specific strategies are developed and programs implemented based on the results of the analyses. Mrs. Brewer discussed how they present the data to the students during test talks, allowing the students to actually see their individual strengths and areas for improvement. These talks are used to motivate and enhance the students' awareness of their progress throughout the school year.

Mrs. White observed, "As a school, we are employing strategies that research says are effective with students with disabilities. For example, we assess students frequently to determine areas of weaknesses and strengths, and we use this data to guide instruction." Ms. Taylor commented on the use of benchmarks to monitor student's progress. Principal French discussed how she formed a committee of teachers to desegregate the test data; later, the committee identified students who did not meet standards and created specific instructional practices tailored to help these students succeed.

In fact, all of the schools in this study shared that they felt an effective strategy was the alignment of instructional practices around data-driven decisions. Principal Sims stated, "Data analysis is now the driving force of every facet of our school improvement plan." Teachers were trained to go beyond simple analysis of the data, and, as Ms. Taylor commented, "We were not just told to analyze the data, but our principal also offered professional training. As a result, we began to take ownership of data analysis." Principal

Parks attributes meeting AYP goals to the Learning Focus School Model and inclusion teaching. He stressed that advice he would offer to other middle school principals in selecting strategies and techniques would be to make sure their choices were research-based.

Mrs. Brewer shared how student achievement data actually changed her teaching style. She talked about how Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) data were reviewed, and how students were placed in classes according to how they scored on the standardized tests. In her case, the area of concern in math revealed that the students struggled with probability, so she began to plan the curriculum to address this area of weakness.

During the interviews, each of the teachers shared a specific program they had selected and implemented. All four of the schools emphasized the effectiveness of attendance monitoring awards programs in addressing issues regarding attendance. Southside Middle, with a changing population of Hispanic students, addressed this concern by mentoring students who were absent and giving awards weekly. In other schools the counselors monitored attendance and would celebrated the students' progress on a weekly basis if they attended school each day for a set amount of days. Principal Parks challenged the entire school to set a record of 100 percent attendance for a 4 month period. His creative challenge was that if the school could achieve 100% attendance, he would learn a popular dance to a song called "Lean Wit It, Rock Wit It" and perform it on the morning announcements for a week. Needless to say, the students won the challenge and the story of the principal's dance is told yearly to each upcoming sixth

grade. Principal Parks beams and chuckles as he reminisces about his moment of fame that served to unite the school and reaffirm the importance of attendance.

All of the exemplary Pacesetter schools in this study employed methods of desegregating data. Each of these schools showed an increased emphasis on the use of data in decision-making and in examination of student work in order to ensure accountability. Each school used an extensive array of data analysis tools to influence instruction, curriculum and scheduling. One key recommendation of all of the exemplary principals and teachers for schools that wish to improve their accountability was to review multiple sources of student test data before making any decisions about selecting strategies or techniques. Both administration and faculty demonstrated a total commitment to use data to drive instruction. Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn & Michael (2004) noted that using data to evaluate curricula is the best use of resources, as staff and students can focus their efforts on areas with the most deficiencies. Principal Jones offered the following advice to schools seeking to improve student achievement of students with disabilities: "Disaggregate all the data and concentrate on improving areas of weakness. Choose to improve one area at a time and select strategies that have proven to work through research."

*Emerging Theme 4: The use of collaboration influenced the achievement of students with disabilities and helped schools meet adequate yearly progress goals.*

Principal French encouraged teachers to collaborate by allowing teachers to meet weekly with common core subjects to reflect on teaching practices and to begin to dialogue about quality teaching. Ms. Taylor mentioned that during their weekly meeting they would collaborate and plan lessons. Mrs.White stated that she often seeks input from

her students on how to assess them for certain learning standards. Principal Parks shared that all stakeholders believe that collaboration matters at all levels, and if this principle were embedded throughout the school, it would have a positive impact on the achievement of students. During these weekly and monthly meetings, teachers would develop common assessments. At Northside Middle School, teachers began a weekly grade level lunch chats to collaborate. At Southside Middle School, departmental meetings focused on instruction and best practices in all of their meetings. Mrs. Brewer stated that the faculty worked together to structure the school improvement plan to look at what the teachers were doing and what they needed to do better. She stated that she was having problems in her science class with students connecting the concepts, and when she met with her grade level content colleagues they gave her strategies that she could use immediately. Ms. Taylor commented that the collaboration among her common core colleagues helped her perfect her teaching strategies. She noted, "We both taught the same student, and the student understood the concept in class, but when we would assess the student for knowledge of the concept, she would fail the assessment." The teachers analyzed the work and determined that the student was having difficulty comprehending the questions on the test. The teacher began to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency in other ways, and the student now experiences success on a regular basis.

Principals and teachers from the exemplary middle schools also stressed the importance of parent participation and collaboration. Each of the four had programs in place which encouraged parent involvement, and most of the schools had a parent involvement coordinator. Principal French shared a specific strategy that she feels encourages parents to become active and involved in the inclusion classes. The program

entitled "Parents as Partners in Science" invited parents to attend science classes and

participate in class lessons and labs. The program evolved from the teacher's concern that

her students with disabilities were struggling with the lab activities and therefore not

experiencing success in class. The teacher thought if she could get the parents involved in

the activities, then perhaps the students could take the lessons home and discuss them

with their parents, thus reinforcing the concept and ensuring a win/win situation for all.

This effective program, first developed by a creative science teacher to assist the students

in her inclusion classes, is now implemented countywide in all classrooms.

Fullan (2004) urges school leaders to support a culture wherein educators identify

the strategies that yield the most effective results for students. The school leadership in

all of the exemplary schools was deeply immersed in all facets of school improvement

and efforts to collaborate. As these schools became more cohesive, a collaborative

learning culture was established. In each of the Pacesetter schools, a curriculum calendar

was developed by the teachers to assist in pacing their content area, and the

implementation of an instructional calendar provided focus for the teachers. In each

school, the leader removed any barriers that would hinder teachers from learning

collaboratively. In essence, collaboration and inclusion of exceptional learners clearly

made a positive difference in student achievement. Ms. Taylor attributed her school's

meeting of AYP goals to whole-faculty study groups and extra time being granted to

meet to collaborate on teaching practices.

*Emerging Theme 5: The implementation of inclusion practices influenced the*

*achievement of students with disabilities and helped schools meet adequate yearly*

*progress goals.*

Southside Middle School is a total inclusion program, where all students are immersed in the school population. Principal Sims commented that the teachers worked hard to make the inclusion model at their school a success. He attributed the school's success with students with disabilities with the excellent co-teaching model that they employed. Ms. Hitchcock stated, "In examining our school's test scores, we discovered that some of our students with disabilities lagged behind the general education population. As a result, the entire faculty became committed to improving the inclusion program, and all of the teachers received professional development for the inclusion model." Principal French and Mrs. Brewer discussed how they identified the students with disabilities who needed help with math and began implementing accommodations that would help these students experience success. Ms. Taylor, a science and math teacher, commented that since the implementation of inclusion, all of the students are benefiting from having two teachers in the room, and using the team approach has allowed her more opportunities to incorporate more activities her lessons to accommodate various learning styles.

In summary, all of the schools involved in this study attributed inclusion practices to their school's success in meeting AYP goals. Principal Parks believes the teachers' commitment to inclusion teaching and the use of Learning Focus Schools contributed to their success. All of the teachers and principals believed that the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general classroom, as well as offering differentiated instruction, contributed to the schools success improving the achievement of students with disabilities and meeting AYP goals.

Summary

The results of the exemplary schools implementing the aforementioned strategies and techniques were quite positive. The Learning Focused School model, along with the faculty study groups, clearly attributed to the schools' success. All of the schools used professional development training to assist teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and all of the schools employed an inclusion model for students with disabilities. The recommendations of all of the principals and teachers were for schools to review student test data to determine which strategies and techniques would be the most effective to improve student achievement.

Each school worked collectively to strategically plan a school improvement plan that incorporated each school's mission and vision. The staff at each school demonstrated self-knowledge and clarity of values, and they shared a strong belief in equity and the democratic process. Each school supported a culture that valued continuous learning for everyone, and the staff demonstrated collegiality and collaboration with a focus on a specific standards for teaching and learning (Neuman, Fisher, Simmons, 2000).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study examined the strategies and techniques exemplary Georgia middle school principals promoted to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP goals. Included in this chapter are a summary of the study, analysis of the research findings, discussion of the research findings, conclusions based on the findings, and implications and recommendations based on the analysis of the data gathered in the study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and define effective strategies and techniques that exemplary middle school principals promote to facilitate the achievement of students with disabilities and meet AYP goals. The research questions included: (1) What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote the achievement of students with disabilities? (2) What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities? (3) How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques that their principals promote? (4) How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary principals make? (5) What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary school leaders?

The researcher conducted a qualitative study of principals from four middle schools in the Northeast Georgia area that received Pacesetter recognition for increasing performance of students with disabilities and for narrowing the standardized test achievement gap between students with disabilities and their normally-achieving peers.

Data gathered to assess effective strategies and techniques included one-on-one interviews, direct observations, and review of pertinent school documents.

The principal and one teacher from each of the four schools were interviewed. The interviews were audio recorded, kept in a secure location, and transcribed by the researcher. The names of the principals, teachers, and schools were coded with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and ensure confidentiality for the participants in the study. In addition to the interviews, direct observations and review of school documents enhanced understanding of how the principals' recommended strategies and techniques were implemented in the classroom. Triangulation was used to compare and analyze the data as shown in the data collection tables.

## Summary

Several findings emerged from the study, but the fundamental overall finding was that all of the exemplary principals involved in the study exhibited convergent characteristics of a charismatic leadership and utilized the principles of distributed leadership:  the principals were all committed to long term goals, they served as role models for their teachers, they were clearly supportive of their teachers, they exhibited a strong belief in equity and the democratic process, they engaged in strategic thought about the evolution of school improvement, and they challenged the teachers through teamwork. All of the principals took their roles as leaders seriously, they demonstrated a dedication to research-based policy, and they all took a sincere proactive approach to distributing responsibility, ensuring accountability, and leaving no child behind.

Discussion

Several convergent and useful findings emerged from analysis of the data in light

of research as the five research questions posed at the beginning of the study where

explored in depth.

*(1) What strategies and techniques do Pacesetter middle school principals use to promote*

*the achievement of students with disabilities? (2) What strategies and techniques do*

*Pacesetter middle school principals use to help their schools meet the Adequate Yearly*

*Progress (AYP) goals of students with disabilities?"*

All four of the principals inhabited the eight key roles that Georgia's Leadership

Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) identified as key to the new work of leadership

for school improvement (GLISI 2003). The institute conducted a comprehensive job and

task analysis of the role of the principal and found that effective principals and/or

designated individuals or teams must: 1) analyze data, causes and systems, 2) lead change

for continuous improvement, 3) lead faculty to implement and sustain aligned

curriculum, assessment and instruction in a standards-based environment, 4) develop

relationships within and outside the school to support the mission, vision and goals of the

school, 5) empower exemplary performance of individuals, groups and the school, 6) lead

and support the professional learning and performance development of faculty and staff,

(7) engage team members in improving processes that support teaching and learning, (8)

manage the effective, efficient, ethical and safe operation of the school. In addition, all

four of the principals demonstrated DuFour's (2001) structure of providing set times for

collaboration, identifying critical questions, holding teams accountable, focusing on

student achievement, and providing relevant data and guidance.

Other convergent findings were that all four of the principals developed a

comprehensive school improvement plan to address the needs of their schools, and they

employed effective research practices to help guide and inform their decisions regarding

the plans. In addition, all of the schools created some form of a leadership team that

assisted in the development of the school improvement plan and that was aligned with the

mission and vision of the entire school. Moreover, all of the principals and teachers

worked together as a team to discuss the importance of collaborating across all grade

levels and content areas.

At each school the principals increased professional development of staff and

addressed the needs of students with disabilities by offering inclusion model workshops,

and differentiating instruction training. Teachers at each of the schools met weekly to

collaborate; this is a proven effective strategy, as Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn

& Michael (2004) and others have demonstrated the relationship between collaboration

and school improvement.  Teachers were encouraged to be more reflective in their

practices, and principals promoted the use of teacher walkthroughs for teachers to witness

their colleagues in action and to further teacher collaboration,

*(3) How do Pacesetter middle school teachers implement the strategies and techniques*

*that their principals promote?*

The strategies and techniques most frequently promoted by the exemplary

principals studied converged around those of the Learning Focused Schools model in

tandem with close analysis of Criterion-Reference Competency Test (CRCT) results and

collaborative teaching. All of the principals commented that they implemented the

practices of the Learning Focused model because it was researched-based and effective.

Specific techniques recommended in the model include the use of word walls, graphic organizers, rubrics, and the "ticket out the door" summarization technique; Principal Jones attributed the use of these effective techniques and others to his school's success with students with disabilities. The process of evaluation, collaboration, and application that each of these schools underwent also led to an increase in the principals and the teachers being more focused on modeling and encouraging the engagement with and collaboration of their students among each other in the classroom.

The exemplary principals' distributive leadership approach to planning led to all of the interviewed teachers stating that they felt that they were instrumental in selecting the research programs, strategies, and/or techniques that were implemented in their classroom; this "defined autonomy" (Waters and Marzano, 2006) has been shown to directly correlate with an improvement in student achievement. All of the schools actively participated in book studies, and many of the schools identified the work of Marzano (2001) as a contributing factor to their success. Teachers expressed enthusiasm about the book studies that catered to the specific needs of their student population. Ms. Hitchcock stated, "Everything is so personal, especially my instruction in my inclusion classroom; we want to do all we can to help the students in my classroom succeed."

*(4) How do the mandates of NCLB affect the choices exemplary principals make?*

Several of the principals were positive about the accountability issues of the No Child Left Behind Act, and frequently mentioned how accountability mandates assisted them in making choices regarding research and policy to improve instruction in their schools. For some principals, the legislation spurred fundamental shifts in their approach to leadership as well. For example, principal Jones described how the mandates of the No

Child Left Behind Act empowered her to become an instructional leader of the school as opposed to simply being a manager.

*(5) What trends seem to be emerging among this sampling of exemplary school leaders?*

Key convergent themes emerged from an exploration of how exemplary principals influence the achievement of students with disabilities. All of the exemplary principals exhibited the characteristics of a charismatic leader in both word and deed. All of the principals were strong charismatic role models who were concerned with long term goals, and their relationships with their followers inspired motivation to not only complete relevant tasks, but to learn and grow in their roles as educators. The principals also employed the tenets of distributed leadership, which engages teams of teachers to bring all of their myriad expertise to bear so that schools can leverage unique teacher leadership expertise toward the collective achievement of targeted school improvement goals. The principals' stated objectives were for their teachers to be leaders by empowerment, and they all stressed that they strove to motivate teachers to develop intellectually and to take risks in order to learn and grow.

As a result of their research and evaluation, most of the principals chose to increase the number of collaborative classes offered, and several chose full inclusion. All of the principals provided their staff with professional development for teachers to address the learning styles of students, and teachers were often encouraged to step into leadership roles and facilitate the trainings. Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs emphasizes that self esteem is a precursor to self actualization, which is the ultimate goal of inclusion, as was demonstrated in Ms. Taylor's attribution of her school's success to

the notion of building relationships with the students, and of communicating the attitude that "I care, you can succeed, and we are here to help."

This emerging role of charismatic and distributed leadership in exemplary schools supports teacher leadership and is not based on position, authority or hierarchy but rather is based on expertise and influence. According to Murphy (2005) this type of emerging leader is seen as creating an interactive web, and is collectively vested in the many as opposed to the few. This new wave of leadership is based on interactions between and among individuals for the common good of improved student learning and school improvement; in short, leadership is not located in any one individual, but is distributed and woven into the entire organizational fabric of the school. These emerging trends in leadership form the foundation for the findings of the exploration of the research questions.

*Recommendations from Exemplary Principals*

The findings included recommendations all of the principals made for schools that strive to improve the achievement of students with disabilities and meet AYP goals were convergent. They all expressed the primary importance of looking closely at student data before developing a school improvement plan, and they recommended exposing students with disabilities to the general education classroom and working with teachers to prioritize the curriculum. In addition, all four principals stated that they employed the principles of distributed leadership and acted as role models for their teachers. The four exemplary principals were quite passionate about what they do and why they do it. Principal Sims summed up this passion when he stated, "It's all about the children."

All of the principals stressed the need to pursue research-based strategies to ensure that all students succeed. Principal French stated that specific effective strategies are needed for the special education learner more than his or her normally-achieving peer, who can often learn regardless of the use of research-based teaching strategies: "My role as a leader is to assist and promote a culture in which my teachers select programs and strategies that yield exceptional results for their students with disabilities based on sound research and data." Principal Sims described himself as "a leader of leaders," and felt that empowerment was his greatest attribute. For him, it was important to include teachers in the decision-making process regarding the selection of classroom strategies and techniques.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, long before the No Child Left Behind Act even existed, the four exemplary principals participating in this study knew that a rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, research-based strategies, transformational distributed leadership, and a strong sense of school community and collaboration were the keys to improving student achievement as a whole and to improving the achievement of students with disabilities in particular. Each of the four principals established a culture in their school of valuing and respecting differences, encouraging collaboration, distributing authority and responsibility, seeking knowledge, reflecting on lessons learned, and promoting the sense that each individual has "a story to tell." These exemplary principals were not afraid to take risks, experiment, and be on the cutting edge in order to determine which strategies and techniques were truly effective in their classrooms.

In essence, knowing the correct actions to take is the central problem of school improvement, and these exemplary principals displayed the attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary to determine those correct actions. Consequently, holding schools accountable for their performance means ensuring that school leaders have the knowledge, skill, and judgment to make the most effective improvements that will increase student performance. According to Elmore (2003), having the "right focus of change" is key to improving schools and increasing student achievement; each of the four exemplary principals clearly had the "right focus of change."

The four exemplary principals all demonstrated the ability to think, plan and act: they understood the dynamics regarding improvement of their instructional program, they developed a plan and communicated it effectively, and they took appropriate action to ensure that the plan was carried out. The majority of the strategies and techniques observed were similar across the four schools and were in place and actively utilized in the classrooms. No matter how schools tailor the process of meeting the needs of all students, the essentials were the same for each of these four schools: teachers learning from teachers in a non evaluative way, talking about their craft and developing lessons to improve student achievement. The principals consciously identified areas that needed attention, and they set goals and worked purposefully and collaboratively with their staff to meet those goals. Although no principal claimed that his or her personal efforts affected the achievement of students with disabilities, all of the teachers recognized that their principal was working to improve student achievement across the board, and the principals' decisive actions demonstrated that they were all seeking to improve the instructional program and have a positive effect on student achievement. The four

exemplary principals were unanimous in acknowledging a strong correlation between research and effective educational practices, and it is hoped that this study will bring increased attention to effective research-based strategies that improve student achievement and that educators will begin to view their choices regarding policies, procedures, and practices through the eyes of a researcher.

The conclusions of this study correlate directly to numerous sources in the literature calling for instructional leadership within the building (Blasé & Blasé, 2001). The principals in the Pacesetter schools lead their schools in noticeably different ways than other schools. While their specific leadership strategies and styles may differ, they all have one significant common thread: they are taking specific actions in the instructional program and are behaving as though they believe that they can work collaboratively with their staff to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their normally-achieving peers. While this study is limited, it does take an important step in adding to the body of scientific research that promotes distributed instructional leadership from a transformational leader as a key element of improving student achievement and in calling for continued research on how to best address the needs of students with disabilities. When leadership practices are linked to student learning, the ripple effects of leaders' actions become evident. While successful leaders rarely if ever take credit for directly influencing student achievement, they do make a strong indirect contribution to student learning via their influence on other people or other features of their organization. The exemplary leaders in this study all embodied emerging trends in school leadership; they all set vision and goals, provided direction, influenced morale, and exercised influence. In addition, they all demonstrated qualities of

charismatic transformational leaders and frequently followed models of distributed leadership by delegating authority and including stakeholders in key decision-making processes. These exemplary leaders can serve as role models not only for their staff, but also for other school leaders who are striving to influence student achievement. It is time for all school leaders to fully inhabit their leadership roles and move past the point where they make educational decisions based on what we think might work, and instead focus on cultivating the qualities of transformational distributed leadership while implementing research-based practices to ensure that their students with disabilities are given every possible avenue for success in their schools. School leaders can become more aware of effective strategies and techniques that influence the achievement of students with disabilities so that they can provide their teachers with the tools they need to help all children reach their highest potential.

## Implications

The implications for this study encompass three facets: educational equity, educational policy and educational practice. The implications for educational equity are that effective school leaders need to ensure that all students receive a quality education and that schools must promote respect for diversity by valuing and challenging all learners. Moreover, achievement gaps among students who differ by class, race, ability level, ethnicity and language must be narrowed, with the ultimate goal being to eliminate them entirely. The implications for educational policy are that all school districts in the United States must meet the No Child Left Behind mandates that require all students to be on grade level by 2014. Lastly, the implications for educational practice are that when principals understand the correlation between research-based instruction and student

achievement, they are better able to promote optimal teaching and learning experiences for all students.

It is hoped that this study will assist all principals in developing an effective knowledge base that supports them in ensuring that all students receive a quality education. The implications for educational research may have the greatest impact, as this study has taken an in-depth look into strategies and techniques that are research-based and have proven to be effective to yield the best results for students with disabilities and to meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. For example, a more thorough analysis and comparison of the practices of high-performing schools and the practices of low-performing schools of students with disabilities could provide important insights into the subject. Finally, continued research to determine effective strategies that increase the performance of students with disabilities is warranted.

Recommendations

This case study reported and examined the strategies and techniques promoted by four exemplary Georgia middle school principals that influenced the achievement of students with disabilities and helped them meet their adequate yearly progress goals. It is hoped that this study adds to the knowledge base of an effective framework for school improvement that best meets the diverse needs of all students. The findings from this study contribute to the extent evidence-research based strategies are being used to make decisions affecting the instruction of students with disabilities, and they narrow the gap in literature that exists in the few evidence-based research strategies of students with disabilities in the middle school setting.

The findings suggest that the following recommendations be shared with Georgia administrators who are working to increase accountability and improve the performance of student with disabilities: Further research with both quantitative and qualitative aspects should be conducted with teachers, parents, and students to gather their perceptions of which factors impact student achievement; such research would bring in other perspectives to  provide insight into the complex task of promoting the achievement of all students. Research should also be conducted to examine how community involvement can improve student success, and further research regarding the examination of exemplary Georgia middle schools principals' leadership styles is also warranted.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

GEORGIA STATEWIDE NEEDS IMPROVEMENT BY THE NUMBERS SCHOOL

YEAR 2004-2005

Table A1

*Georgia Statewide Needs Improvement by the Numbers School Year 2004-2005*

| Schools | Total Schools | Met AYP | Percent Met AYP | Did Not Meet AYP | Percent Not Meeting AYP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 2040 | 1670 | 81.8% | 364 | 19% |
| High | 354 | 223 | 62.9% | 131 | 38% |
| Middle | 425 | 244 | 57.4% | 181 | 43% |
| Elementary | 1252 | 1200 | 95.4% | 52 | 5% |

Source:  Georgia Department of Education (2004-2005)

APPENDIX B

GEORGIA CRITERION REFERENCED COMPETENCY TESTS (CRCT) OF

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TESTED WITH DISABILITIES IN SCHOOL YEAR

2004-2005

Table B1

*Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) of Middle School Students*

*Tested with Disabilities in School Year 2004 -2005*

| Grade Level | Percent Meeting Math | Percent Not Meeting Math | Percent Meeting Language Arts | Percent Not Meeting Language Arts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6th | 37% | 63% | 57% | 43% |
| 7th | 41% | 59% | 61% | 39% |
| 8th | 27% | 73% | 50% | 50% |

Total Number of Middle School Students tested with disabilities: 43,330
Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2004-2005).

APPENDIX C

PROGRAMS FOR SELECTED STRATEGIES

Table C1

*Programs for Selected Strategies*

| | School | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Program | A | B | C | D |
| After-School Program | | x | | x |
| Attendance Monitoring | x | x | x | x |
| Collaborative Teaching | x | x | x | x |
| CRCT Results | x | x | x | x |
| ITBS Results | x | x | x | x |
| Learning Focused Model | x | x | x | x |
| Parent Conferences | x | x | x | x |
| Parent Contracts | x | x | x | x |
| School Leadership Team | x | x | x | x |
| Tutoring Sessions | x | x | x | x |
| School Council | x | x | x | x |
| Whole Faculty Study Groups | x | x | x | x |
| Star Reading | x | x | | |
| Accelerated Reading | | | x | x |

APPENDIX D

WHITMAN INTERVIEW

This personal interview was conducted with a 10<sup>th</sup> Grade General Science Teacher with six years of teaching experience in the public schools. The first year of that experience was in a different district which he does not refer to.

INTERVIEWER: In general terms, how would you describe inclusion, and can you give me an example?

MR. WHITMAN: Inclusion is a good idea if done properly. With that said, my experience has never given me a chance to see that happen. When I first came into the public school, my exposure to special education was one course I had in college called "exceptional child." Prior to my first day of teaching, I had meticulously planned out my lessons for basic 10<sup>th</sup> grade science, but nothing could have prepared me for what was in store. My first class was comprised of 25 students, 15 of which had IEP's. Comparatively speaking, my classroom had more special education students in it than the pure special education class.

INTERVIEWER: What do you see as the role of the special education teacher in the process of inclusion?

MR. WHITMAN: In a perfect world, the process would be a cooperative process between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. We are a poor rural district with a high concentration of special needs students. I never even saw the overworked special education teacher. My classroom became a survivalist dynamic. The first concern was behavior management and the next was finding some sort of meaningful curriculum. Individualized approaches were basically out, I didn't even see the IEPs for half of these kids.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me some general thoughts on inclusion?

MR. WHITMAN:  A lot of people think inclusion is a bad idea around here. Honestly,

the way we use it makes it a bad idea. We do the bare minimum, and the general

education teachers just keep the peace, and everyone is happy. Inclusion is not broken;

inclusion is broken at my school. To fix it, we'd have to totally [look at and re-think] the

concept and strategy, and I don't believe the district is willing to do that. I wish this was

the [norm], but people I talked with in other districts seem to be having a [similar

experience.] I think you'll find this in all the surrounding districts in this demographic.

APPENDIX E

BARROWS INTERVIEW

This personal interview was conducted with a 9th Grade Civics Teacher with three years of teaching experience in the public schools. All three of those years teaching were in the same district.

INTERVIEWER: In general terms, how would you describe inclusion, and can you give me an example?

MRS. BARROWS: I view inclusion as a play on words, instead of no child left behind, it leaves most of the children behind. I don't think it's a bad idea; I think it is being used badly – there's a big difference. I had one young girl who always comes to mind when I hear the word *inclusion*. We'll call her Jenny. Typically, Civics is a class with a very heterogeneous grouping – to the extent that we did it, this was a bad thing. In one class of 25, I had five gifted students, eight special needs students, and the rest general education students. Jenny was one of the eight special needs students. Jenny couldn't read at a fourth grade level, and her comprehension was non-existent. I felt like a dumping ground; if Jenny got the education she needed from me, I lost the attention of the rest of the class. If I moved at the pace the five gifted students needed, I would have lost the rest of the class. I basically was forced to work somewhere in the middle. For Jenny, she was a casualty of this.  I can't imagine she got much from my course.

INTERVIEWER: What do you see as the role of the special education teacher in the process of inclusion?

MRS. BARROWS: Again, that's hard. I know what the role should be, and I also know what it ends up being in my school. In my experiences, the special education teacher was overworked. I saw her only on test days. I would give her [Jenny's] tests and she would administer them in the special education classroom. One week later I would get the test

back and Jenny would always get an "A." In the whole year I had her, Jenny never got

one question right in class (orally or written), nor did she ever show any sign of

information retention. I don't know if they worked magic in the special education room,

or if someone just did the work for her to in lieu of time constraints

INTERVIEWER: Can you give me some general thoughts on inclusion?

MRS. BARROWS: Honestly, schools need to be held accountable for the whole process,

not just doing. There has to be a way to show results beyond what we're doing right now.

Remember, I'm only speaking on behalf of my experience at this particular district

though.

APPENDIX F

LITERATURE MATRIX

| STUDIES | Purpose | Participants | Design/ Analysis | OUTCOMES |
|---------|---------|--------------|------------------|----------|
| Beed, Penny L., Hawkins, E. Marie, Roller, Cathy M. | To trace the roots of scaffolded instruction and its effectiveness | Various reading students in a mainstreamed class | Qualitative observation | Findings suggest that scaffolded instruction helps reading students immensely in information retention |
| Booth, R.. Dixon-Brown, M. & Kohut, G. (2003) | To prove the validity of team teaching in a business learning environment | 4 different classroom and curriculum examples of team teaching dynamics | Quantitative test scores | Cross curriculum team teaching aids in mastery learning |
| Browder, D.M. & Cooper-Duffy, K | To estimate the validity of evidence based practices for students with severe disabilities under the No Child Left Behind act | Broad scopes of students with disabilities | Quantitative testing and monitoring | Evidence based practices are necessary; however, the NCLB act still has issues to work out before it is operating at maximum effectiveness |
| Chih-Ying Chang, Ann M Berghout Austin, Kathleen W Piercy.(2006). | To determine which degree of scaffolding best suits pre-school children in adapting to pre-school settings | An experimental and control group of preschool students | Observational behavior generalities | Those students properly scaffolded adjusted better than their control counterparts |
| Diamond, Marion (2006). | To determine the degree to which varying instruction helps students | Several districts and classroom settings | Quantitative testing | Varying instruction helped students retain mastery learning more than conventional instruction |
| Fessenden, Ford (2006). | To see how well New York Public Schools are doing under NCLB | New York Public School System | Quantitative testing scores | Fewer Schools are failing to keep pace *NCLBA* |
| Gardner, Howard. (2004). | To estimate the magnitude of multiple intelligence variables | A wide range of subjects and theoretical components | A combinatio | Intelligence is much more complex than |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goinpath, C (2004). | To explore effects of criteria and multiple graders on case grading | Several classroom settings | n of observable phenomenon and testing | previously recorded Criteria and multiple graders are important in case grading variables |
| Helms, Marilyn M. John M Alvis, Marilyn Willis (2005). | To explore the results of planning and implementing team teaching techniques | Cross curriculum classrooms | Quantitative Test Results | Team teaching is an effect tool for mastery learning |
| Hurren,B. Lee Matt Rutledge, Amanda Burcham Garvin.(2006) | To explore the effects of team testing | Two separate subject classrooms | Quantitative test results and qualitative observation | Team testing can be valuable if implemented correctly |
| Klenetsky, Phyllis Schiffer (2000). | To explore the effect of 4MAT training on teacher's attitudes | A control group of non-format teachers and a group of format teachers that have been using the program | Quantitative test scores and qualitative observation | Teachers who have been using 4MAT have a better attitude toward varying teaching styles for multiple learners |
| Kozol, Jonathan. (2002). | To see the effects of education attitudes in districts with little wealth | Selections of urban and rural school districts | Quantitative questionnaire. | The attitude in poor districts toward educational goals differs sharply from other districts. |
| Lee-Tarver Aleada.(2006). | To survey teachers' attitudes on cooperative teaching situations | A sampling of several public school teachers | Qualitative observational aspects and quantitative testing | Teachers are overwhelmingly willing to consider team teaching |
| Marilyn M. John M Alvis, Marilyn Willis (2005). | To trace the outcome of a team teaching situation | One MBA TEAM of team teachers | Quantitative questionnaire | The team teaching had a higher success rate than those not team teaching |
| Sailor, Wayne and Blair Roger (2005). | To critically examine inclusion and how it may be fixed | Several models of inclusion both past and present | | Inclusion needs to be |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Simmons, Warren, Ellen Foley, Marla Ucelli (2006). | To see how political involvement on a small level can influence district attitude | One selected school district | Qualitative questionnaire and quantitative test scores | reconsidered as a holistic team effort to ensure maximum effectiveness The attitude of the district is greatly influenced by the attitude of the mayor |
| Sindelar, Paul T. Deirdre K Shearer, Diane Yendol-Hoppey and Todd W Liebert (2006). | To determine if good inclusion is sustainable | One Florida School District | Test scores (quantitative) and qualitative surveys | |
| | To trace the effectiveness of cooperative learning | Several Dutch classrooms | Qualitative survey | Even inclusion in its best form is difficult to sustain |
| Veenman, Simon. Brenda Kenter, Kiki Post (2000). | To determine if team teaching is a viable educational strategy | A sampling of instructors | | |
| White, C. S., Henley, J. A., & Brabston, M. E. (2000). | To ascertain what encompasses an expert student | A sampling of classroom students | Quantitative test scores and surveys | Cooperative learning is working in Dutch schools |
| VanDeWeghe (2004) | | | Quantitative testing and surveys | Team Teaching can be a valuable educational tool |
| Purdue (2006). | To define the importance of scaffolded instruction | A sample of education professors and teachers | Qualitative survey | Expert students have to be successful on many levels other than pure grades and academia |
| | | | Qualitative observation | Scaffolded instruction is a solid tool for education and mastery learning |
| | | | Quantitative survey | |

APPENDIX G

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Date

Principal's Name
School Address

Title of Project: Strategies and techniques used by exemplary Georgia middle school principals to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet adequate yearly progress.

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am Linda D. Clark, a doctoral student currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study to identify strategies and techniques used by exemplary Georgia middle school principals to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet adequate yearly progress goals. You were selected as a possible participant because, as a Pacesetter recipient, your school was recognized for leadership and for raising the achievement of special needs students. Your district's performance data placed your school in the top ten percent of comparably sized systems as determined by the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and the Adequate Yearly Progress Report.

Participating in the study would entail engaging in a confidential 60-minute unstructured interview to freely discuss strategies and techniques you us for increasing achievement of students with disabilities and for meeting adequate yearly progress. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to allow interviews of yourself and one teacher you select. Participation is totally voluntary, you can refuse to answer any question during the interview, you may terminate the interview at any time, and/or you may choose to have any or all of your responses deleted from the analysis. I will tape record and transcribe the information; the data will be later compared and contrasted with other principals like you in a summary form, and published as my doctoral dissertation. Data gathered will remain confidential and will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

I will be contacting you soon to set up an interview date. If you have questions or concerns about this proposed research project, please contact me at (770) 761-6918 or (678) 665-5223. You may also email me t Linda_Clark@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or you can contact my academic advisor, Dr. Walter Polka, at wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-0843 for any other questions. Thank you in advance for your time and participation; the results of the study will be valuable to Georgia's leaders in education.

Sincerely,

Linda D. Clark, Ed. S.

APPENDIX H

LETTER TO TEACHERS

Date

School Name
School Address

Title of Project: Strategies and techniques used by exemplary Georgia middle school principals to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet adequate yearly progress.

Dear Sir or Madam:

You are invited to participate in a research study which will identify and examine strategies and techniques used by exemplary Georgia middle school principals to influence the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet adequate yearly progress. My name is Linda D. Clark, and I am a doctoral student currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University. The content of this research will be used in my dissertation. Your principal selected you as a possible participant in this study; if you decide to participate, you will be contacted for an interview.

There are no risks involved for the participants. These are unstructured interviews, which will allow the interviewee to freely discuss strategies and techniques used for increasing the achievement of students with disabilities and for meeting adequate yearly progress. The interview process should only require about 60 minutes of your time.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Interview tapes will remain in the possession of the researcher until the final document is printed, and then they will be destroyed. Your participation is entirely voluntary. In the upcoming week I will be contacting you to set up an interview date. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this proposed research project please contact me at (770) 761-6918 or (678) 665-5223. You may also contact me via e-mail at Linda_Clark@gwinnett.k12.ga.us.  You may also contact my academic advisor, Dr. Walter Polka via e-mail at wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-0843 for any others questions.

Let me thank you in advance for your assistance with this study. I am sure that the results will be valuable to the educational leaders in Georgia.

Sincerely,
Linda D. Clark, Ed. S.

APPENDIX I

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

| | |
|---|---|
| Georgia Southern University | |
| Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs | |

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Phone: 912-681-5465 | | Administrative Annex |
| | | P.O. Box 8005 |
| Fax: 912-681-0719 | Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu | Statesboro, GA 30460 |

**To:**    Linda Dianne Clark
4461 Gin Plantation Drive
Snellville, GA-30039

**CC:**    Dr. Walter Polka
P.O. Box-8131

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

**Date:**    March 19, 2007

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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07172**, and titled **"Strategies and Techniques Used by Exemplary Georgia Middle School Principals to Influence the Achievement of Students with Disabilities and to Meet Adequately Yearly Progress"**, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

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

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

Sincerely,

N. Scott Pierce
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

1. How do you address the problem of academic improvement of students with disabilities?
2. How do you motivate teachers to make necessary changes in their instruction?
3. How do you use student achievement data or adequate yearly progress reports to determine the changes in instruction at your school?
4. What changes have occurred in the students and teachers as a result of the strategies and techniques that you implemented in your school?
5. What strategies and techniques do you employ to improve the quality of teaching?
6. How have the changes you made contributed to your school's success in meeting AYP goals and achievement criteria on the CRCT?
7. If you could give any advice to other middle school principals to improve the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP, what would you say?
8. What would you change or repeat in your selection of strategies and techniques that influence the achievement of student with disabilities?
9. Is there anything that I may have left out?
10. Do you have anything you would like to add or any questions for me?

INTEREVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1.  How was student achievement data used to determine the changes in your teaching style?
2.  Does the professional who introduces you to new instructional practices offer evidence or research proving that they work?
3.  It's difficult to implement everything you've heard in a workshop. What has prevented you from using the new practice in your class
4.  Did you involve the students in the instructional change? If so, what was their response to change in the instructional program?
5.  How involved are the students in the change process as you observed.
6.  What strategies and techniques would contribute to influencing student achievement and meeting AYP?
7.  If you had the opportunity to write an article about how and why teachers make decisions concerning instructional practices they use, what would you say? How would you inform the public about teachers' roles in using research-based strategies?
8.  If you could give any advice to other teachers on how to improve the achievement of students with disabilities and to meet AYP, how would you suggest to them to go about selecting strategies and techniques?
9.  What would you change or repeat in selecting strategies and techniques for improvement at your school?
10. Is there anything that I may have left out?
11. Do you have any questions or comments for me?