The Effects of Whole School Reform on Instructional Program Coherence in Urban Elementary Schools

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THE EFFECTS OF WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM ON INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM COHERENCE IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

BY

MYRNA E. GARCIA

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM ON INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM COHERENCE IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The implementation of whole school reform efforts and school improvement initiatives have ceased fragmentation in schools that may be impeding schools in Abbott districts from meeting accountability mandates required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A high level of instructional program coherence in a school, which is enhanced by the five factors of: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction and professional capacity community, has been identified to increase student achievement.

Correlations were conducted on responses to a teacher survey administered to teachers in five urban elementary schools in an Abbott district in New Jersey to determine the correlation between instructional program coherence and each of the five factors found to impact instructional program coherence. These correlations were used to determine the relationships between instructional program coherence and each of the five factors. Descriptive statistics, namely the absolute value of the means of the responses on the surveys, were used to attain the levels of the five factors and instructional program coherence in each school. The schools with the highest level of instructional program coherence were identified.

Principals, whose schools were identified to have high levels of instructional program coherence, were interviewed to get an in-depth understanding of the nature of instructional program coherence and the five factors in the schools. Attributes that were perceived by the principals to impact the levels of instructional program coherence and
the five factors were identified. In addition, common instructional frameworks were highlighted, which included the Comer School Development Program (SDP), the WSR model implemented in these schools. Additional instructional frameworks identified were: the Collins Effective Writing Program, the Four Blocks of Literacy, and Teaching Math for Understanding. The principals of these schools perceive the implementation of Comer SDP and school improvement initiatives as a positive influence in their schools that are responsible for the perceived high levels of instructional program coherence and the increase of student achievement in their schools.
Acknowledgements

Since I was a little girl I remember my parents telling me, “Get an education. We want you to have more then we have.” My parents had always been my inspiration while growing up encouraging me to do better and to follow my dreams. After getting married, my husband Randy became my biggest fan and supporter. He took care of first my daughter, so I could get my first masters degree, later my three children so that I could get my second master’s and now my doctorate. He not only took care of my children, but he kept up with the house and eliminated any obstacles that got in my way so I could continue working.

Of course this dissertation could not have been written without the permission and support of the Superintendent of Schools from the district where the five elementary schools used in the study were located. Participants from the five elementary schools completed extensive surveys and principals allowed me to interview them so that I may have the data I needed to conduct my study. The principals and district staff, such as the assistant superintendent, the Human Resource administrator, the district’s technology department, and the director of student services, all assisted me by providing the services and information I needed.

My support did not end there; the staff of the school, at which I am a vice principal, also played an important role in making this endeavor possible. They helped me get information, look up definitions, sent me e-mails of good wishes and encouragement, they even blessed my office, which I still believe definitely helped me to pass my comprehensive examination and gave me the encouragement to keep going. I would be remiss without acknowledging a very important person that helped me get
through this process, my friend and colleague, Helen Horan. She provided me with words of wisdom, shared her knowledge, provided me with materials and listened when I just needed to vent or share my successes and she did this every step of the way!

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Lastly, I would like to thank all the members of Cohort VII. I can’t even find the words to describe this special group of people but to only say that I was proud to be part of this group that was indeed, “Smarter than the average bear.” I will never forget any of them or this wonderful experience I shared with them.

I fully acknowledge all those I mentioned above and thank all of them for being supportive, for their encouragement, and for helping me succeed in reaching my goal!
Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, for starting me on the right path. Mom, thank you for always being there. Dad, I know you are supporting me from heaven.

This is dedicated to my husband, Randy, who is my best friend, my confidant and my rock. Thanks for putting up with me.

This is dedicated to my children, Serena, Randy Michael and Jeremy. Thank you for being understanding and giving up some of your time with Mommy so I can fulfill my goal.

To all who made this dream come true, I did it only because you all believed in me!
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Chapter I

Introduction

“One of the most prominent issues in the U.S. today is school reform. Educators, politicians, and the general public all identify the need to improve the educational system” (Ricco, 2004, p. 54). School reform is not a new issue in education. According to the Society for the Advancement of Education (2003), “The U.S. reaction to the Soviet launching of the first satellite, Sputnik in 1957, galvanized the nation to take quick action by using crisis language that convinced policymakers to push rapid reforms” (p. 2). In 1983, the report, Nation at Risk, was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education under the Reagan Administration. This report was considered “an impassioned call for a more demanding set of expectations in American schools” (Cavanagh & Carroll, 2004, p. 35).

Even though President Reagan did call attention to the needs of the schools in A Nation at Risk, the President abandoned the issue after using it in his re-election campaign in 1984. This action by President Reagan reaffirms the belief that the issue of school reform is used by politicians to strengthen their platforms and gain support by voters that are unhappy with student performance in public schools. In addition, it was pointed out that all the presidents elected since A Nation at Risk was released in 1983 have passed broad education plans. These include, George H.W. Bush’s “America 2000,” Bill Clinton’s “Goals 2000,” and most recently George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001” (Society for the Advancement of Education, 2003).
Federal, state, and district mandates have placed schools under tremendous pressure to improve student achievement. On the federal level, the passing of NCLB (2001) has raised the accountability level of local districts and schools. According to NCLB, by 2014, all students must be reading on grade level. NCLB requires that each state develop and implement an accountability system that defines student proficiency for the attainment of academic standards. Each year, each school must attain adequate yearly progress (AYP), which is based on students' scores on a standards-based test, in the areas of Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics. The standards-based test measures the students' attainment of New Jersey's identified Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). There is an expectation that schools achieve gradual increases in AYP annually with the ultimate expectation that all students will achieve 100% proficiency by 2014. The schools that do not achieve AYP receive sanctions from the state.

First, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) relied on the enforcement upon school districts of 21 strategies they refer as Demonstably Effective Strategies. These strategies were called to question by urban students' advocates. The NJDOE had to set standards and school improvement initiatives in their pursuit to meet the mandates associated with rational reform efforts. The state's improvement initiatives connected to whole school reform (WSR) were difficult for poor school districts in New Jersey to implement due to limited funds. In order to meet the needs of the poor school districts in New Jersey, as stated by Walker and Gutmore (2000), the Supreme Court ordered the Commissioner of Education, in 1997 and 1998, to ensure parity funding for poor districts and for them to implement a number of remedial
measures directed at redressing their longstanding problems with achievement. As a result of this ruling, the special needs districts in New Jersey identified as Abbott districts were able to begin to implement programs to facilitate the reform process in 1999.

Funding has provided instructional materials, professional development, curriculum enhancements, and implementation of programs for parents, among other school improvement initiatives. The implementation of school-based management, new instructional programs, and additional instructional staff have also become factors in the improvement of the schools in the Abbott districts. A critical mandate in the state’s Abbott regulations is that elementary schools will implement a national model of WSR to assure universal literacy by the end of third grade and attainment of the CCCS at every grade level (NJDOE, 2005).

The implementation of WSR has created tensions in New Jersey districts and has affected decision-making at all levels, such as: school-based budgeting and in the procedures of hiring new staff members, just to name a few. There is usually resistance to change in any system. WSR is requiring change. The changes required by WSR may also create resistance at all levels due to the need to do away with the status quo. According to Fullan (2001), “…rather than contributing to substantial improvements, adapting improvement programs may also add to the endless cycle of initiatives that seem to sap the strength and spirit of schools and their communities” (p. 110).

Fullan (2000) stated, “The main enemies of large-scale reform are overload and extreme fragmentation” (p. 51). Districts, especially the teachers within the districts, are on overload having to implement many school improvement initiatives and
mandates required under WSR, while at the same time trying to achieve instructional program coherence to avoid fragmentation. According to Hendrie (1999), when the New Jersey Supreme Court mandated that urban districts had to implement WSR, some local board members and superintendents in the urban districts of New Jersey worried that WSR efforts were careening off schools in different directions leaving little instructional coherence district-wide.

When the implementation of WSR first began, districts were very concerned with the execution of the mandates. Some of these mandates included: a school-based budget, school based management teams, and the choosing and implementation of a WSR model. According to Commissioner MacInnes (2005), while non-Abbott districts were trying to determine the revisions that needed to be made to the curriculum to meet the standards, Abbott districts were busy trying to implement the mandates of Abbott v. Burke V (1998). More specifically he stated,

Most districts (Abbott), concentrated on how to decentralize decisions about curriculum and instruction to the school level, create new school councils, set up school-based budgets that they could not revise, and to ensure that each elementary school selected a rational model of WSR. Little emphasis was given to standards-based instruction by the Department or the parties involved in Abbott. (p.3)

It is the opinion of the Commissioner that this has caused an achievement gap between students in the Abbott Districts and other students. It is for this reason that there was a shift from concentrating on the implementation of WSR to a concentration on instructional priorities in 2002.
Instructional program coherence within the district is important and it cannot be achieved without instructional program coherence within the individual schools.

Ensuring that policies and programs have their intended impact at the school level requires policies and programs that are aligned with standards and with each other in a seamless system that focuses on providing all schools with the tools they need to achieve...without alignment, programs and policies can work at cross purposes. (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 2002, p.30).

This “seamless system” is important in acquiring instructional program coherence, which is essential in improving student achievement.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) districts are also implementing WSR initiatives. Some of the schools are in districts similar to those in the special-needs districts of New Jersey. In 1993, Ambassador Walter Annenberg announced a $508 million challenge grant to improve public education in the United States. A group of Chicago school reform activists and education stakeholders that included teachers, parents, principals, community leaders, and foundation officers, organized to write a proposal to include Chicago as one of the cities to receive a grant. In 1995, the Annenberg Foundation awarded a 5-year grant of $49.2 million to establish the Chicago Annenberg Challenge and local donors pledged an additional $100 million. The mission of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was, “to improve student learning by supporting intensive efforts to reconnect schools to their communities, restructure education, and improve classroom teaching” (Newmann, Staith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001, p. 5).
The Chicago Annenberg Challenge funds networks and external partners that seek to develop successful, community-based schools. They address three critical education issues through whole-school change. These three critical issues are: school and teacher isolation, school size and personalism, and time for learning and improvement. Through this funding more than half of Chicago's public schools have participated in the program. Whole-school change has required the implementation of multiple improvement initiatives in CPS.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has evaluated the effectiveness of these initiatives using the results of surveys given to the teachers, principals and the students in the schools implementing whole-school change. The purpose of the CCSR is to provide feedback to the Chicago Annenberg Challenge and the schools which participate in efforts to improve the educational opportunities of the students. In addition, the results of the surveys are used to expand public discussion about the conditions of education in CPS and the kinds of efforts needed to advance meaningful improvements (Newman et al., 2001).

One of the major findings in the study by CCSR is the effect of instructional program coherence on improving student achievement. According to Newman et al. (2001), schools in CPS with stronger program coherence show higher gains in student achievement. It is their belief that there are ways in which school leaders, school improvement partners, and policy makers can act to bring about the instructional coherence that will reward their school improvement efforts.
Research conducted by the CCSR has found the following in relation to the implementation of initiatives for school improvement in the CPS, as well as other urban schools:

1. Professional fatigue and frustration is caused by the overwhelming amount of workshops and meetings, a large and fragmented array of school improvement grants, programs and partnerships without the time or support to adopt and master practices that may improve student learning, and the fear of cutting programs or resources that may be essential to meet the needs of the students.

2. School organizational factors, such as unity of purpose, clear focuses, and shared values for student learning are important.

3. The existence of incoherent school programs where diverse initiatives are set up to serve important needs, however, lack the sustained attention of the majority of staff within the school and have no apparent effects on the core goal of improving student achievement.

4. "Christmas tree" innovations are improvement strategies that, although they bring attention to the school because of numerous program and equipment purchases, fail to build its capacity to improve teaching and learning.

5. Cluttered and contradictory state and district policy environments fragment school development efforts.

Some of these same characteristics can be found in the urban districts of New Jersey.
According to Newman et al. (2001), these factors imply the need for instructional program coherence. Schools identified as having strong program coherence exhibited three major conditions within the schools. These conditions are:

1. A common instructional framework that guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning climate. The framework combines specific expectations for student learning with specific strategies and materials to guide teaching and assessment.

2. Staff working conditions support implementation of the framework.

3. The school allocates resources such as materials, time, and staff assignments to advance the school’s common instructional framework and to avoid diffuse, scattered improvement areas.

Statement of the Problem

New Jersey’s urban districts designated as Abbott Districts must implement in the elementary schools policies, initiatives and programs brought about by WSR, while striving to maintain the high level of instructional program coherence needed to increase student achievement and meet the accountability requirements under NCLB (2001). In order to assure a high level of instructional program coherence, the schools should have a common instructional framework, staff working conditions that support the framework, and school allocated resources to advance the school’s common instructional framework to avoid diffuse, scattered improvement areas. Has the mandate for WSR in Abbott elementary schools assisted in establishing the conditions
that are characteristic of schools identified as having strong instructional program coherence, which promote student achievement?

**Purpose of the Study**

WSR efforts have caused school districts to have to deal with a monumental amount of change. This change has caused tension and apprehension in everyone involved. Initially many teachers, and administrators as well, felt that WSR would not last. However, 5 years have passed and WSR is still a mandate, especially now with the added accountability passed along by NCLB (2001). As districts and schools scramble to improve, more and more programs and initiatives are being implemented. Fullan (2001) stated,

> The main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects...it is not uncommon now to find school districts in which vastly different approaches to education reform are being attempted at the same time. (p. 109)

It suffices to say that all these innovations and initiatives are causing teachers who are in the forefront of implementing them to feel overwhelmed.

It is also frustrating to districts and schools when they feel they are doing all the right things and have implemented the right programs, but students' scores on the standardized tests have fallen. In their panic to bring the scores up, other innovations and programs are looked into without giving the programs in place a chance to work. Districts and schools may not realize that they are in the midst of an "implementation dip." "The implementation dip is literally a drop in performance and confidence as on..."
encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understanding... People feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious...and deeply disturbed" (Fullan, 2001, p. 40).

WSR along with other school improvement initiatives are constantly being implemented on an ongoing basis to comply with new mandates issued at the federal, state, and district levels. The WSR models chosen by Abbott Schools are models suggested by the state for their confirmed ability to improve student achievement. However, urban elementary schools in Abbott districts in New Jersey are still being classified as schools in need of improvement. If research shows that the programs being implemented increase student achievement, why are some schools improving while others are not? It time to stop the continuous flow of programs and initiatives and evaluate what is in place.

The purpose of the study conducted by the CCSR on the CPS was to study the relationship between instructional program coherence and student achievement. Through the use of surveys administered to teachers, administrators, and students, evidence was presented that schools with stronger program coherence showed higher gains in student achievement. In addition, factors that discouraged or supported instructional coherence were identified. Through their findings they were able to offer suggestions to school leaders, school improvement partners and policy makers on how to bring about the instructional program coherence that can lead to higher student achievement (Newman et al., 2001).

The purpose of this study was to identify the effects of WSR on achieving instructional program coherence in urban elementary schools in a New Jersey school
district identified as an Abbott District. Factors that enhance instructional program coherence, the degrees in which they exist, and the level of instructional program coherence in each school were determined. It was hopeful that the results would assist the district in improving educational opportunities for its students, expand public discussion about the conditions of education within the schools, and promote brainstorming of the kinds of efforts needed to advance meaningful improvements.

"Effective school improvement systems are infused with data collection and analysis to inform and to improve policy and practice" (NASBE, 2002, p. 30).

In the future, this study may lead to the research Newman et al. (2001) stated was not obtainable in the study by CCSR, that is, research has not addressed how administrators and teachers might actually rethink their circumstances and bring better coherence to their efforts. Once the results of the study were presented to the district, it was hopeful that the district would document the problem solving and decision-making techniques used to increase instructional program coherence in the elementary schools. In addition, perhaps the results of this study encouraged the district to evaluate the middle school in order to increase instructional program coherence throughout the district.

Research Questions

The quantitative and qualitative data obtained were used to answer the following main research question: What are the effects of the implementation of WSR and school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and improving
student achievement? The data were also used to answer the following subsidiary questions:

1. For each of the five elements identified that promote instructional program coherence, which factors correlate to instructional program coherence?
2. What is the predictive strength of these factors in explaining instructional program coherence?
3. What, if any, is the nature of the relationship between these factors and instructional program coherence?

Conceptual Framework

The main underlying assumption of WSR, according to the Commissioner of the NJDOE in Abbott v. Burke V (1998), is the belief that it can create the opportunity to achieve a thorough and efficient education for students among the urban elementary schools in the Abbott Districts of New Jersey. In addition, the Commissioner highlighted the following assumptions of WSR:

1. WSR affects the culture of the entire school including instruction, curriculum, and assessment.
2. WSR can be particularly effective in enabling the disadvantaged children in poor urban communities to reach higher educational standards.
3. The key to the implementation of WSR is continuous professional development that focuses on student achievement of the CCCS and is based on on-going professional renewal.
Above all, in order for WSR to be effective, the Commissioner stated that these assumptions are valid, provided that WSR is carried out successfully and schools integrate reform throughout the school as a total institution rather than by simply adding reforms piecemeal. Simply put, properly implemented, with support and approval by teachers, staff and parents, and with sufficient monetary support, WSR is believed to improve schools and student achievement.

Researchers believe that the implementation of WSR and the policies, initiatives and programs that come with it, will be effective only if a high level of instructional program coherence exists within the school. Newman et al. (2001) stated in order for a school to obtain this high level of program coherence, the school must exhibit the following conditions:

1. A common instructional framework,
2. Excellent staff working conditions,
3. Allocated resources to support and advance the instructional framework.

The main underlying assumption being that if schools attain a high level of instructional program coherence, student achievement will improve.

On the school front, there are many more factors such as demographic characteristics that may impact students’ achievement. Some are: socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, the school’s location, language spoken at home, and the parents’ education attainment. The inability to appropriately house students and reduce class sizes, to those recommended by the Commissioner, inhibits the effective implementation of WSR. Other factors such as student mobility, teacher attrition/migration, school enrollment, attendance, and limited English proficiency
(LEP) may play a part in students’ success in school. Many of these issues are difficult to control and the problems they bring are often beyond the school’s ability to resolve.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to one Abbott District and the five urban elementary schools within that district. All five schools were implementing the same WSR model and school improvement initiatives. In addition, all five elementary schools in this Abbott District belong to Cohort II of WSR implementation. The quantitative analysis, through teacher surveys, was limited to certified staff within these five schools. Students were not surveyed. The qualitative piece of this study was limited to interviews with only the principals from those schools with a perceived high level of instructional program coherence.

This study was also limited due to the restricted amount of responses per school, which lowered the confidence level of the results of the absolute means per school. It is not clear if the returned surveys indeed reflected the perceptions of all the teachers within each school. It is also uncertain how the fact that some teachers did not respond to some questions on the survey, especially the mathematics section, affected the results. Further limitations included the multicollinearity of the independent variables, which prevented multiple regressions to be used.

Although there are various factors that affect school improvement and may impact the degree of instructional program coherence in schools, this study delimited its attention to those identified by the CCSR as factors that affect instructional program coherence. Those factors identified are: school leadership, parent and community
involvement, professional community, student-centered learning climate, and high-quality instruction. In addition, attention was given to the following conditions within the schools: a common instructional framework; excellent staff working conditions, and the allocated resources to support and advance the instructional framework.

Definition of Terms

Abbott District: An Abbott District means one of 28 urban school districts that were identified in 1990 as Abbott Districts by the New Jersey Supreme Court. The following urban districts were identified: Asbury Park, Bridgeton, Burlington, Camden, East Orange, Elizabeth, Garfield, Gloucester, Harrison, Haboken, Irvington, Jersey City, Keansburg, Long Branch, Millville, New Brunswick, Newark, Orange, Passaic, Paterson, Pemberton, Perth Amboy, Phillipsburg, Pleasantville, Trenton, Union, Vineland, and West New York. Neptune Township, Plainfield and Salem have been added to the original 28 Abbott districts to bring the total of Abbott Districts in New Jersey to 31 (NJDOE, 2002).

Corner School Development Program (SDP) is a WSR model that focuses on bridging the gap between home and school by identifying and addressing the underlying problems students and their families may have that interfere with the child’s progress in school. It is designed to involve all school staff, community agencies, and parents in solving the problems that have been identified. SDP has three components: a School Planning and Management Team, a Student and Staff Support Team, and a Parent Involvement Team (NJDOE, 2002).

High-quality instruction: High-quality instruction is defined by three elements: student exposure to subject matter; subject matter introduced at a steady pace and coordinated within and across grade levels; student engagement in the subject matter; teachers use of intellectually challenging assignments that require students to study a topic in depth; students ability to communicate and explain what they have learned, and draw connections to problems and situations beyond school; and pedagogy: the instructional practices teachers use in the classroom (Wenzel et al., 2001).

Instructional program coherence: “School instructional program coherence is defined by interrelated programs for students and staff that are guided by a common framework and pursued over a sustained period of time. Strong program coherence is present when a common framework directs all aspects of student learning and governs the working environment” (Wenzel et al. 2001, p. 18).

Parent and community involvement: Wenzel et al. (2001) define parent/community involvement as the participation of parents in school activities that enable parents to contribute in significant ways to achieving school goals. Parents support their children’s learning at home and are viewed as critical resources by the school. There is a mutual trust between parents and school staff. Teachers cultivate ties with parents and the community, are knowledgeable about community and cultural
issues that concern the students and their families, visit students' homes, and attend neighborhood events.

Professional capacity: Professional capacity reflects the quality of a school's human resources, professional development, professional community, and a system of values and beliefs that emphasize teacher responsibility for change (Sporte, 2005).

School Leadership: The principal invites teachers, parents, and Local School Council (Local School Council) members to assume major roles in leading improvement efforts according to a unified vision of a successful school (Sporte, 2005).

School Leadership Council (SLC): A collaborative, school-based planning and decision-making body (NJDOE, 2002).

Standards-based reform: The process by which schools and school districts work to align school district and school curriculum to the CCCS, assure instructional practice is effective and driven by this curriculum and the professional development of teachers and the selection of instructional materials, textbooks, and instructional software are driven by the aligned curriculum (NJDOE, 2002).

Student-centered learning climate: A strong student climate is characterized by the following:

1. High expectations for student academic achievement,
2. Strong academic, emotional and social support for learning from teachers, parents and peers,
3. Students feel teachers know them and care about them.
4. Students have a sense of being safe, physically and psychologically.
5. There are few discipline problems.
6. Teachers and students treat each other with respect and trust.

7. A strong-centered climate is supported by the school’s effort to develop and sustain a school-wide, focus on teaching and learning and optimize instructional time. (Wenzel et al., 2001)

Whole school reform (WSR): Whole school reform is a complete restructuring of an entire school, incorporating a wide range of programs and strategies that have been used successfully to improve schools by strengthening curriculum and ensuring resources are targeted to the needs of students. These schools feature smaller class sizes, intensive instruction in all subject areas (particularly reading), tutoring services, school-level management by a team, and a school-based budget. WSR requires effective leadership by the principal with the support and participation of the faculty of each school (Crosbie, 2000). State regulations pertaining to schools in the Abbott districts presume that elementary schools will implement a national model of WSR to assure universal literacy by the end of third grade and attainment of the CCCS at every grade level (NJDOE, 2005).

Whole school reform model: School reform models are meant to improve education. They attempt to do this by stepping away from the traditional ways of thinking about school organization and decision-making, staffing, teaching, curriculum, student services, and relationships with parents, business, and the community. School reform models tend to target schools that serve disadvantaged students. Some models focus on reforming a particular aspect of the school, such as curriculum. Among reform models that might be labeled “whole-school,” some have a rigid structure and prescribe
the curricula, materials, and instructional strategies to be used, while others do not prescribe any of the above but rather have a philosophy of school change which school staffs adopt and apply based on their local situations and needs (EdSource, 2002).

**Significance of the Study**

The implementations of WSR and school improvement initiatives have proven to be a difficult process in the Abbott school districts. District administrators, school administrators, and teachers are torn in different directions in their quest to implement new programs and policies aimed at improving their schools. Teachers are overwhelmed, overloaded and feel a sense of insecurity as to the amount of effort they should put in these new initiatives for fear that they will also go to the wayside, like past initiatives. Frustration has also surfaced in districts, as well as at the school level, due to the limited amount of student achievement.

After 5 years of implementing WSR, new programs, new initiatives and policies to improve schools and student achievement, some schools are still being identified by the NJBOE as in need of improvement because of their inability to meet AYP. The Abbott regulations, Improving Learning and Literacy in Abbott Districts: Implementing Standards-Driven Instruction, Reforms, Programs and Services under Abbott v. Burke, (2004), require districts and schools to develop, implement, and evaluate policies that will provide for a coherent curriculum fully aligned with the CCCS and the use of test results and other data for decision making and improving instruction. The underlying goal of this study was just that: to evaluate policies and to use test results and other data for decision making and improving instruction.
Asensio and Johnson (2001) stated, “Only school-wide change aimed at aligning all parts of the system—standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment can enable every student to succeed” (p. 3). The studies conducted by the CCSR have shown evidence that improving instructional program coherence improves student achievement. Through their studies, they have been able to make suggestions, to school leaders, school improvement partners and policymakers, on how instructional coherence can be achieved so that schools can improve and lead to higher levels of student achievement. In addition, Newmann et al. (2001) identified factors within the educational system that discourage instructional program coherence and those factors that enhance it.

This research proposed to study five urban elementary schools in an Abbott district to determine the effects of WSR on the level of instructional program coherence of each individual school and to identify the factors that may impede or enhance instructional coherence. The data collected would enable this district to focus on eliminating those factors that are working against coherence and strengthen those factors that promote it. This may make it possible for the schools to achieve even higher levels of coherence thus improving student achievement.

According to NASBE (2002), “If carefully aligned school improvement is the vehicle that moves schools toward higher achievement, then data are the fuel. Effective school improvement systems are infused with data collection and analysis to inform and to improve policy and practice” (p. 30). The data collection and analysis presented in this study was intended to provide the administrators, at the district and school level, evidence of possible factors that may be affecting student achievement in a negative or
positive manner, instead of just an analysis of students’ performance on standardized test scores. “Building an accountability system that focuses on student achievement requires states to measure much more than student test scores and focus on evaluating critical systemic elements related to instruction and learning” (NASBE, p. 30).

Hopefully, the results of this study helped to identify those programs and initiatives that are having a positive affect in the schools and identified those that can be eliminated in order to relieve some of the feelings of frustration, overload, and anxiety that are being experienced by administrators and teachers. A greater amount of focus could be placed on factors that were found to be essential and instrumental in improving student achievement. Students in urban districts have many contextual factors that work against them; it would benefit these children greatly if solutions can be found that would improve their chances of achieving in school and becoming great contributors to society in the future.

Summary

Walker and Gutmore (2000) stated, “...The ultimate evidence of the success of Abbott will rest on whether students in the Abbott districts have been able to successfully demonstrate their mastery of the standards established in the state’s core curriculum frameworks” (p. 9). The vast amount of mandates handed down to the local schools on the federal, state, and district levels, as documented previously, is overwhelming and has left administrators, teachers, parents and students frustrated at their inability to achieve high levels of achievement, despite the implementation of
WSR efforts. The time has come to identify what works and what does not in order to improve instruction and attainment of the CCCS.

Evidence presented by the CCSR has shown that instructional program coherence produces real learning sustained over time and improves student achievement. In addition, the identification of factors that promote and prevent instructional program coherence can provide insight into modifications to policy and practice that are needed in order to improve low-performing schools. According to Asensio and Johnson (2001), “Finding ways to use data in helpful, not punitive ways, the district can offer the critical information services that the school needs to make informed decisions and necessary adjustments along the way” (p. 8).
Chapter II

Related Literature

Among the first mandates of the NJDOE on Abbott Districts was the adoption of a WSR model. The purpose of the WSR model is to assist the Abbott school districts with the implementation of the nine elements of WSR identified by the Abbott regulations, Improving Learning and Literacy in Abbott Districts: Implementing Standards-Driven Instruction, Reforms, Programs and Services under Abbott v. Burke, (2004), as:

1. Improved student achievement and mastery of CCSS through standards-based reform at the school level;
2. Assessment, planning, budgeting and implementation of reforms, programs and services driven by data, including student outcomes, student and school needs, best practices, national research, and evidence of effectiveness in a similar school context;
3. School-based leadership and decision-making;
4. Integration and alignment of school-level reforms, programs, and services;
5. Educational technology;
6. Teacher supports;
7. A safe school environment;
8. Student and family supports;
9. Accountability.
In addition, Abbott districts are required to develop a 3-year operational plan that identifies reforms, programs, and services that will operate in the school during the 3-year period and a budget that makes allotments of monies for the items listed in the plan. The 3-year operational plan must be based on the outcome of a needs assessment and related to the improvement of student achievement.

The Commissioner of Education in the Abbott regulations, Improving Learning and Literacy in Abbott Districts: Implementing Standards-Driven Instruction, Reforms, Programs and Services under Abbott v. Burke, (2004), assured the improvement of learning and literacy in Abbott School districts. It ensured that proposed reforms, programs, services, and staffing, that are identified through assessment and evaluation, are cost-effective and efficient, are focused on improving learning, literacy and student mastery of the CCCS, and are supported by adequate funding. In addition, the rules are consistent with the requirements, reporting and responsibilities imposed on Abbott schools and school districts by NCLB (2001).

This appears to be an attempt by the NJDOE to align the state mandates imposed on Abbott Districts to those from the federal level in NCLB (2001). However, the accountability requirements of NCLB that schools meet AYP, annually, determined by standardized test scores, with the ultimate goal of all students reaching 100% proficiency by 2014, has added even more stress on schools who are already overwhelmed by the implementation of WSR, school improvement initiatives, and many professional development programs, all aimed at improving student achievement. Hargrove, Walker, Huber, Corrigan and Moore (2004) stated that in a 1999 survey of
North Carolina teachers, 83.8% of the participants felt that their job was more stressful since the implementation of the state's high-stakes accountability program.

According to Fullan (2000), "The main enemies of large-scale reform are overload and extreme fragmentation" (p.1). The implementation of WSR, the school improvement initiatives required by federal, state, and district mandates and the added stress of the accountability of student achievement to meet AYP, have indeed caused overload on teachers, administrators, and students. The extreme fragmentation, of which Fullan speaks about in his quote, is what schools must be wary of if they hope to improve schools and student achievement. Newman et al. (2001) agrees, "Research has pointed out how clustered and contradictory state and district policy environments …fragment school development efforts" (p.10). In order to prevent fragmentation of school development, districts and schools need to find a way to satisfy the implementation of school improvement initiatives and mandates in a manner that will facilitate leading for school administrators, teaching for teachers, learning for students, and participation of all stakeholders, such as parents and the community, in order to ascertain improved student achievement in the Abbott schools.

Through the administration of surveys, between the years 1999 and 2001, the CCSR studied the reform efforts of the CPS. They have found evidence that schools that showed improved student achievement had a high degree of instructional program coherence. They found that the efforts used by schools to improve instructional program coherence should be embedded in systemic strategies to build effective school leadership, teachers' professional community, parent and community involvement, and
high-quality instruction, all essential supports to guide school improvement along with a student-centered learning climate (Newman et al., 2001).

Once all the expectations, laws, school reform initiatives, standards, research-based programs, and so on, have been handed down to the schools, it is up to the building principal to somehow make them all work. Everyone does not have the capability to be a good leader. It takes special people with special abilities to be able to juggle all that schools are expected to effectively implement in order to improve student achievement. Effective leaders must be able to work with and through all the stakeholders of students’ education, strive to meet common goals, collaborate in making decisions, evaluate instructional programs for effectiveness, use data analysis to focus on students’ needs, provide support and guidance to teachers, involve parents and community members, all the while assuring a safe and nurturing environment for students that is conducive to learning.

WenZel et al. (2001) identified many characteristics of strong leadership, such as leadership based on a clear mission and vision in the school, communication with teachers and involving them in decision-making. Teachers are encouraged to work with colleagues and administrators to plan for student development. The recruitment and retention of effective staff members, encouragement for teacher professional development, reduction of classroom interruptions, and effective communication with school community is important. In addition, strong leadership accepts responsibility for fair enforcement of policies and program implementation and is efficient and effective.

Other researchers, in addition to citing some of the characteristics mentioned above, found other traits of strong leadership. Asensio and Johnson (2001) stated that
building leadership is an essential variable for success, schools undertaking this kind of reform work need strong, stable, visionary, and committed leadership that focuses on instruction rather than on management alone. Leadership needs courage to stick with a program long enough to see results, to value and model risk-taking in order to send the message to staff that reform includes everyone, and a leader should see himself or herself as a catalyst for change. Portnoy (2004) identified six core functions of leadership in schools as: instructional, ensuring quality of instruction; cultural, tending to the symbolic resources of the school (traditions, climate and history); managerial, overseeing operation of the school (human resources: recruitment, hiring, mentoring); strategic, promoting vision, mission and goals; external development, representing school in the community; and micropolitical, buffering and mediating internal interest while maximizing resources.

Part of the job of leadership is to establish a professional community within the school. It is essential to have a professional community where staff members have learned to collaborate and reach consensus, support each other, share knowledge, and work together to meet the needs of the school and the students. Staff should feel responsible for their teaching and the students’ learning and should be motivated to do the best they can for the improvement of themselves, the school and student achievement. Wenzel et al. (2001) identified a strong professional community as one where teachers have a clear and common vision and a shared sense of a mission, goals, beliefs, and values. Additional characteristics are: a common language, commitment to high-quality instruction, shared responsibility, and accountability for students’ success. In addition, a strong professional community is highly collaborative, facilitates the
exchange of information, is reflective, and disagreement is constructive rather than destructive.  

DuFour (2004) suggested that in establishing a professional learning community, focus should be on ensuring that children learn, establishing a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results of students. He further stated that the hardest part of establishing a professional learning environment is assuring that it is sustained. “The rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it” (p.12).

Hand in hand, with the establishment of a strong professional community, is high-quality instruction. It is the hope of leadership that by developing a strong professional community the students will receive the high quality instruction they need to be successful. Teachers must realize that the knowledge of various teaching strategies acquired through professional development is not enough. It is the practical use and execution of those teaching strategies, in a manner that proves student learning through assessment that promotes student achievement. “Every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers... netted greater increases in student achievement than other, non-instructional uses of school resources” (Protheroe, Lewis, & Paik, 2002, p.2).

Wenzel et al. (2001) specifically defined quality instruction by three elements: student exposure to the subject matter, how teachers engage students in the subject matter, and pedagogy. Quality instruction requires the use of didactic teaching methods: whole-class presentations, recitation, individual student work, and should have a strong emphasis on interactive teaching methods: interactive, problem-oriented, differentiated
strategies to promote analysis, application, and production of knowledge. In addition, strong quality instruction should be supported by strong curricula, instructional materials, and time for teaching and learning.

Another researcher is a little more specific as to what quality instruction entails. In order to achieve quality instruction, teachers should set the stage for learners to build on their learning by using increasingly sophisticated conceptualizations and by encouraging discussion of the big ideas. In addition, teachers should spiral class discourse into higher levels of inclusive ideas by providing learners with the resources they require and empowering students to regulate their own learning (Brooks & Brooks, 2004). While another researcher felt that there are three characteristics of “intellectual work” in the classrooms: the students construct new knowledge based on what they already know, the students engage in inquiry in order to gain in-depth understanding of problem solving and use of elaborated communication to express their ideas and findings, and students are able to use their new knowledge outside of the classroom (Protheroe et al., 2002).

In order to facilitate the learning of students, their environment should be conducive to learning. This includes making the school safe, maintaining good discipline and management in the classroom and the school, and having ample materials for teaching the students and for students to use in order to be engaged in learning. In addition, the classroom should reflect the learning experiences they have encountered by displaying their individual, as well as group work, for future reference. Beyond that, the environment also includes the relationships that exist between the adults in the room.
and the students. There must be mutual respect and rapport between them to facilitate communication, a sense of belonging, and trust.

Wenzel et al. (2001) summarized the characteristics of a strong student-centered learning climate as having high expectations for student academic achievement, strong support for learning from their teachers, parents, and peers. Students should feel that their teachers know them personally, care about them, notice when students are having personal or academic difficulty, and should provide help. Students should have a sense of being physically and emotionally safe, few discipline problems should exist, and teachers and students should treat each other with respect and trust. Most importantly, "A strong learning climate is supported by the school's efforts to develop and sustain a schoolwide focus on teaching and learning and optimize instructional time" (p. 11).

The final essential support in establishing strong instructional program coherence is the involvement of parents and community in the education of the students. Parents are a key piece in improving student achievement. Parents are the students' support outside of school. They can provide the reinforcement of what is being taught in school through their assistance in completing homework assignments, studying for tests or reinforcing the importance of education. Parents' involvement in school, through participation in decision-making, socializing with teachers and staffs in school functions or even volunteering their time to the school, makes it evident to students that their parents are interested in their success.

Community members are important in helping to provide services that promote student achievement. Contributions made by community members can assist students in the following areas: academics, through monetary donations or donations of
instructional materials; health, through donations of their services (dental, eye screening, counseling) or materials (glasses, hearing aids, and special materials to help those children with sight disabilities), and shared decision-making through participation in the schools' SLC. In addition, community members donate gifts and food for families in need during the holidays and awards to motivate high achievement in the students.

Wenzel et al. (2001) stated that schools with strong parent and community support have parents that participate in school activities and contribute in significant ways to achieve school goals, support their children learning at home, and are viewed by the school as a crucial resource. There is trust between parents and the school exhibited by mutual respect and confidence in each other's abilities to help students. Teachers cultivate ties with the parents and community, visit students' homes, attend neighborhood events and are knowledgeable about community and cultural issues that are important to students and their families.

Many researchers highlight some of the same attributes, listed above, as important reasons for parent and community involvement. Lewis (2004) reported that there are many studies, reports, and initiatives that affirm that engagement in learning, the environments that value trust and integrity in relationships between teachers, students and their families, work together to make a critical difference in learning. Cochrane (2004), goes beyond to state, "Teaching that combines skills of teachers and the specialized knowledge of adults outside school leads to deep understanding as students connect to the rich resources their community has to offer" (p. 79). It is evident that the involvement of community members in teaching the students in the classroom is another way to improve student achievement.
Although the essential supports highlighted above have been found to enhance instructional program coherence and improve student achievement, there are other contextual factors that research has shown affect student achievement. These factors include issues such as racial/ethnic background, student mobility, socioeconomic status, attendance, and students of limited English proficiency (LEP). In addition, class size, teacher attrition, and teacher migration can also be significant factors.

According to Kiger (2002), "Class size is viewed as a key reform strategy to improve the perceived achievement deficits in U.S. public schools," (p. 1) and class size reduction, when combined with other reform initiatives, is a facilitator of instructional program coherence by creating working conditions that support implementation of the common instructional framework. Many urban schools have overcrowded classrooms, which limit the amount of attention that teachers can give individual students to assist them in personal or academic areas. In addition, overcrowded classrooms have higher incidences of discipline problems. Holloway (2002) pointed out teachers in smaller classes spend less time on keeping students focused and disciplining students giving them more time to devote to instruction, working with poor readers and students' personal concerns.

Solving the problem of class size is very difficult in some urban districts where the size of the school and lack of space does not allow it. In some of the schools in these urban districts, this issue has been dealt with by reducing the teacher-student ratios in the classroom. This has been done by creating team teaching situations or dividing students among other teaching staff, such as reading specialists and intervention teachers, during reading and math periods. In some instances,
Paraprofessionals have been added to classrooms whose class size does not meet state mandates. According to Achilles, Finn, and Pate-Bain (2002), the definition of class size and teacher-student ratio is not synonymous, and students who received instruction from a variety of professionals were more likely to be confused as to whom they were responsible.

Although there exists research that shows the positive influences of class size on student achievement, there are many factors that impede schools from creating small class size environments. Some of these factors, as highlighted by Biddle and Berliner (2002) are: the need to recruit and hire more teachers, and the need to find or create extra rooms that may require modifying school buildings or use of temporary classrooms. These changes may require additional funds that may not be available in the districts. In addition, in some urban districts the building of new schools cannot keep up with its growing population due to the redevelopment of the city.

For many years, the issue of closing the achievement gap caused by the diversity of students in urban schools has been researched. Yet the achievement gap continues to be viewed by many as one of the contextual factors that impede student achievement. The implementation of NCLB (2001) has brought even more attention to this contextual factor because of the requirement of schools to achieve AYP in various subgroups that include those based on racial/ethnic backgrounds. According to James, Jurich and Estes (2001), assessments of kindergarteners showed that African American and Latino children are over-represented in the lowest quartiles of achievements and that although minority youth have shown some improvement in some academic indicators, they still have a long way to go to reach parity with their White peers.
The population of urban schools often consists of a large number of economically disadvantaged students. These students are identifiable by their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Documented studies have presented evidence that socioeconomic status is a factor that may also impede student achievement. According to NASBE (2002), more than half of all low-performing schools are in high-poverty, urban areas. About three quarters of low-performing schools have the majority of their students qualified for the federal free-lunch program, and more than 90% are minorities. Walker and Gatmote (2000) stated that in New Jersey the performance data on the state's assessment indicated that students in the neediest districts continue to achieve at levels significantly lower than their more affluent counterparts.

"Students who transfer frequently between schools during the school year are at greater risk for academic and behavioral problems...a Minneapolis-based study found a strong relationship between mobility and a student's race and family income" (Staresina, 2004, p. 1). Families of economically disadvantaged students have the necessity to move when their rent is raised beyond their means and they must relocate to areas that are more affordable. Some students in urban areas may become homeless, thus forcing the families to move elsewhere with other family members. In addition, some families move according to the area in which they can find work because of their limited skills. Student mobility affects the students' continuity of instruction, the development of strong relationships, and students' sense of stability. NASBE (2002) stated that high student mobility correlates with lower student test scores, causes higher rates of grade retention, and higher rates of dropouts.
Teacher attrition and migration are contributing to low student achievement as well. Teachers leave for a variety of reasons, frustration with teaching, a new job outside of teaching or to administrative positions in or out of the district. Some teachers are lured to other districts or jobs because of the potential to make more money. In addition, the added stress of accountability by reforms may contribute to teacher attrition. Hargrove et al. (2004) stated the following:

Assessment, which often takes the form of high stakes testing, is not always consistent with the philosophical principles underlying the standards, does not always adequately measure the growth called for by the standard, and can focus attention away from the reform supported by these standards. The outcomes of this dysfunction are proving to be debilitating to the reform effort and are leading to increased teacher frustration and attrition. (p. 567)

According to Darling-Hammond (2003), “Most important, attrition consigns a large share of students in high-turnover schools to a continual parade of ineffective teachers” (p.9). The longer teachers stay, the more experienced and effective teachers become. Attrition requires positions to be continually filled with teachers that are ineffective and that will need time to develop the skills to become effective and capable of quality instruction.

LEP students are a subgroup identified as one of the indicators in meeting AYP. LEP students with as little as a year of English are expected to perform proficient or advance proficient on the NJASK 4, the same requirement as students who have been taught in general program classes with a minimum of 4 years of instruction in English. Although this may sound absurd to some, and has been acknowledged somewhat by the
state, it continues to affect urban school districts with high enrollments of LEP students in their efforts to achieve AYP.

According to the Government Accountability Office (2001), students in English based programs may take 4 to 8 years to develop the language skills needed to perform on par with native English-speakers in all core academic subjects, such as, reading, language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics, whereas students in programs where the student’s native language is used, students spent 4 years or less in the program. Some of these students do show improved student achievement in their native language, but their achievement in their native language is not taken under consideration by the state, it is then performance in English that counts.

The NJDOE has identified attendance as the 41st indicator required for school districts to meet AYP. In some Abbott districts, meeting the attendance indicator may prove to be difficult depending on the demographics of their population. Some families, coming from countries where an education is not mandatory, have a difficult time understanding that the law mandates an education. In addition, the value placed on education by some of the students’ parents also depends on the priority parents place on ensuring that students attend school. School must use community agents, truant officers, and at times the judicial system, to force parents to bring students to school. However, schools are finding that more positive means can be used in educating parents on the importance of education. NASBE (2002) cited, “a study of one school-family-community partnership in Baltimore found that the quality of the school’s partnership program significantly improved attendance, as well as student performance on reading and writing tests in third grade” (p. 39).
In addition to the contextual factors highlighted above, Newman et al. (2001) found evidence that schools with strong instructional program coherence had a common instructional framework that guided curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning climate. Schools also displayed effective working conditions that supported implementation of the common instructional framework and the school allocated resources such as materials, time, and staff assignments to advance the framework and to avoid diffuse, scattered improvement efforts. Much research is available to support the concept of a common instructional framework.

Jerald (2003) stated, "To overcome the problem of scattered content and unequal expectations, teachers need a common, coherent, and specific curriculum telling them what students should have learned at the end of each grade level and at key checkpoints along the way" (p. 14). In addition Jerald (2003) pointed out that leading districts have adopted some form of common, district-wide curriculum and instructional programs. More specifically, Aldine, Texas decided to develop grade-by-grade "benchmark targets" to ensure that teachers were basing instruction on a common framework for learning rather than on the state test itself.

"Accountability systems are imposed from outside because the public has doubts about that profession's quality of service" (Popham, 2004, p. 82). For years, many reforms have been imposed on schools for this very reason. It is up to the districts, and the schools in them, to try their best to implement all these reforms and initiatives for school improvement, in alignment, in order to ascertain higher student achievement.

Researchers identified, through evidence found in studies, various components, programs, and initiatives have increased student achievement. The concept of high
Instructional program coherence promoting high student achievement has been found in many studies, along with the contextual factors that enhance it. Other researchers have identified other contextual factors that may impede student achievement. These factors must be taken into account when exploring ways to align all the components of school improvement and whole school reform to assure optimal implementation for students’ success.

In conclusion, the research presented has provided evidence that the implementation of WSR efforts and school improvement initiatives can cause fragmentation in schools, which in turn can affect student achievement. WSR efforts and school improvement initiatives must be implemented in a cohesive manner. As discussed previously, a high level of instructional program coherence is instrumental in raising student achievement. Five factors have been identified by the CCSR as enhancing instructional program coherence in the schools. The five factors are: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community. Other researchers cited in this chapter support the importance of these factors in the schools. It was also determined that three conditions must exist in a school to obtain a high level of instructional program coherence. These conditions are: a common instructional framework, allocated resources to support the framework, and staff conditions conducive to the implementation of the framework.

Schools in Abbott Districts are mandated to implement a WSR model, as well as school improvement initiatives that will assist in raising student achievement in order to meet the regulations of Abbott v. Burke V (1998) and the accountability mandates of
NCLB (2001). WSR and these school improvement initiatives need to be implemented in a very cohesive manner in order to improve student achievement. In light of this research, it would be beneficial for schools to determine their level of instructional program coherence, determine the levels of the factors identified to enhance instructional program coherence within their schools, and ascertain that the conditions of a common instructional framework, allocate resources to support the framework and staff conditions conducive to the implementation of the framework exist in their schools. Based on their findings, adjustments can be made within their schools that may assist them in optimizing their ability to meet the accountability mandates of NCLB.
Chapter III

Methodology

According to Sporle (2004), "Research has shown that student learning improves most in schools where multiple, related Essential Supports are implemented and evaluated on an ongoing basis" (p. 1). The Essential Supports being school leadership, parent and community partnerships, student-centered climate, professional capacity and a quality instruction program. The CCSR has used surveys since 1999 to evaluate the degree of instructional program coherence present in the CPS and its effects on student achievement. By doing so, they have been able to provide evidence of factors that have enhanced and impeded school improvement and they have shared this with the stakeholders of the CPS, which have made modifications to programs that have led to improved student achievement.

Population of Study

The population of this study consists of five urban K-4 elementary schools. All five schools are located in an Abbott District in New Jersey. According to the Fall Survey System Report for 2004-2005 conducted in the district annually, the racial/ethnic makeup of the elementary population being studied is: 88.3% Hispanic, 7.8% Black, 3.4% White, and .5% Pacific Islander. In addition, 84% of these students are identified as economically disadvantaged, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture free/reduced lunch indicators.
Each elementary school has 2 administrators: 1 principal and 1 vice-principal. The enrollments of the schools range from 500 – 800 students. The WSR model used in all the elementary schools is the Corner School Development Program (SDP) and each school has its own SLC. The implementation of WSR and the SDP model began in the year 2000.

Research Tools

Two surveys, designed by the CCSR to measure the degree of instructional program coherence in the elementary CPS, were used. The first survey, a teacher survey, was administered to the teachers, and the other survey, a principal survey, was administered to the principals of the five urban elementary schools. The results of the teacher surveys were used to determine if the five factors were correlated to instructional program coherence. In addition, the data were used to identify those schools with a high degree of instructional program coherence and the level of each of the factors that enhance instructional program coherence in each school.

Permission for the use of the surveys was requested, in writing, from the CCSR. In addition, permission to conduct the study in these five elementary schools and the use of the surveys was obtained from the assistant superintendent of the district through the submission of a study proposal, as required by the district, and a letter in writing on Seton Hall letterhead.

In order to get a more in-depth understanding to the relationships of the five factors of school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community and
instructional program coherence, interviews were conducted with the principals of the
two schools with the highest perceived degrees of instructional program coherence.
The responses to the interview questions assisted in determining the nature between the
factors and the perceived high level of instructional program coherence. In addition, the
degree of each factor that contributed to this high level was explored and how the
schools were able to obtain these levels.

Data Collection Process

Teacher and principal surveys developed by the CCSR were mailed to the
participants at each individual school with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the
study. The letter stated that participation was voluntary and attempted to encourage
participation. The participants were provided with addressed envelopes in which they
returned the completed survey by mail. The confidentiality of each participant was
assured by the anonymity of the survey. There were no identification questions, such as
their names or any other personal identifying factors. The surveys were color coded to
identify the school at which the participant works. The study as a whole did not
identify the town, district, or the names of the schools. Pseudonyms were used, when
necessary, for comparison or clarification purposes. Of the 330 surveys sent, 91 teacher
surveys were returned. The amount of teacher surveys from each school varied (see
Table 1).
Table 1

Number of Surveys Returned per School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of surveys returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The principals of those schools, identified through the surveys, with a perceived high level of instructional program coherence were contacted, and an interview was requested. Both principals agreed to be interviewed in the privacy of their office. At the interview, the principals were asked the interview questions that were prepared beforehand. An audio recording was made, with their permission through the signing of an informed consent form. These interviews were later transcribed (see Appendix B). The confidentiality of the principals interviewed was assured by the anonymity of their replies. Pseudonyms were used in both cases.

The proficiency and advanced proficiency levels in Mathematics on the Elementary Schools Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) and New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) for the years 2001 through 2005, for each of the schools, were used in this study. The scores for each school were obtained from each
individual school principal, with the permission of the superintendent of schools, and from the school report cards. The anonymity of each child was protected because individual scores were not used.

Data Analysis

The data obtained through the surveys and interviews were used to answer the following main research question: What are the effects of the implementation of WSR and school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and improving student achievement? The data were also used to answer the following subsidiary questions:

1. For each of the five elements identified that promotes instructional program coherence, which factors correlate to instructional program coherence?

2. What is the predictive strength of these factors in explaining instructional program coherence?

3. What, if any, is the nature of the relationship between these factors and instructional program coherence?

The statistical evidence needed to answer the main research question and subsidiary question three required an analysis of qualitative data obtained through a survey given to the principals of the five urban elementary schools and interviews. The results were used for discussion purposes on the effect of WSR on instructional program coherence. Subsidiary question one required the analysis of data by determining the correlation between instructional program coherence and the factors
that support it, namely, high-quality instruction, parent/community partnerships, professional capacity/community, school leadership, and student-centered learning climate. A multiple regression was initially going to be used to determine the strength of these factors in the schools that were identified as having a high degree of instructional program coherence. This would have provided the evidence to formulate a response to question two; however, due to multicollinearity, descriptive data were used, namely the absolute value of the means.

The following tables identify the factors this study focused on and the corresponding questions on the surveys. Tables 2 and 3 helped to focus on the answers that pertained to each measure and facilitated the analysis in determining the degree to which each of these factors exist in each of the five elementary schools studied. The degree of each factor assisted in determining the level of instructional program coherence in each school.
### Table 2

#### Teacher Survey: Questions Related to Program Coherence and the Five Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Related questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Instruction</td>
<td>46-80, 99-103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Community Partnerships</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity / Community</td>
<td>1-5, 16-19, 24, 26, 29-30, 34, 36-40, 81-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>6-8, 21-23, 86-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students-Centered Learning Climate</td>
<td>20, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coherence</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

#### Principal Survey: Questions Related to Program Coherence and the Five Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Related questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Instruction</td>
<td>3, 42-44, 50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Community Partnerships</td>
<td>23-24, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity / Community</td>
<td>4-5, 7-11, 23-34, 39-40, 45-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>1-2, 12-15, 25, 27-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Centered Learning Climate</td>
<td>55-56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The purpose of this study was to obtain valuable data through the use of qualitative and quantitative analysis on responses on principal and teacher surveys, interviews with selected principals based on a high level of instructional program coherence in their school, and the individual schools’ ESI/A and NJASK 4 scores in mathematics. The outcomes of this study were used to evaluate the effects of the implementation of WSR and school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and improving student achievement. The results could enable the district to focus on programs, policies, or practices that are working in the schools and those that are not. It is hopeful that this knowledge will lead to improved student achievement. “Ensuring that policies and programs have their intended impact at the school level requires policies and programs that are aligned with standards and with each other in a seamless system that focuses on providing all schools with the tools they need to achieve” (NASBE, 2002, p. 30).
Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

The main purpose of this study was to determine the effects of whole school reform (WSR) on instructional program coherence in five urban elementary schools within an Abbott District in New Jersey. The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has presented evidence that the level of instructional program coherence in schools affects student achievement. In addition, the CCSR found that instructional program coherence is influenced by five major factors: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, professional capacity community, and high-quality instruction. Four major questions were developed and answered with the assistance of the data collected from a teacher survey that was mailed out to the teachers in the five elementary schools and the interviews of the principals whose schools were identified as having a high degree of instructional program coherence using the results of the teacher surveys. The questions were addressed in a logical fashion that allowed for the final response of the main question which stated: "What are the effects of the implementation of WSR and school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and improving student achievement?"

Analysis of Teacher Surveys

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) hands down mandates to the Abbott Districts in New Jersey in order to comply with the regulations of the Abbott v. Burke decisions and NCLB (2001). In turn, the Abbott Districts have had to
implement a WSR model and other school improvement initiatives in their schools in the hopes that these initiatives will raise student achievement scores that will enable them to meet the accountability levels required by NCLB. These districts must be careful that the implementation of these school improvement efforts do not impede or bring down their level of instructional program coherence. As shown by the CCSR, schools with stronger program coherence show higher gains in student achievement.

The first question addressed in this study was: “For each of the five elements identified that promote instructional program coherence, which factors correlate to instructional program coherence?” In order to answer this question, it must be determined what type of relationship, if any, exists between instructional program coherence and the five factors identified by the CCSR. The levels of instructional program coherence and the five factors: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community, were all measured using the questions on the teacher survey. The questions on the survey were grouped according to the factors that they measured (see Table 2). In order to determine the relationships that existed, a correlation analysis was conducted. Due to the number of respondents, 91 out of 330 surveys sent, it was virtually impossible to break out the data by school. Therefore, the correlations were run on the responses of all 91 teacher surveys returned.

The results of the correlations indicated that there is a stable relationship between instructional program coherence and four of the five factors that enhance it, namely, school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, and professional capacity community. Although there was no correlation
between instructional program coherence and the factor of high quality instruction, it was found that when the factor of high quality instruction was divided into four domains, reading / language arts, writing, mathematics and computers, there was a relationship with two of the four domains of high-quality instruction: writing and reading / language arts. The perceptions of the teachers, as reflected on the surveys, showed that the strengths between the factors and instructional program coherence varied from low to moderate except for writing, which had little, if any, correlation with instructional program coherence. Professional capacity community had the strongest correlation with instructional program coherence.

High-quality instruction was measured using the survey questions in which teachers had to identify the existence and use of essential materials needed to provide sound instruction in reading / language arts, computers, writing and mathematics, the content covered and the use of instructional strategies in those areas. Out of the four domains identified within high-quality instruction, only two were perceived by the teachers to have had a bearing on instructional program coherence. These two domains were reading / language arts and writing (see Table 4).
Table 4

*Correlations between Program Coherence and High Quality Instruction and Is Domains*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Domain 1</th>
<th>Domain 2</th>
<th>Domain 3</th>
<th>Domain 4</th>
<th>Domains 1-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>High Quality Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>.363*</td>
<td>.242*</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading L.A.</td>
<td>.725**</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.537*</td>
<td>.576**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.570**</td>
<td>.538**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.260</td>
<td>.886**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.111</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, two-tailed.*

As shown in Table 4, there is a low correlation between reading / language arts and instructional program coherence with $r = .363$. There exists a positive relationship between reading / language arts and instructional program coherence. This relationship was found to be statistically significant with a $p$ value of .011. The more the teachers perceived a strong compliance in reading / language arts within the district, the higher the level of perceived instructional program coherence.

There was little, if any, correlation between writing and instructional program coherence with an $r = .242$. There exists a positive relationship between writing and
instructional program coherence. This relationship was found to be statistically significant with a \( p \) value of .047. The more the teachers perceived a strong compliance in writing within the district, the higher the level of perceived instructional program coherence. Out of the two domains that had a statistically significant correlation with instructional program coherence, reading/language arts and writing, the domain of reading/language arts was the stronger of the two.

The second factor identified as enhancing instructional program coherence is the factor of parent/community partnerships. Parent/community partnerships was measured using the survey questions in which teachers had to indicate if they perceived themselves to be respected by the parents of the students, if parents were involved in the education of their children and if they perceived themselves to be knowledgeable about the community and the students. There is a low correlation between parent/community partnerships and instructional program coherence with an \( r = .449 \) (see Table 5). There is a positive relationship between instructional program coherence and parent/community partnerships. This correlation was found to be statistically significant with a \( p \) value of .000. The more apparent it was to the teachers that there was a high level of parent/community partnerships, the more apparent it was that there was a high level of instructional program coherence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Parent / Community Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>.449*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p < .05, two-tailed.

The third identified factor that enhances instructional program coherence is school leadership. School leadership was measured using the survey questions in which the teachers had to indicate if they perceived that the principal empowered them to be leaders, allowed them to take part in the decision-making process in the school, provided professional development, collaborated with and cared about them, communicated a clear vision, and if the principal was knowledgeable about meeting the needs of the students. There is a moderate correlation between instructional program coherence and school leadership with $r = .678$ (see Table 6). There is a positive relationship between school leadership and instructional program coherence. This relationship was found to be statistically significant with a $p$ value of .000. The more the teachers perceived that there was a high level of school leadership, the higher the level of instructional program coherence.
Table 6

Correlation between Instructional Program Coherence and School Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>School Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>.678**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < .01, two-tailed.

The fourth factor identified to enhance instructional program coherence is student-centered learning climate. Student-centered learning climate was measured using the teacher survey questions in which teachers were asked to indicate if they perceived teachers, as well as themselves, to place emphasis on helping students learn, control disruptive behavior, assist families in helping the students learn and if they helped the students believe they could learn. There is a low correlation between student-centered learning climate and instructional program coherence with an $r = .409$ (see Table 7). There is a positive relationship between student-centered climate and instructional program coherence. This relationship is statistically significant with a $p$ value of .000. The more teachers perceived that there was a high level of student-centered learning climate, the higher the perceived level of instructional program coherence.
Table 7

Correlation between Instructional Program Coherence and Student-Centered Learning Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Student-Centered Learning Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>.409**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < .01, two-tailed.

The fifth factor identified as enhancing instructional program coherence is professional capacity community. Professional capacity community was measured using the survey questions in which teachers responded to questions indicating if they perceived that the professional development offered to them improved their teaching practices, addressed the teachers', as well as the students' needs, has been sustained and coherently focused, is connected to the schools' improvement plan, and has provided opportunities for working collaboratively with their colleagues in and out of their school. In addition, teachers were asked to indicate if they perceived that teachers collaborated in curriculum and instruction, took responsibility in maintaining discipline in the entire school, are involved in making important decisions in the school, and are loyal to each other. There is a moderate correlation between professional capacity community and instructional program coherence with $r = .699$ (see Table 8).

Professional capacity community had the strongest correlation of all the factors. There is a positive relationship between professional capacity community and instructional
program coherence. This relationship was found to be statistically significant with a $p$ value of .000. The more apparent the teachers found a high level of professional capacity community, the more apparent a high level of instructional program coherence.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Professional Capacity Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>.699**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **$p < .01$, two-tailed.

In conclusion, four of the five factors correlated to instructional program coherence, school leadership, parent / community partnerships, student-centered learning climate, and professional capacity community, and these four factors had a positive relationship with instructional program coherence. Although, there was no correlation between instructional program coherence and high-quality instruction, when high-quality instruction was divided into the four domains of writing, reading / language arts, computers, and mathematics, there was a correlation between instructional program coherence and writing and instructional program coherence and reading / language arts. These two domains also had a positive relationship with instructional program coherence. The strongest correlation was between instructional program coherence and professional capacity community.
The second research question addressed was: What is the predictive strength of these factors in explaining instructional program coherence? In order to answer this research question, a multiple regression would have been performed on the data; however, due to the limited number of respondents and the problem of multicollinearity, the multiple regressions could not be run. Since multiple regressions could not be used because of multicollinearity, descriptive statistics were used to determine the degree of instructional program coherence and the relative importance of each of the five factors of school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community is all five schools. More precisely, the absolute value of the means was used to compare the means between the schools, determine the schools with a relatively high degree of instructional program coherence and the relative importance of the factors within those schools.

It should be noted here that out of 330 surveys sent out, which ranged from 50 – 76 teacher surveys per school, 91 teacher surveys were returned. Using Table C.11: Sample Sizes for Interval Data in Hinkle, Wiersma and Jurs (2003), for a two-tailed test, an effect size of .30, alpha of .05 and power between .80 to .85, an appropriate sample size would be between 90 – 103 for the total number of surveys sent, which was met. However, the returned surveys ranged from 12 to 29 surveys per school. Unfortunately, the limited amount of responses per school lowers the confidence level of the results of the means per school. It is not certain if the returned surveys indeed reflect the perceptions of all the teachers within each school. It is also not clear how the
fact that some teachers did not respond to some questions on the survey, especially the mathematics section, affected the results.

Table 9 reports the means of instructional program coherence in the five elementary schools utilized in this study. This table identifies the Orange and Yellow Schools as having the highest degrees of instructional program coherence based on the teachers’ perceptions, as recorded by the teacher surveys, with the Orange School having the highest perceived level of instructional program coherence. The Yellow School is the second highest.

Table 9

*Absolute Means of Instructional Program Coherence in the Five Elementary Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = number of valid responses.*
Tables 10 through 14 report the means of the five factors that enhance instructional program coherence within these five elementary schools. The five factors being high quality instruction, parent/community partnerships, school leadership, student-centered learning climate, and professional capacity community. The Orange School has the highest absolute mean in four of the five factors, namely high-quality instruction, parent/community partnerships, school leadership, and student-centered learning climate. It should be noted that the Orange School had the highest absolute mean of instructional program coherence. The Yellow School, the school with the second highest absolute mean of instructional program coherence, had the highest absolute mean in the factor of professional capacity community.

Table 10

*Absolute Means of High Quality Instruction in the Five Elementary Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>196.67</td>
<td>43.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>185.67</td>
<td>18.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>171.00</td>
<td>89.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>169.50</td>
<td>29.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>191.60</td>
<td>17.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = number of valid responses.*
Table 11

Absolute Means of Parent / Community Partnerships in the Five Elementary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51.14</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50.90</td>
<td>9.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>16.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44.10</td>
<td>11.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48.87</td>
<td>9.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = number of valid responses.
Table 12

*Absolute Means of School Leadership in the Five Elementary Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>144.22</td>
<td>22.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>139.35</td>
<td>26.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>118.80</td>
<td>37.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>112.27</td>
<td>27.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>96.67</td>
<td>26.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = number of valid responses.*
Table 13

*Absolute Means for Student-Centered Learning Climate in the Five Elementary Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28.06</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.96</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.91</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26.07</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = number of valid responses.*
### Table 14

**Absolute Means of Professional Capacity Community in the Five Elementary Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>126.40</td>
<td>25.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>134.55</td>
<td>36.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>116.50</td>
<td>28.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>134.33</td>
<td>25.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>114.75</td>
<td>26.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = number of valid responses.*

In conclusion, the distribution of the means show that the highest perceived levels in the five factors, except for the factor of professional capacity community, is consistently obtained by the Orange School, which is the school with the highest perceived level of instructional program coherence. The Yellow School obtained the highest level in professional capacity community and also had the second highest absolute means in two of the other factors. The Yellow School received the second highest perceived level of instructional program coherence. Previously it was concluded that high levels of the factors, namely school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community were based on the perceptions of the teachers. The
more the teachers' perceptions raised the level of the factors, the higher the perceived level of instructional program coherence. These results, based on the means, indicate that the higher the perceived level of instructional program coherence, the perceived strength of the factors tends to be high as well.

Analysis of Interviews

In order to get a more in-depth understanding to the relationships of the five factors of school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity community, and instructional program coherence, interviews were conducted with the principals of the two schools with the highest perceived degrees of instructional program coherence, namely the Orange and Yellow Schools. The responses to the interview questions assisted in determining the nature of the relationship between the five factors and instructional program coherence, which is the third question that is addressed in this study. More specifically, what do the principals believe, if anything, affected the perceived levels of these factors that in turn affected the perceived levels of instructional program coherence, which led to the increase of student achievement.

Table 15 identifies the means of the two high quality instruction domains, reading/language arts and writing, in each of the five elementary schools. The means of these two areas were very close between the five elementary schools, with only a 1.84 difference between the highest and lowest mean. The principals of Orange School (Principal A) and Yellow School (Principal B) seem to concur that this is due to the excellent professional development within the district in the areas of reading/language
arts and writing. More specifically, Principal B stated, "Excellent, very comprehensive, professional development component, not just this school, but a tribute to this school district where we have incorporated a lot of language arts literacy...the Collins Effective Writing Program, the Four Blocks of Literacy Program..." Principal A verified, "There is an excellent professional development component within the district. There's also that piece in the district that is being developed in Language Arts Literacy..." As far as writing, Principal A pointed out, "...Students do a tremendous amount of writing throughout the content areas. They're writing all the time. There is a lot of writing. Teachers model it for them, how they need to write and then they continue it."

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Reading / Language Arts</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>57.11</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29.53</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55.38</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27.83</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>56.33</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beige</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>57.22</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29.15</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55.60</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27.69</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = number of valid responses.*
The other two domains of high-quality instruction, computers and mathematics, did not have a statistically significant correlation with instructional program coherence. These two domains were discussed with the principals. Both principals identified technology as an area that is in need of more focus. More specifically, Principal A explained, "I think technology is the weakest right now. I think it has to do with the fact that there are technical people making decisions about what's going to happen with the technology, rather than the teachers." Principal B agrees that technology needs to be developed, but stated the problem a little differently, "Technology, I think, is still something that has to be developed. Teachers are still a little hesitant about technology themselves." However, both Principals A and B agree that it will get better. Principal A said, "There's a district technology committee that was pulled together, and I think that that's one of the area's they hope to change. Once this happens, this area is going to be stronger." Principal B concurred, "This school year there is a concentration district-wide with technology. I think it's just in its early stages and that it will definitely improve."

Many teachers that responded to the survey did not complete the mathematics portion. Mathematics did not have a statistically significant correlation with instructional program coherence. The principals were asked if they perceived mathematics to have a bearing on instructional program coherence. Principal A stated, "We have a program that's being developed that's very student based and discovery based. It's a constructivist approach...we are committed to this constructivist approach to mathematics instruction. We showed tremendous gains last year in mathematics." Principal B commented, "We dramatically improved in the test scores. I believe that
the teaching styles of the teachers and the strategies that they’ve used changed dramatically through Teaching Math for Understanding...the constructivist approach.”

The ESPA and NJASK test scores in Mathematics, for the subgroup of Total Population of the five elementary schools for the years 2001 – 2005, did reflect increases in mathematics for the 2004 – 2005 school year with all schools meeting the AYP mandate for 2005 of 62% (see Appendix C).

The next factor discussed with the principals was the element of parent / community partnerships also referred to as parent and community involvement. In this area, both principals were asked: “What do you attribute to the high level of parent / community partnerships at your school?” Principal A, whose school had the highest mean in this area, stated, “I tell the parents what we are doing and why...very open communication and informative. We also try to teach parents how to help their children. We have a lot of family programs. This is important to them.” Principal B explained, “We also have parent workshops...Family Literacy Nights and Family Nights Out. We have a wonderful group of parents that are familiar with our school, are comfortable coming...on a daily basis...and are doing their own programs and activities.” Involving parents in workshops to help their children at home and in activities that bring them together with their children and the school seem to be what both principals attribute to the perceived high level of parent / community partnerships.

The next element to be discussed is school leadership. The principals were asked, “What do you attribute to the high levels of school leadership within your school?” Both principals focused on empowering their teachers to become leaders. Principal A remarked, “Everybody has their own special talent and their own area of
interest of what they like. I try to maximize that. Since we opened five years ago, I lost four of my staff members to vice principalships.” Principal B pointed out, “Since we were so familiar with school based management…teachers…were given a lot of authority to be in very respectful positions as teachers…and work side by side with administration.” In addition, Principal B stated, “Many teachers became even more involved and became teacher leaders of different committees and different functions. So, I believe that’s where they get the feeling that they can be productive and have an important role in this school as a teacher leader.” Both schools have School Leadership Councils and allow their teachers to take on leadership roles within the school.

Professional capacity community is also a factor that is believed to enhance instructional program coherence. The two principals were asked, “What do you attribute to the high level of professional capacity community at your school?” Principal A responded, “There is an excellent professional development component within the district. Our staff is encouraged to get into it and participate in that area. One of our teacher leaders is one of the district leaders for the Four Blocks.” Principal B, whose school had the highest mean in this area replied, “I am very pleased and very proud…I think that has a lot to do with…teachers feeling that they are productive and that their voice does count.” In addition, in the area of professional growth whereas Principal A had mentioned four of her teachers went on to acquire vice principalships, Principal B pointed out, “They take much more pride in their profession…and become so highly professional. We now have six District Teachers of the Year and three National Board Certified Teachers because they have that zeal and zest for the profession.” Both
principals have highlighted growth within the teaching profession, as well as personal growth in becoming administrators and teacher leaders.

Finally, the fifth element that was perceived to enhance instructional program coherence, student-centered learning climate, was discussed. As with the other four elements the principals were asked, "What do you attribute to your high level of student-centered learning climate?" and "As the results indicated, the means of all five schools were very close in the area of student-centered learning climate, why do you think so?" Principal A simply stated, "That's an initiative in the district." However, she does shed more light in this area when WSR is discussed later on in this chapter. Principal B was more elaborate, "I believe that has a lot to do with the professional development that has been received by the teachers and the students' needs. I think our teachers are very well equipped to provide our students with the types of scenarios that they need to perform well at their varied levels." In response to why they think the means in the area of student-centered learning climate were so close between the five schools, Principal B explained, "I think because the district, and we as elementary schools, as far as administration and working with our central administration, have made these decisions to be unified and to be consistent across the board." These responses reflect that both principals feel that the means in student-centered learning climate are so similar because of the consistency of the district in addressing this area.

Table 10 summarizes the principals' perceptions of the elements that attributed to the factors that the teachers perceived to have a bearing on instructional program coherence. The principal of the Orange School is identified as Principal A. The principal of the Yellow School is identified as Principal B. This study has provided
evidence that high perceived levels of these factors contribute to high perceived levels of instructional program coherence, which is further verified by the high absolute means of these factors in the schools with a high level of instructional program coherence. Those results, along with these just discussed, reflect the nature of the relationship between these factors and instructional program coherence.

Table 16

*Elements Perceived by the Principals to Attribute to the Perceived High Levels of the Five Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>1. Excellent professional development</td>
<td>1. Excellent professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Trenendous amount of writing throughout the content areas</td>
<td>2. Collins Effective Writing Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/Language Arts</td>
<td>1. Excellent professional development</td>
<td>1. Excellent professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. District focus in Language Arts Literacy</td>
<td>2. Four Blocks of Literacy Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Community</td>
<td>1. Open and informative communication</td>
<td>1. Parent Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>2. Parent workshops</td>
<td>2. Family Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Maximizing special talents and focusing on interests of teachers</td>
<td>1. Teachers working side by side with administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2. Producing school leaders</td>
<td>2. Teacher leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Centered</td>
<td>1. District initiative</td>
<td>1. Professional development in meeting the students' needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Climate</td>
<td>2. Consistency among the elementary schools</td>
<td>2. Comer SDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Comer SDP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>1. District’s Professional Development Program teachers</td>
<td>1. Empowerment of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>2. School leader for the Four Blocks of Literacy</td>
<td>2. Six district Teachers of Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Four teachers became vice principals</td>
<td>3. Three National Board Certified teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus now turns to the main question of this study, which is, What are the effects of the implementation of WSR and school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and improving student achievement? The answer to this question was obtained through the responses to questions posed to the principals.
during their interview. The following questions and responses are based on the implementation of the WSR model, named the Corner School Development Program (SDP), one of the WSR models mandated by the State through the Abbott v. Burke decisions and the other school initiatives mandated and initiated by the district to improve student achievement. In addition, these responses also shed light on the history of the district where the elementary schools are located and how it has impacted student achievement in terms of school improvement efforts.

The first question the principals were asked was: "What school improvement model, if any, was implemented before the implementation of a WSR model?"

Principal A responded, "The Effective Schools Correlates, that's what we used to guide our improvement efforts. We operated in a very collaborative manner, and we addressed the issues of parental involvement...curriculum...climate and school culture. We had a committee that governed the school." Principal B's response was somewhat similar, "We had what was called the 21st Century School Block Grant. We began with School Based Management...with a lot of facilitation through the State Department of Education, which led us to become eligible for an Effective Schools Grant in 1986."

Principal B concurred with Principal A in the areas that the Effective Schools Grant addressed, "It concentrated on many of the elements that we're talking about now with school leadership...assessing students...parental involvement and community support."

These responses indicate that both elementary schools with did have a formal school improvement model, the Effective Schools Correlates, that was being implemented before the mandate of implementing a WSR model.
The next question asked, "What obstacles, if any, did you encounter at the beginning of the implementation of the WSR model, Coner, in your school?" Principal A replied, "At the beginning, the State was really pushing for SFA (Success for All). But when we went to look at it, we thought it wasn't as good as what we were doing currently. We thought it would run counter to what we were doing. We made an effort to explore other options." Principal B responded, "We were obviously obligated by the State Department to make a selection. It seemed that the Coner model did correlate with the Effective School Grant... all the other elementary schools in the district selected the model so that we would all be in unison." In regards to a specific obstacle, Principal B pointed out, "There weren't really obstacles, except the obstacle of obviously having something mandated from the State Department of Education where you think you, as a school, are doing very well and then you are required to make certain selections."

Due to the fact that Principal B mentioned the requirement of making "certain" selections, the following inquiry was made, "I'm aware of an application you made to use a different model rather than choose one of the State models, can you tell me something about that?" Principal B responded, "We first elected to stay with the Effective Schools Program because... we thought that was very effective and we were very familiar with it. We were actually approved... along with another school in the district... however we wanted to remain uniform... We elected to go with the Coner model instead and work together with all the elementary schools." When asked a similar question, Principal A gave a similar response, "Before we decided on Coner, we wanted to just use our internal plan. Even though our model was accepted and we
could have continued with our model...it's always better to work together.” When answering this question, Principal A further pointed out, “Comer fits very well...they take it a little bit further in that they look at ...specific child development. Effective Schools didn’t do that. That was...one of the pieces that we wanted to develop.” These responses indicate that the selection of Comer as a WSR model was due to its likeness to the Effective Schools Model, its focus on child development and the ability for the five elementary schools to be uniform.

In relation to the support that the five elementary schools received the following question was asked, “What type of support did you receive in the implementation of the Comer WSR model?” The answers from both principals were very similar. Principal A responded, “Our staff members were sent to New Haven to get in-service and professional development in the area of Comer. The principals, everybody, we had teams going up there for training. The parents were trained in Atlantic City.” Principal B concurred, “We went to Comer...all the training up in Yale University, which was a wonderful experience for quite a large percentage of our teachers and staff members...I myself went to the Principal’s academy...we did receive excellent support.” These responses indicate that the support given at the start of the implementation of Comer was in the way of training sessions at Yale University and Atlantic City on the implementation of the Comer SDP.

During the discussion of the factor student-centered learning climate, the principals were asked the following question, “Do you think it (the close mean levels of student-centered learning climate between the five elementary schools) has anything to do with Comer?” Again the responses of both principals were similar. Principal A
replied, "Comer is definitely student-centered. We chose Comer because of that, and they have helped us move in that direction." Principal B responded, "...Comer has helped in all the areas because it is student based...addressing the needs of the whole child...and the six developmental pathways. When teachers...concentrate on all those different pathways you are then targeting children's needs."

The CCSR has provided evidence that certain conditions within a school promote high levels of instructional program coherence. For instance, research shows that the use of a common instructional framework, such as the Four Blocks, which guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning climate and combines specific expectations for student learning with specific strategies and materials to guide teaching and assessment, contributes to a high level of instructional program coherence. To determine the presence or non-existence of common instructional frameworks, the principals were asked the following questions, "Are there any common instructional frameworks being used in your school, if so, what are they and in what area? Are there any other frameworks that you believe adds to the increase of student achievement?"

Principal A suggested, "The constructivist approach, in mathematics and process writing." Earlier in the interview, Principal A stated, "Comer is this umbrella that gives us a process for operating...the framework for keeping everything moving in the right, same direction." Principal B similarly replied, "All the areas I mentioned earlier are as well, with guided reading, the shared reading, the writing program and the math program...all K-4 teachers are receiving that kind of support and...professional development in those areas." As far as Comer as a framework, when asked, "Do you consider Comer a common framework in your school that is assisting in the increase of
student achievement? How so, Why not?" Principal B answered, "Yes, I believe we are very strong in the Corner philosophy and the Corner beliefs. It's just part of our vocabulary and part of who we are now. We are truly a Corner school." These responses indicate that both principals identify Corner SDP as a common instructional framework that is taking them in the direction they want to go. In addition to the Four Blocks, the constructivist math program, Teaching Math for Understanding, and process writing, are also identified as common instructional frameworks that are present in both schools and assisting in improving student achievement.

Resources are needed to support the common instructional frameworks that are in place; both principals were asked the following question, "How do you think the allocation of resources has helped enhance instructional program coherence in your school?" Again the responses are very similar, Principal A stated, "We have been very lucky with the Abbott funding these last few years. We have plenty of resources." Principal B replied, "...as an Abbott District we have been very fortunate to receive...funding...we...have been very diligent in making...sure...these funds are directly related to the classroom...instruction...and technology...which has definitely made a huge difference." These responses indicate that the Abbott funding has supported the common instructional frameworks that are in place in these schools.

Staff working conditions also affect instructional program coherence. Only Principal B had the opportunity to answer this question, "What types of staff working conditions exist in your school that you feel help enhance instructional program coherence?" The response was, "We were in a building that was 100 years old with very different working conditions than we have now and obviously we were doing well
there. So, I'm not quite sure if the working conditions really have that much of an impact.” Principal B did point out, “I think it is the people, the type of staff that you have and relationships that are more important and those are the reasons for our good results.” What is reflected in these responses is that the building itself is not what is important but what the people inside it are doing.

This is the 5th year of the implementation of Comer SDP in the five elementary schools. The principals were asked, “How do you think it has helped improve student achievement in your school? Has it impeded the improvement of student achievement?” Principal A simply stated, “Comer has been positive in every way.” Principal B responded, “Definitely has helped because we believe in the philosophy...based on the whole child and meeting the six developmental pathways...bringing parents into the mix. I do whole heartedly feel that the Comer program did...effectively help us.” As far as impeding, Principal B replied, “In the beginning you feel that it is an imposition because WSR is being imposed upon the school...in this point in time...I do believe it did allow us to be very successful and to become more cohesive.” These responses indicate that the implementation of Comer SDP has been positive in both schools.

When the principals were asked, “What major benefits have you seen that can be attributed to the implementation of WSR in general?” Principal A responded, “Developing the student, keeping it very student-centered...we tend to forget that our students are very needy.” Principal B pointed out, “…The major benefits are...student achievement...the professional development we have in place and of course the parental involvement.” The major benefits of WSR, according to these responses, it’s student-centered, student achievement, the professional development and parental involvement.
When the principals were asked, “What initiative in your school do you think attributes most to improving student achievement?” Principal A responded, “The Four Blocks, the constructivist approach to mathematics instruction and the bilingual program.” On the other hand, Principal B replied, “The Teaching Math for Understanding Program definitely was a huge, huge success for us because it showed in our test scores. I believe that the teaching styles of the teachers and the strategies that they’ve used changed dramatically.” In addition, Principal B pointed out, “That type of teaching style…the constructivist approach, whether the teachers realized it or not, carried over into the literacy because it just naturally does that. We…were so thorough with it and gave it such emphasis and importance.” Both principals agreed that the initiative, Teaching Math for Understanding, contributed most to improving student achievement. When Principal B was asked, “How about initiatives in the area of Reading / Language Arts?” she responded, “Mostly strategies that were presented to teachers. Using different reading strategies that are throughout all the different components. I couldn’t say specifically just one.”

On the other side of the coin, the principals were asked, “What initiatives in your school, or the district, do you think do not help in improving student achievement?” Principal A responded, “The preschool program hurt us. We were using High Scope…and the children came better prepared. When we went with Creative Curriculum, the levels that the students came into kindergarten really dropped back. Eventually…things changed.” In addition, Principal A believes, “The children coming in our second grade are very much stronger than our third and fourth graders this year. This is the year we take the hit.” Principal B stated, “I can’t say at this point
there's something that is not needed...teachers have become very proficient and can turnkey information to new teachers and teachers may need refreshers, teachers that would like a little help here or there.” Where Principal A feels that the preschool initiative has hurt student achievement and may cause a drop in the test scores of the third and fourth graders in her school, Principal B does not identify any initiative that is not needed.

The Orange School has been identified as being in the full implementation status in the Corner SDP. Principal A was asked, “What do you think attributed to being in full implementation in Corner?” Principal A responded, “The fact that we were almost there to begin with because we were doing Effective Schools and it was so close. Some schools are farther along than others.” When Principal B was asked, “What level in the process of implementation of Corner is your school at?” She replied, “I don’t believe we’re at the full implementation level, but we’re very, very close...as far as our evaluations and assessments of ourselves and the evaluations that we received from the coordinator. We are close to being at full implementation.” Even though both schools had high perceived levels of instructional program coherence, the school with the highest mean in that area is in full implementation of Corner whereas the other is in the transitional level, but very close to full implementation.

In relation to meeting AYP, which is necessary in meeting the mandates of NCLB (2001), the principals were asked, “In the 5 years that WSR has been implemented, have you been assigned any designation for not making AYP?” Principal A, the principal from the Orange School that had the highest mean in instructional program coherence, replied, “No.” At this point, Principal A was not asked any other
question pertaining to AYP or test scores. However, Principal B, principal of the
Yelaw School that had the second highest perceived level of instructional program
coherence, responded, “Yes, we are unfortunately a school in need of improvement
which is considered year two. However, we were successful in an AYP appeal for our
2003 scores, and we have another appeal in...for our 2005 scores.” In addition she
stated, “We’re hoping to be successful...which will bring us back to year one in early
warning and that is where we are very hopeful to be.”

Principal B was further asked, “Specifically, in what subgroups did you not meet
AYP? Principal B stated, “The subgroups that we did not meet AYP in were, Total
Population, the LEP Population, and the Economically Disadvantaged Population.” In
addition, Principal B was asked, “What do you think attributed to not making AYP in
those subgroups?” In response, Principal B stated, “…we are the school with the
highest level of poverty in this school district that certainly had an impact of the
results...the LEP students have the disadvantage because of their language barrier.”

In order to meet AYP in the future, Principal B was asked, “What, if anything,
will you do to remedy this problem?” Principal B replied, “Well, we have a leveled reading program that none of the other elementary
schools have where students are identified for different reading levels. It’s very
flexible groupings so that they can move quickly to higher levels of reading.
We have all the intervention teachers involved, as well as the classroom
teachers, so that there is small group instruction and a very low student teacher
ratio with the lowest at risk students being in the smallest groupings
possible. We also have before school programs, after school programs and
Saturday morning programs. Right now, we're beginning our NJASK prep for third and fourth grade which is a mandatory after school program in literacy and mathematics, which we feel was successful in the past year and will be just as successful this year as well.

During the course of the interview, Principal A volunteered what she thought was the hardest part of her job as a principal. She stated, "One of the hardest things for me to accomplish, that I think is important, is to keep us going in the direction of our mission...It's so hard to do that because we are constantly being pulled here or there."

Principal B was asked, "As a principal, what do you think is the hardest part of the job, which is interfering with even bigger gains in student achievement?" Principal B replied, "The time factor...There's so much...to accomplish in one day...it has a lot to do with WSR, the mandates and all the reports that are due...As an Abbott District that does make it difficult."

Finally, the last question asked of the two principals was, "Are there any other comments you would like to add on the topics of WSR and/or instructional program coherence?" Principal A concluded,

I would like to share this (the results of the surveys) with my staff. This will validate what they do...we tie everything back to the results. If it is going to take us where we want to go, it's worth doing. If it's not, we try not to waste our time with it. Our resources are everything.

Principal B summarized,

Well, I should have emphasized...a little more about the economically disadvantaged status that our school faces that other schools out there do not
have... that's something very difficult to control. It seems to be the location of
our school and that many families coming in from other countries seem to find
their place here, in this area, because they can get a cheaper apartment... Then
they themselves grow, they move out of the area. Our students are the students
that have the less advantage and it's difficult for them, so that makes it difficult
for us as well. We just can't seem to find what we can do to help them
accelerate at a faster pace. It's not that they cannot or that they do not have the
ability, but they need more resources and more time to catch up to everyone
else. We need to realize that at this school and not allow that to deter us from
continuing our progress.

Summary

The four research questions that were posed as a basis of the study were
answered here using the quantitative and qualitative data collected through a teacher's
survey and interviews with the principals of the two schools with the highest perceived
levels of instructional program coherence. The limited amount of surveys returned and
the limited responses to certain sections of the survey lowered the amount of confidence
on the results of the descriptive means. However, the results of the correlations and the
perceptions of the principals, expressed through the interviews, do shed light on the
positive relationships between the perceived levels of the five factors, school leadership,
student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality
instruction, and professional capacity community, and the perceived levels of
instructional program coherence.
The interviews highlight those activities that are implemented in the schools that are perceived as enhancing the five factors and instructional program coherence in the schools that were perceived to have a high level of instructional program coherence. The following chapter will highlight the key findings. In addition, recommendations will be presented on how instructional program coherence may be enhanced in other schools that are implementing WSR efforts and school improvement initiatives. It is hopeful that these recommendations will assist schools in improving student achievement. In addition, recommendations for future study will be suggested to improve on this study.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whole school reform (WSR) efforts have caused school districts to have to deal with a monumental amount of change. This change has caused tension and apprehension in everyone involved. In addition to the implementation of a WSR model, many districts began to implement school improvement initiatives that were deemed necessary to increase student achievement. The passing of NCLB (2001) added more mandates and the pressure of accountability on schools. As districts and schools scramble to improve, more and more programs and initiatives are being implemented. Fullan (2001) stated,

The main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adored projects...it is not uncommon now to find school districts in which vastly different approaches to education reform are being attempted at the same time. (p.109)

WSR, along with other school improvement initiatives, are constantly being implemented on an ongoing basis to comply with new mandates issued at the federal, state, and district levels. The WSR models chosen by Abbott Schools are models suggested by the State for their confirmed ability to improve student achievement. Even though since 2002, according to Commissioner MacHines (2005), the NJDOE has shifted its focus from a concentration on WSR to a focus on instructional priorities, urban elementary schools in Abbott districts in New Jersey are still being classified as schools in need of improvement. It is important to look at the many programs being
implemented and evaluate them for their effectiveness. There should be a sense of cohesiveness in the implementation of the WSR model and the school improvement initiatives so that high levels of instructional program coherence can be obtained in the schools. The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has identified five factors that enhance instructional program coherence. These five factors are: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction and professional capacity community. They found that the higher the level of these factors in a school, the higher the level of instructional program coherence. According to the CCSR, a high level of instructional program coherence will increase student achievement.

Discussion

The intent of this study was to identify the effects of WSR on instructional program coherence in urban, elementary schools. The study was delimited to five elementary schools in an urban district in New Jersey identified as an Abbott District. The five elementary schools are all implementing the Comer School Development Process (SDP) as their WSR model.

The data collected were obtained through a teacher survey, a principal survey, and interviews of the principals whose schools were perceived to have a high level of instructional program coherence. The responses to the teacher survey were used to identify the relationship, if any, between each of the five factors and instructional program coherence. These relationships were identified through correlations conducted between each of the five factors and instructional program coherence. Due to the
limited number of responses, 91 out of 330 teacher surveys returned, the correlations were run on the total responses on all the teacher surveys returned, instead of the responses of the individual schools.

The responses of the teacher survey were also used to identify the strengths of each of the five factors and instructional program coherence in each of the five elementary schools. The strengths were obtained through descriptive statistics, namely the absolute means of each factor and of instructional program coherence. The absolute means were used instead of multiple regressions, due to the multicollinearity between the independent variables, which were the five identified factors found to increase instructional program coherence, and the limited amount of teacher responses. The descriptive statistics were also used to identify the two elementary schools with the highest levels of instructional program coherence.

Finally, the data collected from the interviews of the two principals of the schools identified as having high levels of instructional program coherence were used to get a more in-depth understanding of the relationships of the five factors of school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, high-quality instruction, and professional capacity/community and instructional program coherence. The responses to the interview questions assisted in determining the nature of the relationship between each of the five factors and instructional program coherence. In addition, the responses to the interviews assisted in identifying the perceived effects of WSR and school improvement initiatives on instructional program coherence.
Subsidiary question one. For each of the five elements identified that promote instructional program coherence, which factors correlate to instructional program coherence? The results of the correlations indicated that the correlations between instructional program coherence and each of four out of the five factors that were identified to increase instructional program coherence, school leadership, parent / community partnerships, student-centered learning climate and professional capacity community, were statistically significant. The correlation between instructional program coherence and high-quality instruction was not statistically significant. However, when high-quality instruction was divided into four domains: writing, reading / language arts, mathematics and technology, the correlation between instructional program coherence and writing, and the correlation between instructional program coherence and reading / language arts were statistically significant. The strengths of the correlations varied from very little correlation to moderate, with the correlation between professional capacity community and instructional program coherence being the strongest. The relationships between instructional program coherence and each of the following: school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent / community partnerships, professional capacity community, writing and reading / language arts, according to the r values, were all deemed positive, regardless of strength.

The more teachers perceived that there were high levels of each of the four out of five factors that promote instructional program coherence, school leadership, parent / community partnerships, student-centered learning climate, and professional capacity community, the more the teachers perceived that there was a high level of instructional
program coherence. In addition, the more apparent teachers found that there were high levels of the two domains of high quality instruction: writing and reading / language arts, the more apparent the teachers found that there was a high level of instructional program coherence.

**Subsidiary question two.** What is the predictive strength of these factors in explaining instructional program coherence? Overall, the distribution of the means show that the highest perceived levels of the five factors, except for the factor of professional capacity community, is consistently obtained by the Orange School, which is the school with the highest perceived level of instructional program coherence. The Yellow School obtained the highest level in professional capacity community and also had the second highest absolute means in two of the other factors, school leadership and parent / community partnerships. The Yellow School received the second highest perceived level of instructional program coherence.

Previously it was concluded that high levels of the factors, namely school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent / community partnerships, high-quality instruction and professional capacity community were based on the perceptions of the teachers. The more the teachers' perceptions identified high levels of the factors, the higher the perceived level of instructional program coherence. These results, based on the means, indicate that the higher the perceived level of instructional program coherence, the perceived strength of the factors tended to be high as well.

Through the administration of surveys, between the years 1999 and 2001, the CCSR studied the reform efforts of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). They have found evidence that schools that showed improved student achievement had a high
degree of instructional program coherence. They found that the efforts used by schools to improve instructional program coherence should be embedded in systemic strategies to build effective school leadership, teachers’ professional community, parent and community involvement, and high quality instruction, all essential supports to guide school improvement along with a student-centered learning climate (Newman et al., 2001).

Subsidiary question three. What, if any, is the nature of the relationship between these factors and instructional program coherence? The two principals whose schools were previously identified as having a high level of instructional program coherence were interviewed. The responses of these interviews assisted in determining the nature of the relationship between the five factors and instructional program coherence. More specifically, what do the principals believe, if anything, affected the perceived levels of the factors of school leadership, student-centered learning climate, professional capacity community and parent/teacher communities and the two domains of high-quality instruction: writing and reading/language arts, which in turn affected the perceived levels of instructional program coherence?

In the area of writing, the principals identified the district’s excellent professional development program as an attribute that may have attributed to the high level of writing in the school. The professional development program is very comprehensive and sustained. The frequency in which the students wrote was also identified. In addition, the principals identified the framework of the Collins Effective Writing Program as impacting the writing program in the schools.
In the area of reading/language arts, the principals highlighted the excellent, comprehensive and sustained professional development program in the district as attributing to the high level of reading/language arts in the schools. The district's intense focus in Language Arts Literacy was also mentioned. In addition, the implementation of the framework, the Four Blocks of Literacy, was identified as influencing the reading/language arts program in the schools.

For the factor of parent/community partnerships, the principals identified open and informative communication with parents as important. In addition, parent workshops that assist parents on how to help their children at home were mentioned. The principals also felt that family activities that allow parents, teachers and students to socialize were also effective. These elements were perceived by the principals as the attributes that contributed to the high level of parent/community partnerships.

It was apparent to the teachers that there existed high levels of school leadership within their schools. These high levels of school leadership were thought to have influenced the high levels of instructional program coherence. The principals felt that the maximizing of teachers' special talents, focusing on teachers' interests, and allowing for teacher leaders that work side by side with the administration, were the attributes that may have influenced these perceptions.

The level of student-centered learning climate in all the schools seemed to be at about the same level, with a difference of 1.99 between the school with the lowest level and the school with the highest level. The principals attributed professional development in learning to meet students' needs and the Comer SDP WSR model to the teachers' perceptions of a high level of student-centered learning climate. In addition,
the consistency of all the elementary schools in implementing the Comer SDP model was named as an attribute.

Finally, in professional capacity community, the principals attributed the district's excellent professional program for the high level of professional capacity community. The professional development offered is comprehensive and sustained. The Commissioner in Abbott v. Burke V (1998) identified the key to the implementation of WSR as continuous professional development that focuses on student achievement of the CCCS and is based on on-going professional renewal. In addition, the empowerment of teachers to become administrators and school leaders, the fact that some teachers go to become District Teachers of the Year and National Board Teachers were also identified as attributing to the high level of professional capacity community.

It is important to point out at this time, the comments made by the principals on the components of high quality instruction, namely, computers and mathematics, which did not have a statistically significant correlation with instructional program coherence. In the area of technology, the principals felt that at this time, this area is very weak in both schools. However, they are hopeful that it will improve in the future due to a district technology committee that has been formed to address the issues of technology within the schools and the district.

Many teachers who returned the surveys chose not to answer the portion of the survey that dealt with mathematics. This, with the limited amount of surveys returned may have influenced the results in this area. The principals however, believe that the Teaching Math for Understanding Program has been successfully implemented in the schools. They have identified this program as one of the common instructional.
frameworks in their schools. They feel that the implementation of this program in the
five elementary schools contributed to the rise in standardized test scores in all five
elementary schools in the district. All five schools met the adequate yearly progress
(AYP) mandate of 62% for this past school year, 2005 (see Appendix C).

The principals of both schools have highlighted elements that they have
attributed to the high levels of school leadership, student-centered learning climate,
parent/community partnerships, professional capacity community and the two domains
of high-quality instruction: writing and reading/language arts, within their schools.
The data from the teacher surveys provided evidence that perceived high levels of these
factors contributed to the perceived high levels of instructional program coherence. The
high absolute means of these factors in the schools with a high level of instructional
program coherence were also found to be high. It must be noted again, that the limited
number of returned surveys and responses tends to lower the confidence level of these
results. The responses of the principals on the interviews reflect the nature of the
relationship between these factors and instructional program coherence.

Main research question. What are the effects of the implementation of WSR and
school improvement initiatives on achieving instructional program coherence and
improving student achievement? Before the implementation of WSR in this district,
the two schools identified to have high levels of instructional program coherence were
using the Effective Schools Correlates as its school improvement plan. It is interesting
to note that these two schools were the only elementary schools within the district that
were using the Effective Schools Correlates before WSR. The Effective Schools
Correlates include a clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional
leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home school relations. According to the Association for Effective Schools (1996), “The correlates are the means to achieving high and equitable levels of student learning...all children (male or female, rich or poor, black or white) will learn at least the essential knowledge, concepts and skills needed...to be successful” (p. 1).

One of the obstacles, which was identified as the only obstacle in implementing WSR, was dealing with the fact that they were mandated by the state to choose a WSR model when the schools felt that the school improvement plan they had in place was already working. Initially, the elementary schools applied to use an alternative model based on the Effective Schools Correlates. These two schools were approved to use this alternative model; however, the other three elementary schools in the district were not. In order to remain uniform, the five elementary schools decided to implement Comer SDP because of its resemblance to the Effective Schools Correlates, although the State was pushing the WSR model Success for All (SFA) as the definitive model.

Comer SDP was not only chosen by the five elementary schools because of its similarity to the Effective Schools Correlates, but because it is student-centered. The Effective School Correlates did not have this piece. The principals felt that Comer SDP has helped in all the areas because it addresses the needs of the whole child and through the six developmental pathways, identified by Comer, children’s needs are targeted. This is also the explanation the principals gave for the similarity in the absolute mean of the five elementary schools in the area of student-centered learning climate.
According to Newman et al. (2001), the implementation of WSR and the policies, initiatives, and programs that come with it, will be effective only if a high level of instructional program coherence exists within the school. The Orange and Yellow Schools have been identified as schools that have a perceived high level of instructional program coherence based on the absolute means in this area. In addition, Newman et al. (2001) stated, in order for a school to obtain this high level of program coherence, the schools must also exhibit the following conditions:

1. A common instructional framework,
2. Excellent staff working conditions,
3. Allocated resources to support and advance the instructional framework.

Through the interview, the principals identified more than one common instructional framework. The frameworks identified were: Teaching Math for Understanding, which is a constructivist approach to the teaching of mathematics; the Collins Effective Writing Program or process writing; and the Four Blocks of Literacy. The principals also identified Comer SDP as a common instructional framework in the schools. They believe that Comer is the umbrella that gives them a process for operating in and the framework responsible for keeping everything moving in the same direction. The schools are very strong in the Comer philosophy and beliefs. They believe they are now “Comer” schools. Both elementary schools that are being focused on are located in an urban setting. The schools are brand new, state-of-the-art facilities with high technology equipment and a vast amount of resources. However, when questioned about staff working conditions, one of the principals interviewed pointed out that the building they
were previously in was about 100 years old, which is also the case with the other school, and they were doing well there. She was not quite sure if the working conditions, in her case, really had much of an impact on instructional program coherence. She pointed out that she felt that "the type of staff that you have and relationships are important and those are the reasons for our good results."

As far as resources, both elementary schools are located in an Abbott District and receive special funding from the State. The principals feel that they are very fortunate to receive this funding and have plenty of resources. They believe that the district has been very diligent in making sure that this funding is directly related to the classroom, instruction, and technology, and has definitely made a big difference. The Abbott funding has provided the resources to support the common instructional frameworks identified by the principals of the two elementary schools.

The principals of the elementary schools identified major benefits in the implementation of Comer SDP. The major benefits identified were, the development of the student, student achievement, the professional development program, and parental involvement. They like the fact that Comer SDP is student-centered because in the words of Principal B, "We tend to forget that our students are very needy."

The accountability of student achievement and meeting AYP mandates has added to the stress of students, teachers, and administrators. It is very fortunate that the Orange School, which was identified as having the highest perceived level of instructional program coherence, has not been assigned any designation for not achieving AYP. The Orange School has met the AYP mandates. However, the Yellow
School, which also had perceived high levels of instructional program coherence, has been designated as a school in need of improvement in the year 2003 and 2005. This is very surprising due to its level of high instructional program coherence. However, in 2003 an appeal was submitted to the State, which reversed the status of school in need of improvement for 2003. Another appeal has been submitted for the 2005 scores and it is hopeful that the same results will be obtained. The principal of the Yellow School identified the subgroups of Total Population, LEP Population, and Economically Disadvantaged Population as the subgroups that did not meet the AYP mandate. She attributes the economically disadvantaged status of her school and the testing of LEP students, who need more time to acquire English language skills, as the obstacles in meeting AYP.

According to Fultan (2000), “The main enemies of large-scale reform are overload and extreme fragmentation” (p.1). The implementation of WSR, the school improvement initiatives required by federal, state, and district mandates and the added stress of the accountability of student achievement to meet AYP, have indeed caused overload on teachers, administrators and students. However, it is evident by the responses of the principals, that the implementation of WSR has been positive in these two schools.

Policy Implications

According to Newman et al. (2001), the CCSR, through the study of the CPS, have found evidence that schools with improved student achievement have a high degree of instructional program coherence. They found that the efforts used by schools
to improve instructional program coherence should be embedded in systemic strategies
to build effective school leadership, student-centered learning climate, professional
capacity community, parent and community involvement, and high-quality instruction,
all essential supports to guide school improvement along with student-centered learning
climate.

The limited number of surveys received and the limited responses on the surveys
lowered the confidence level of the results of this survey. The results may not be
indicative of the perceptions of all the teachers within each of the five elementary
schools studied. In addition, it is not certain how the omitted responses to some
questions by the teacher may have affected the results. Perhaps a policy requiring that
teachers complete this survey annually, similar to the implementation of the surveys in
Chicago, will obtain more complete data. The district may consider other procedures to
follow to assure a high number of returned surveys and responses to the questions on
the surveys. This will help them to evaluate if the schools are maintaining a high level
of instructional program coherence that will increase student achievement. Achieving
high levels of instructional program coherence is important because according to
Newman et al. (2001), schools with strong program coherence show higher gains in
student achievement.

School leadership is one of the factors that impact instructional program
coherence. Wenzel et al. (2001) identified many characteristics of strong leadership,
such as leadership based on a clear mission and vision in the school, communication
with teachers and involving them in decision-making. Teachers are encouraged to work
with colleagues and administrators to plan for student development. Each elementary
school in the district studied has a School Leadership Council (SLC). These councils
consist of administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and representatives from the
community. All these stakeholders work together to make important decisions that
affect the school. These issues may cover curriculum, instruction, the hiring of new
personnel, home-school functions, professional development and student related issues,
just to name a few. The principal of the Yellow School stated, "I believe that's where
they get the feeling that they can be productive and have an important role in this school
as a teacher leader."

Part of the job of leadership is to establish a professional capacity community
within the school. It is essential to have a professional community where staff members
have learned to collaborate and reach consensus, support each other, share knowledge,
and work together to meet the needs of the school and the students. The teachers of
both schools that reached high levels of instructional program coherence have learned
all these skills through participation in the SLC and through training in the Comer SDP
WSR model. The policy of having SLC in the elementary schools should be
maintained.

Another common thread in the identification of attributes that were perceived to
affect the high levels in the factors and instructional program coherence was the
district's excellent professional development program. The professional development
program in this district is stated as being sustained and comprehensive. Staff should
feel responsible for their teaching and the students' learning and should be motivated to
do the best they can for the improvement of themselves, the school and student
achievement.
In their interviews, both principals confirmed a strong professional development component in their district, as well as on-site support by math coaches, math specialists, literacy coaches, and reading specialists. Professional development is sustained to make sure that new teachers are brought up to speed and that the other teachers have the opportunity to get refresher workshops if needed. These personnel, except for the math coaches, are readily available in the buildings for the teachers on a full-time basis. Dufour (2004) suggested that in establishing a professional learning community, focus should be on: ensuring that children learn, establishing a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results of students. He further stated that the hardest part of establishing a professional learning environment is assuring that it is sustained. District policies should ascertain professional development that is sustained and is followed up in the classroom.

An essential support in establishing strong instructional program coherence is the involvement of parents and community in the education of the students. Parents are a key piece in improving student achievement. Parents’ involvement in school, through participation in decision-making, socializing with teachers and staffs in school functions, or even volunteering their time to the school, makes it evident to students that their parents are interested in their success. In both elementary schools, parents are part of the SUC. The principals pointed out how providing workshops for parents to teach them how to help their children at home are what parents want, according to surveys that parents completed.

Another important point stressed by the principals was the importance of open communication with parents. They concurred that family activities, such as Family
Literacy Nights, Parents Night Out and generally bringing parents together with the teachers and students has attributed to parent involvement in the schools. Lewis (2004) reported that there are many studies, reports and initiatives that affirm that engagement in learning, the environments that value trust and integrity in relationships between teachers, students and their families, work together to make a critical difference in learning.

Student-centered learning climate is also a factor that contributes to a high level of instructional program coherence. Wenzel et al. (2001) summarized the characteristics of a strong student-centered learning climate as having high expectations for student academic achievement, strong support for learning from their teachers, parents, and peers. While the elementary school with the highest level of instructional coherence did have the highest mean in this area, the levels of the other four elementary schools were very close. This was attributed to the implementation of the WSR model, Comer SDP. They stressed that the Comer SDP focuses on the whole child with special attention given to the six developmental pathways of physical, social, psychological, ethical, linguistic, and cognitive growth and development. According to Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes and Joyner (1999), “The SDP school community uses the six developmental pathways as a framework for making decisions that will benefit children” (p. 3). Policies should be in place to provide for professional development that prepares teachers and administrators to develop student-centered learning climates in the school and the classrooms.

As discussed in chapter 4, the five elementary schools achieved higher scores in mathematics on the NJASK this past school year, 2005, and all the schools met the
AYP mandate of 62% in the area of mathematics. The principals attributed this rise in scores to the implementation of the Teaching Math for Understanding Program. Teaching Math for Understanding is a constructivist approach to teaching mathematics. The principals identified this approach as the common instructional framework in mathematics. The teacher survey for this study was administered before the district received the results of the standardized tests. The principal of one school suggested repeating the survey due to the fact that the teachers now had proof that this new program worked and helped to raise their math scores. She feels that the new results of the survey would be different. This is a good recommendation, especially since the test scores did improve in the area of mathematics, the need to look for an alternative instructional framework for mathematics does not seem to be necessary at this time. The results of repeating the administration of the surveys may provide evidence that there does exist a high perceived level of mathematics and may indeed identify the program Teaching Math for Understanding as a common instructional framework within the five elementary schools.

Technology is another component of high quality instruction. The principals admitted that this is an area of weakness in the district. However, they are hopeful that the district's newly formed technology committee will strengthen technology in the schools. According to the results of the surveys, there was no correlation between instructional program coherence and technology. The teachers did not perceive technology to impact the perceived high level of instructional program coherence. It is suggested that the district investigate the discrepancy between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of technology in the schools.
The principals of the schools that were identified as having a high level of instructional coherence identified the presence of common instructional frameworks in the academic areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and writing as attributing to the high levels in those areas. In writing, the Collins Effective Writing Program, in mathematics, the Teaching Math for Understanding Program, and in reading/language arts the Four Blocks of Literacy were considered these common instructional frameworks. The overall common instructional framework identified by the principals was the WSR model, Comer SDP. Principal A stated, “Comer is this umbrella that gives us a process for operating...the framework for keeping everything moving in the right...direction.” It is recommended that these common instructional frameworks be implemented in the middle schools that will contain Grades 5 through 8 next school year. Since evidence was presented that these frameworks seem to be effective in the elementary schools, perhaps they will also be effective in the middle school grades as well.

In order to implement school improvement initiatives, it is essential to have the necessary resources. There must be an allocation of funds that will provide the school with the personnel and the materials it would need. Being an Abbott District has been advantageous to the two elementary schools. Both principals pointed out that one of the benefits of being an Abbott district was the monies received that helped to implement the WSR model and school improvement initiatives. It is essential that the district continue to find revenues to support the programs that are in place even if the resources provided by Abbott become limited. Teachers cannot teach or implement school improvement initiatives without the proper resources.
Together with the common instructional frameworks and allied resources, excellent staff working conditions are also important. The principals of the schools with a high level of instructional program coherence were not quite sure if the working conditions, featuring new, state-of-the-art buildings, really have that much of an impact on instructional program coherence. They felt that relationships are more important and the reasons for good results. Therefore, focus should be placed on what is happening inside the building and on the relationships of everyone in the school building. The Comer SDP WSR model emphasizes the relationships of all that are involved in the education of the students, including the students. It is recommended that this component continue to be implemented.

According to the principals of the Orange and Yellow Schools, the Effective Schools Correlates are very similar to some of the aspects of Comer SDP, with the exception of the student-centered component. Therefore, it may be that this attributed to their higher levels of instructional program coherence. In essence, these two schools were already implementing effective school improvement initiatives that the other three schools were not; perhaps this provided them with a head start in developing instructional program coherence. Since the other schools are implementing the same WSR model and school improvement initiatives as the Orange and Yellow Schools, it is hopeful that these schools will also achieve similar levels of instructional program coherence in the not too distant future.
Future Studies

Due to the limited responses to the surveys, alternative measures had to be used. For example, the correlations conducted had to be done with all the schools combined, not for each individual school. In addition, because of multicollinearity, which occurs when independent variables have a strong correlation between them, multiple regressions could not be run to determine the strengths of the five factors in relation to instructional program coherence. Instead, the absolute means of the schools in those areas were used. The confidence level of the results of the absolute means was low due to the limited number of surveys returned and the limited responses on the surveys.

It would be interesting to see if the results were similar if the survey was given as a district initiative like in the CPS, where it would be mandatory for the whole staff to complete the surveys. There would be sufficient data to run the correlations per school and perhaps allow for multiple regressions. It may validate the results of this study and would highlight which of the five areas, school leadership, student-centered learning climate, parent/community partnerships, professional capacity/community, or high-quality instruction, needed improvement to achieve high levels of instructional program coherence and thus increase student achievement.

Another possible study for the future would be to study the middle schools. Since the middle schools in this district are using a different WSR model, it would be interesting to evaluate the effects of that WSR model on instructional program coherence in the middle schools. This may help in raising student achievement at those levels. Again, it would be beneficial to make it a whole school initiative to ascertain that all the surveys would be returned so that sufficient data are collected.
Conclusions

The main focus of this dissertation was to determine the effects of WSR on instructional program coherence in urban elementary schools. The level of instructional program coherence in the elementary schools is important. The CCSR has provided evidence that high levels of instructional program coherence leads to high levels of student achievement. Two of the five urban elementary schools in this Abbott District were found to have perceived high levels of instructional program coherence.

In addition, four of the five factors, student-centered learning climate, school leadership, parent/community partnerships, and professional capacity/community, along with two domains of high-quality instruction, reading/language arts and writing, were positively related to instructional program coherence. Perceived high values of any of these elements produced perceived high levels of instructional program coherence. Another important finding is the existence of common instructional frameworks that contributed to the high levels of instructional program coherence. These common instructional frameworks were, Math for Understanding in Mathematics, the Four Blocks of Literacy in Reading/Language Arts, and the Collins Effective Writing Program. The WSR model was considered by the principals of the two schools with a perceived high level of instructional program coherence to be the common instructional framework that tied all their school improvement initiative together.

It is evident by the results of this study that the WSR models, Camer SLP, as well as the school improvement initiatives in various areas of the curriculum have had a positive effect on the perceived level of instructional program coherence. It is hopeful
that all of the schools in this district will continue to implement these initiatives successfully, along with the Corner SDP, to continue raising their levels of instructional program coherence. Of course, resources and support must continuously be provided to support these initiatives and the culture and environment must provide excellent staff working conditions. All in all, the principal from the Orange School put it well when she stated, “If it is going to take us where we want to go, it’s worth doing. If it’s not, we try not to waste our time with it.”
References


Association for Effective Schools. (1996). *Setting the course for learning by all.*


Appendix B

Transcripts of Interviews
Interview Transcript of the Orange School Principal

1. What school improvement model, if any, was implemented before the implementation of a WSR model?

   Effective Schools correlates, that’s what we used to guide our school improvement efforts at Number 7 School before here and also at Peterson School. Those are the two feeder schools that came into this building when we came together.

2. What areas were included in that, Language Arts Literacy, Reading - what components?

   Oh sure, all the curriculum pieces, as well as the structure of the governing body for the school and how we operated. We operated in a very collaborative manner, and we addressed the issues of parental involvement, we addressed the issues of curriculum and we addressed climate and school culture.

3. How about the governance, like a School Leadership Council?

   We had a council but it wasn’t called a council. We had a committee that governed the school.

4. Is it similar to the Comer Model?

   Yes, actually that was our reason for choosing the Comer model. We wanted to go with Comer because it’s very much similar to the Effective Schools Model.

5. What obstacles, if any did you encounter at the beginning of the implementation of Comer?
At the beginning, the State was really pushing for SFA (Success for All), which we thought ok. We went to look at it. This was the, what did they call it, the definitive model they called it. They really wanted everyone to do SFA and our superintendent at the time thought if that's what they want, let's give it to them. But when we went to look at it we thought it wasn't as good as what we were doing currently. I know that's how we felt, and the team of our building felt, because we had a group of people who went to see it down in Asbury Park and we thought it would run counter to what we were doing. We made an effort, though the principal's council, to explore other options, which the superintendent was receptive to so it worked out.

6. From what I understand you tried to apply to use the Effective Schools before you actually chose Corner, can you tell me a little about that?

Before we decided on Corner, we wanted to just use our internal plan, our plan that we had in place, because we went through a process coming into the building. We did a lot of strategic planning. Actually, we did a whole year's worth of strategic planning when we came into our new building. We were bringing together two schools and we wanted to respect each of the schools. We wanted to make all the stakeholders a part of the process. We wanted it to be really something that was going to belong to everyone coming into the building. We went through a year of strategic planning. We had some staff developers coming from outside. Mike Quint was one of those fellas. He just did the process with us. So everybody had ownership, not one of the schools over the other. It was a pretty painful process when we went through that
planning process. You had to decide what was most effective and you had to move forward adopting those things. You had to let go of some of the things that you were doing that weren't working. Together we had to make those decisions and it took us a good year of very serious work to get that done.

7. Do you know why they didn't accept this plan?

Well, the state had the models that it liked. Effective Schools was not one of them. At the time, we were pretty much with the Effective Schools. When we went down to North Carolina, my school's Leadership chairperson and I went down to North Carolina for the Effective Schools Conference. We were really well into that but it was not one of the models adopted by the State. So that caused a problem, there was a problem there. At that point then, even though our model was accepted and we could have continued with our model and there was another school in the district that also had that happen, we had conversations. Do we want to go off on our own? That's not always good because we're working in the district and with the district. It's always better to work together so that whole conversation took place. So then we looked for a model that fit the Effective Schools model. Corner fits very well into that. They take it a little bit further in that they look at the child, specific child development. Effective Schools didn't do that. That was good for us because that was one of the pieces that we wanted to develop. At this time, we're thinking, of somehow addressing the social needs of our students. We have very poor students in our building. All these issues of poverty affect their learning. We need to address that somehow. Corner that was one of the pieces that they
had most developed: the development of the holistic child. It fit where we
wanted to go. So at that point, we said if we go with this, this would be very
good for us. The other schools, I guess, agreed with us. That was the one thing
everybody could live with and be okay with. So that is what we did.

8. What type of support did you receive in the implementation of the Comer WSR
model?

Once we decided that that's what we were going to do, we got a lot of
support. Our staff members were sent to New Haven to get in-service and
professional development in the area of Comer. The principals, everybody, we
had the teams going up there for training. The parents were trained in Atlantic
City. There was a lot of money put into that whole process. It really got off to a
good start.

9. Tell me a little bit about this group that you have with the principals. When do you
get together and how often?

We get together once a month. It's a principal directed council. We
wanted to talk about issues that were important to us. Over time the
superintendents have become more involved. They have a big hand in what we
talk about, but we still talk about things that are important to us through the
council. We talk about instruction. We talk about everything that affects the
schools.

10. Do you feel that meeting with the principals has helped the schools to remain on the
same page?
Yes, it increases articulation on the elementary level. We needed to do that because working in isolation is really not effective anymore.

**Volunteered information by interviewee:**

One of the hardest things for me to accomplish that I think is most important, is to keep us going in the direction of our mission. One thing that always happens is that people are telling us to do this, do that, de this, do that, this is important, that's important. My job is to say, "Wait a minute, we are going here, and yes that's important but this is going to take us off track." It is one of the hardest things I have to do through. It's so hard to do that because we are constantly being pulled here or there. I am talking about local, state, national. I mean the national government is even saying well this and that, you have to be doing this you should be doing that. Going through that is tough.

That's the one thing that is hard for me.

11. What do you attribute to the high level of Parent Community Partnerships at your school?

I tell the parents what we are doing and why. I'm very open with my parent leadership group. When things are happening that scare me, I tell them about it. If I think that we're going to fail in a particular area, I share it with them. Maybe that goes against conventional wisdom, but I am right out front and open about all this stuff. Open, very open (communication) and informative, I try to get everything out there to them at whatever level I can explain it to them. I do that. The leadership team is more educated. The people that have stepped up to lead the parents are people who can understand at a
different level. I am also very clear with the other parents as well. These are barriers and these are the things that I am trying to change and I tell them. We also try to teach parents how to help their children. We have a lot of family programs and that comes from surveying them. They want us to do that with them. This is important to them. They want to be able to help their kids and they not always can. So we do family literacy, we do family math, we do a lot of programs for the parents. We do the parent college.

12. Tell me a little bit about the family college.

Well, it's called the parent college and it's designed for the 10% of kids that are very, very, very needy. We reach out to their parents and we try to help them by showing them what resources are available to them, helping them link up to those resources. We just bring in people from the community that can help them. We help them forge those links. It is for the neediest kids, but the family programs are open to everybody. It involves helping parents become literate. Helping parents learn English. Helping parents help their own kids with the homework. All these things.

13. Tell me a little bit about what you do each morning for both parents and students.

We begin the day together. It is important to me to foster a sense of community. When you're principal it's very easy to lose yourself in this type of stuff and not be part of the school community. If you have the TV, you know everybody says, "Oh, we have the Crenston System or the Safari System." But then I can't see them. I'm out there talking into the void. We come together everyday as a school in the cafeteria and we do morning exercises and we
salute the flag. Every week we do the peace pledge because conflict resolution and having a peaceful school is very important to us. We have a character education program in place. We have conversations about our school initiatives in the morning. We showcase students. A student may come up and read something they wrote to the rest of the school, or they might want to read a little poem. They might want to do a cheer from the cheerleading club, or they might want to sing a song or do a dance. We can do this in the morning. We start at 8:35, by 8:45 we’re done and then everyone goes to his or her classrooms. It is open to the parents. They can come inside and be a part of that. The parents do birthday gifts. We have a birthday gift from the PTO. Every morning we celebrate somebody’s birthday. We give them little cups. During the course of the year, every child gets up to the front of the room. They get their cup or get honor roll recognition or student of the month recognition. So there are things in place, aside from those special things, that we do.

14. What do you attribute to the high level of School Leadership at your school?

   Everybody has their own special talent and their own area of interest of what they like. I try to maximize that. Wherever we have a need, if there are staff members that show an interest, then I encourage them to take the leadership in that area. I’m very proud of the fact that we produce many teacher leaders in this building. Since we opened five years ago, I lost four of my staff members to vice principalships. I mean they just go out and become leaders. One of them in the district, but the others have gone out of the district. They still have ties with this school. We have a strong relationship. Several of our teachers have
done this and I think it's wonderful. Within the school, if you have an interest I encourage them to be the leaders in that area. If it's something we want to develop within our mission and within what we want to do, they take it and they go.

15. What do you attribute to the high level of Professional Capacity Community at your school?

There is an excellent professional development component within the district. There's also that piece in the district that is being developed in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics. Our staff is encouraged to get into it and participate in that area. There's another piece, one of our teacher leaders is one of the district leaders for Four Blocks. Doing that piece within the building, a balanced literacy program that we at the Wrenz School has taken at our own has given us a good leg up on literacy in the building. One of the leaders of the district is here in this building. They just take everyone along with them.

They share with the others. I encourage that in my staff. That's something they truly believe in. We think it's going to take us where we need to go, go for it and be a leader.

16. Do they turn key to the other staff?

Yes, yes they do.

17. So, you don't only have district professional development you have in house also?

In house, absolutely yes.

18. If you notice the five schools had very close means in the area of student-centered learning climate, why do you think this is so?
19. Do you think it has anything to do with Comer?

Comer is definitely student-centered. Absolutely. That is one of the reasons why we chose it. We were already moving in that direction. We chose Comer because of that and they have helped us move in that direction.

20. Do you think Comer has helped in other areas, or what specifically do you think Comer has helped to improve student achievement?

In bringing everything together, that is important because you can’t operate in one way in one area and then in another way in another area. Comer is this umbrella that gives us a process for operating without getting into specifics as far as curriculum. I believe they do have pieces like that but we never brought into it because what we were doing was strong and we were happy with it. So we just continued doing. They just gave us, I guess, the framework for keeping everything moving in the right, same direction.

21. Even though you did have a high level in high-quality instruction, this was not statistically significant when I did the correlation. Why do you think that we might have had a problem in mathematics and technology?

I think technology is the weakest right now. I think it has to do with the fact that there are technical people making decisions about what’s going to happen with the technology rather than the teachers. That’s what I hear from my people. I have a very strong teacher leader in the area of technology. That’s the piece that’s fallen down. I think that we are beginning to make strides in changing that. There’s a district technology committee that was put together
and I think that that's one of the areas that they hope to change. Once that happens, this area is going to be stronger.

I think that mathematics is well on its way to being better. Right now in our school, math is better than our literacy. We have a program that's being developed that's very student-based and discovery-based. It's a constructivist approach. I think we might have had a little veer off because last year we adopted a new math book. When you adopt something new then that becomes the focus. But one of the things that I’ve done this year is planned my feet and said, "Wait a minute, we are committed to this constructivist approach to mathematics instruction. We showed tremendous gains last year in mathematics and we're not moving away from that. The math book is a tool to accomplish that. And that's all it is. It can't determine what we're doing in teaching mathematics.” I don't know if that's happening in other schools. I don't know but for us that's what started to happen. We can't let that happen because this constructivist approach is very strong and it showed tremendous gains for us.

I'm surprised that this didn't show because we had tremendous gains last year. Well, let me talk about test scores. That's the other piece. Everything we do goes back to student results. Everything. If it's not helping us get better test scores we don't need to be doing it. The teachers do this, I do this, we all do this and this is a conversation that is ongoing, in grade level meetings, curriculum meetings, everywhere. For example, this year we had a 14-point gain in mathematics, it's huge. The teachers, when they started implementing this constructivist approach, it was something new. Whenever you introduce
something new people are wary of it and they don’t always just buy in. So this increase is the new piece and now I communicate that fact to the staff. “Look this is what you got for doing that, this increase.” So I think if you gave them those questions again this year you would get different results because of that.

22. Are there any common instructional frameworks being used in your school, if so what are they and in what area?

The constructivist approach in mathematics instruction and process writing. We also do a tremendous amount of writing through the content areas for example, in social studies and science. It’s something that originated from our bilingual instruction and we’ve been very successful with the bilingual students in this building. They write about social studies. They’re writing all the time. There is a lot of writing. Teachers model it for them, how they need to write and then they continue it. This year we’re expanding it to writing in the regular program. Writing about science, social studies and mathematics. We keep math journals where they do the T. The T, everybody does it. It’s a school wide thing. We talk about it in the CIA committee, the Curriculum Instruction and Assessment committee. Then it goes out to the staff and everybody does it once it’s decided in committee. That’s my job too, to make sure that it gets implemented. Sometimes there are times when it’s hard to get people to do it but I follow through making sure it gets done.

23. How do you think your allocation of resources has helped enhance instructional program coherence in your school?
We have been very lucky with the Abbott funding these last few years. We have plenty of resources. I let the staff have a lot of input on how money is allocated. In fact, for years I never said, "You have $2000 or $3000." I said to them, "Tell me what you need." They are very specific in exactly what they need in November. "Tell me how much you need, tell me what materials you need." That's how we build our budget. So teacher A could get $10,000, teacher B could get only $1000. Their needs are different. A person who has been around for 20 years has a lot of stuff. A teacher who is just starting out needs a lot of stuff. That's how we have operated. As far as developing, for example the social worker and science teacher, we had a science teacher before other schools because we felt it was key for our operation. We budgeted for it and we were given the resources for it. Now, let me talk about this because this was a problem on the district level. When we did that, I guess maybe we should change something else like Physical Education. We've got 3 or 4 teachers in that gym doing Phys. Ed together. I couldn't see the problem with having four classes with three teachers and put in five extra kids in each of the other classes. It works out nicely. But we had a problem with the supervisor. They were insisting that four teachers had to be there. The assistant superintendent came in and said, "You're going to have to do." But I said, "I am not giving up the Science teacher to do it." It was a real tough thing, but what ended up happening is that they gave me more money to have the person so that I didn't have to give up the Science teacher. It was a hard thing to do, but sometimes that's what the principal needs to do, they need to take that stance.
24. This is your 5th year of implementation of the Comer SDP WSR model, how do you think it has helped improve student achievement in your school? Has it impeded the improvement of student achievement?

Comer has been positive in every way.

25. What major benefits have you seen that attribute to the implementation of WSR in general?

Developing the student, keeping it very student-centered, that's been a major benefit. That whole social, psychological piece we tend to forget that our students are very needy. Those are the students that you end up giving 80% of your attention to and you don't get to the other business that you have to do. Whereas if you have a social worker that will work with them and somebody that reaches out to the parents and helps the parents then you can give more of your resources to everybody else. That's how you can really make gains. So I think that is the best piece of Comer, the best part of it.

26. What initiatives in your school do you think attributes most to improving student achievement?

The Four Blocks, the constructivist approach to mathematics instruction, our bilingual program is very strong and the way that we've implemented it has helped a quite a bit.

27. What initiatives in your school do you think do not help in improving student achievement?

The preschool program has hurt us. We may not pass next year because of what happened in preschool. Our 3rd and 4th graders, when they were in
preschool, went to a preschool that was done solely in English. It was not required that we have a bilingual program for preschool, so we did not do one. Those children we find have lost both languages and our team has said that their development was arrested. There’s a group of about 30 kids in 3rd and 30 in 4th that are floundering now because of what happened to them in preschool. We had no impact on that. We talked about it at ESAC and our teachers went to meetings and spoke about this. It was not just the bilingual kids. The Creative Curriculum was very unstructured. We were using High Scope before that and the children came better prepared. When we went with Creative Curriculum, the levels that the students came into kindergarten really dropped back. Those two things impacted negatively on our students’ readiness. They were doing better when they were home and taken care by their parents. The bilingual kids could continue developing their Spanish. Everybody, in general, that moved from High Scope to Creative Curriculum caused a drop. We complained about it, we talked about it, but we weren’t heard at the district level for a while. Eventually, we were and things changed. The children coming in our second grade are very much stronger than our 3rd and 4th graders this year. This is the year we take the hit.

28. How about the bilingual students? You mentioned that because they did English in preschool that was a problem, is that still the case?

Those kids were not identified as bilingual kids. The children who came in and didn’t go to the preschool they were the bilingual students, the LEP students. Those others had surface English and they stopped being identified as
ELLs, so they didn’t get bilingual services. Those are the ones that are in 3rd and 4th grade now and they are struggling. They were never identified as bilingual students and there’s no way to identify them to give them services at this point. The 2nd graders now at least got ESL and that has helped. Now there is the dual language program being piloted at preschool that we expect will help. We have a sheltered first grade and a sheltered kindergarten class who need ESL, who might have been considered bilingual and they might have continued in Spanish. So even though they’re having some trouble those classes are lower than the other classes. I can show you some results that we have done with those kids, in particular the ones in the sheltered classes. They scored as low on the DRA as the kids who just arrived in this country from other countries. So preschool does them absolutely no good but doesn’t do them any harm. Which is what happened with the 3rd and 4th graders. It actually harmed them. I believe this in my heart.

29. What do you think attributed to be in full implementation in Corner?

The fact that we were almost there to begin with because we were doing Effective Schools and it was so close. Some of the schools are further along than others.

30. In the five years that WSR has been implemented, have you been assigned any designation for not making AYP?

No.

31. Are there any other comments you would you like to add on the topics of WSR and/or instructional program coherence?
I would like to share this with my staff. This will validate what they do. I try to give them as much information as I can. This would validate it. They want to share. They are very happy about what they are doing. It gets good results. We tie everything back to the results. If it is going to take us where we want to go, it's worth doing. If it's not, we try not to waste our time with it. Our resources are everything.
Interview Transcript of the Yellow School Principal

1. What school improvement model, if any, was implemented before the implementation of a WSR model?

   We had an effective school program, which began in 1986, but actually even before that going back to 1982. We had what was called the 21st Century School Block Grant, which was initiated only at our school. We began with School Based Management and training in that area with a lot of facilitation through the State Department of Education, which led us to become eligible for an Effective School Grant in 1986. That concentrated on many of the same elements that we're talking about now with school leadership, and assessing students, and parental involvement, and community support. So we were very much familiar with the Whole School Reform components because of the Effective Schools Model and all the training and ongoing training and assessment we did of ourselves over a three-year period. So, we were in very good status as far as that goes and in relation to the Whole School Reform model when that came along.

2. What obstacles, if any, did you encounter at the beginning of the implementation of a WSR model, Conser, in your school?

   Well, luckily, as I said, we were familiar with the different initiatives, so it was a pretty easy selection because of that. We were obviously obligated by the State Department to make a selection. It seemed that the Conser model did correlate well with the Effective Schools Grant. Being that all the other elementary schools in the district selected the model so that we would all be in
unison and uniform across the district, it didn’t seem to be a difficult task to select the Comer model. There weren’t really obstacles, except the obstacle of obviously having something mandated from the State Department of Education where you think you, as a school, are doing very well and then you are required to make certain selections. That’s sort of an obstacle in itself. But you have to meet these standards when you feel that you are functioning well and effectively.

3. I’m aware of an application you made to use a different model rather than choose one of the state models, can you tell me something about that?

We first selected to stay with the Effective Schools Program because, as I said, we thought that was very effective and we were very familiar with it. So we chose to go with what they called an alternative school program using the Effective Schools Model and the Effective Schools Correlates. We actually were approved to do that, along with another school in the district, however, we wanted to remain uniform and in correlation with the other schools. We elected to go with the Comer model instead and work together with all the elementary schools.

4. What type of support did you receive in the implementation of the Comer WSR model?

We received excellent support, we really did. We went to Comer, the School Development Program, all the training up in Yale University. Which was a wonderful experience for quite a large percentage of our teachers and staff members. It was a full week training for Comer 101 and another full week
training for Comer 102. I myself went to the Principal's academy for another full week of training. It was very, very comprehensive, very interesting, motivating and I thought it was a wonderful experience. Of course, that's all due in part to the district supporting the programming and allowing us to attend those sessions as well. So we did receive excellent support.

5. What do you attribute to the high level of Parent Community Partnerships at your school?

Although we were working on that component for several years, even well back in the 21st Century School Brock Grant that I was speaking about earlier from 1982, we had some levels of success. Although it is difficult to get parents to come into the schools, feeling probably intimidated, there's a language barrier, cultural barrier, etc., and we remained faithful. Through the Effective Schools program that was one of the major components and major focuses of one of the elements. However, it wasn't until the Comer School Development Program was implemented that we really saw significant progress in parental involvement. Now I can very proudly say that we have a wonderful group of parents that are familiar with our school, are comfortable coming into the school on a daily basis, have gathered themselves together and are doing their own types of programs and activities. It has made a tremendous and significant difference.

6. Can you just mention a few of the activities that you do with parents that you think are helping you do better?
The parents themselves are doing mostly fund raising activities. However, they are getting satisfaction out of that, getting teacher cooperation and working with several different activities each month. We also have parent workshops. We have a family literacy night where parents come in with their children and teachers demonstrate to them reading skills, how to read orally with their students and their children, how to ask pertinent questions and then they get time to, not only listen to the teachers doing it, but they also get time to practice that with their children right there that evening. They seem to be very, very receptive to that and we get a large turn out for that. We have Family Nights Out, which are tremendous functions. We'll get 200 to 300 parents at those evening functions as well. Now we are thinking of adding a component to that which is basically a social time with the parents and the children and the teachers and the staff members, with arts and crafts activities and games and dancing and just having a lot of fun together. Now we are thinking of incorporating an academic piece as well. We feel that parents are now much more comfortable coming in and they feel that we are much more approachable.

So, I think that at this point in time they are ready for that component as well.

7. What do you attribute to the high level of School Leadership at your school?

I think, obviously since we were so familiar with School Based Management. Teachers here at that time in 1982, I was still a teacher here, were given a lot of authority to be in very respectful positions as teachers. They were held in high regard because they were allowed to become leaders of certain committees, and certain activities. So way back in 1982, that's when that began,
and I myself, as a teacher at that time, felt that I was a leader, I was a teacher leader. I was allowed to become a teacher leader and work side by side with administration and then that just continued again through the Effective Schools program. Many teachers became even more involved and became teacher leaders of different committees and different functions. So, I believe that's where they get the feeling that they can be productive and have an important role in this school as a teacher leader.

8. What do you attribute to the high level of Professional Capacity Community at your school? Your school scored at the highest level.

That's excellent, I am very pleased and very proud of that. I think that has a lot to do with what I just described. The teachers feeling that they are productive and that their voice does count do become more involved. They take much more pride in their profession and then go on and research and just reach out for different areas and different genres and become so highly professional. They go on to become District Teachers of the Year. We have now, at this school, six District Teachers of the Year and three National Board Certified Teachers because they have that zeal and that zest for the profession. I think it's all from them, that leadership style.

9. Can you highlight a little bit the professional development component in the school and the district?

Excellent, very comprehensive, professional development component, not just this school, but a tribute to this school district where we have incorporated a lot of language arts literacy and mathematics professional
development sessions for our teachers. They are not just one-shot deals. There are on-going and continuous professional development with a lot of support from supervisors, and obviously the school principals and vice principals and our central administration as well. We’ve gone through guided reading, shared reading, the Collins Effective Writing Program, the Four Blocks of Literacy Program and a very comprehensive Teaching Math for Understanding Program. This is for every grade level throughout the K-4 system in the district.

10. Can you discuss a little bit, or tell us a little bit about relationships the teachers have between themselves both professionally or/ and any other kind of relationship?

For this school, I honestly think that there are very effective relationships, very positive, in a professional level and personal level because the teachers do socialize together as well. They are very anxious to be with each other at professional development sessions not only what we offer at the school but within the district as well as out of the district or other staff development sessions that they are interested in. They ask each other to turnkey information for them. They have no problem having each other come in and demonstrate lessons and to speak with each other and articulate with each other at grade level meetings, very open and very effective level of sharing that type of information.

11. What do you attribute to your high level of student-centered learning climate?

Again, I believe that has a lot to do with the professional development that has been received by the teachers and the students needs because they are so varied and vast at these levels that we need to do something to differentiate
instruction and to make instruction meaningful for students at varied levels. So it's almost something that we cannot avoid in order to be successful with our students. We need to look at their individual needs, their small group needs and their large group needs as well. To do all varied instructional strategies with the students including direct instruction as well but also small group instruction, one on one instruction, and one on one tutoring as much as possible as well. So, I think our teachers are very well equipped to provide our students with the types of scenarios that they need to perform well at their varied levels.

12. As the results indicated all five schools were very close in the area of student-centered learning climate, why do you think this is so?

I think because the district, and we as elementary schools, as far as administration and working with our central administration, have made these decisions to be unified and to be consistent across the board in the district so that we're all on the same playing field. All teachers are receiving the same types of professional development at every grade level, district-wide, K-4. So, I believe that certainly is a significant reason for that.

13. How do you think the WSR model, Comer, has helped in that area?

I think Comer has helped in all the areas because it is student-based. It's addressing the needs of the whole child and looking at all the components and the six developmental pathways for each child. When teachers do that and they concentrate on all those different pathways you are then targeting children's needs. The Comer project has done that for us in many ways.
14. Even though you did have a high level in high-quality instruction, the correlation between high-quality instruction was not statistically significant with instructional program coherence in the five elementary schools, however when I broke it up into its components, the correlation of two out of the four components, specifically writing and reading/language arts was statistically significant and the five elementary schools had very close levels. Why do you think this is so?

The reading components, we definitely again had that as a concentration area, the literacy component and much of the professional development was geared in that area as well. Naturally all the teachers leaned towards literacy because literacy is the key to doing well in any of the subject areas including mathematics. I believe that focus and concentration led to those results.

15. Math and Technology did not correlate with instructional program coherence can you discuss with me why perhaps that was the case.

Technology, I think, is still something that has to be developed. Teachers are still a little resistant, a little hesitant about technology themselves. We still are concentrating on that, as a matter of fact, this school year there is a concentration district-wide with technology. I think it's just in its early stages and that it will definitely improve and progress, just as the other areas have, because we are giving it full concentration at this time.

16. Are there any common instructional frameworks being used in your school, if so in what area? Are there any other frameworks that you believe adds to the increase of student achievement?
All the areas I mentioned earlier are as well, with the guided reading, the shared reading, the writing program and the math program because, as I said, we have all concentrated on that. All K-4 teachers are receiving that kind of support and that kind of professional development in those areas. So, I believe that is the reason for those results as well.

17. Do you consider Comer a common framework in your school that is assisting in the increase of student achievement? How so? Why not?

Yes, absolutely, absolutely yes. We’re very strong. I believe we are very strong in the Comer philosophy and in the Comer beliefs. We say it every day, that we are a Comer school and we believe in the three guiding principles, of Consensus, Collaboration and No-Fault. It’s just part of our vocabulary and part of who we are now. We are truly a Comer School.

18. What types of staff working conditions exist in your school that you feel helps enhance instructional program coherence?

Well, previous to this point in time, when we’re sitting at a brand new, state of the art, beautiful, magnificent school building, we were in a building that was 100 years old with very different working conditions then we have now and obviously we were doing well there. So, I’m not quite sure if the working conditions really have that much of an impact because I think as a school in a 100 year old school building we were doing just as well as we are doing now. Maybe now we will sour up into stellar status in a state of the art school. I think it is the people, the type of staff that you have and relationships that are more important and those are the reasons for our good results.
19. How do you think your allocation of resources has helped enhance instructional program coherence in your school?

That's absolutely true. I'm sure as an Abbott District we have been very fortunate to receive the type of funding that we have had for our students and for our staff. We, the district have been very diligent in making sure that these funds are directly related to the classroom, classroom instruction and all the equipment in technology that is possible to have in our instructional programs which has definitely made a huge difference for us.

20. This is your 5th year of implementation of the Comer EDP WSR model, how do you think it has helped improve student achievement in your school? Has it impeded the improvement of student achievement?

Well, it definitely has helped because we believe in the philosophy and the philosophy is based on the whole child, and meeting the six developmental pathways. Definitely bringing parents into the mix in everything that we do. I do whole-heartedly feel that the Comer program did very effectively help us in those areas. As far as impeding, I think in the beginning you feel that it is an imposition because WSR is being imposed upon the school. There is some resentment in that fact because you think you are doing just fine without it. Now in this point in time, I am very grateful for that mandate. I do believe it did allow us to be very successful and to become more cohesive as a school.

21. What level in the process of implementation of Comer is your school at?

I don't believe we're at the full implementation level, but we're, very, very close to that level as far as our evaluations and assessments of ourselves
and the evaluations that we received from the coordinator. We are close to being at full implementation.

22. What major benefits have you seen that can be attributed to the implementation of WSR in general?

All the major benefits are obviously student achievement and the professional development program we have in place and of course the parental involvement. So those three areas I think were the most beneficial.

23. What initiatives in your school do you think attribute most to improving student achievement?

I think the Teaching Math for Understanding Program definitely was a huge, a huge success for us because it showed in our test scores. We dramatically improved in the test scores. I believe that the teaching styles of the teachers and the strategies that they've used changed dramatically through Teaching Math for Understanding. I think that type of teaching and the style of teaching with the constructivist approach, whether teachers realized it or not, carried over into the literacy because it just naturally does that. Once you see, as a teacher, that students are doing well with these new approaches you are very excited about what you see happening. As a teacher, you automatically use those kinds of strategies in all your teaching. So, if I had to pick one initiative I think that was probably the most effective. We, as a district, were so thorough with it and gave it such emphasis and importance. We followed up with it every single month and had math coaches following up and supporting the program as
well. I believe that we, as a district, should be really proud that we did such a good job with the Teaching Math for Understanding initiative.

24. How about the initiatives in the area of Reading / Language Arts?

In reading / language arts I think its mostly the strategies that were presented to teachers. Using different reading strategies that are throughout all the different components. I couldn’t say specifically one, it’s just that the teachers are exposed to and trained in using different approaches. So, its not only one of the initiatives, they were all doing that simultaneously and when its repeated, like that and you see it running through and interwoven into all of those areas its becomes just part of the way teachers are instructing now.

25. What initiatives in your school, or the district, do you think do not help in improving student achievement?

I can’t say at this point there’s something is not needed. We are getting to the point now, I think, that teachers can be the leaders and not need as much help from consultants and different outside expertise. Our teachers have become very proficient and can turnkey information to new teachers and teachers may need refreshers, teachers that would like a little help here or there. I can see where that has happened.

26. In the five years that WSR has been implemented, have you been assigned any designation for not making Adequate Yearly Progress? If so at what level are you at the present time?

Well, yes we are unfortunately a school in need of improvement which is considered year two. However, we were successful in an AYP appeal for our
2003 scores and we have another appeal in as we speak for our 2005 scores, which we're hoping to be successful as well which will bring us back to year one in early warning and that is where we are very hopeful to be.

27. Specifically, in what subgroups did you not meet AYP? What do you think attributed to not making AYP in those subgroups?

The subgroups that we did not meet AYP in were total population, the LEP population, and our economically disadvantaged population. I believe since we are the school with the highest level of poverty in this school district that certainly had an impact on the results and an impact in the other subgroups. Of course the LEP students have the disadvantage because of their language barrier. I do believe they just need more time to be more proficient in the English language and that the State Department needs to look at how we're assessing our LEP students.

28. What, if anything, will you do to remedy this problem?

Well, we have a leveled reading program that none of the other elementary schools have where students are identified for different reading levels. It's very flexible groupings so that they can move quickly and accelerate quickly to higher levels of reading. We have all the intervention teachers involved as well as the classroom teachers so that there is small group instruction and a very low student teacher ratio with the lowest and most at risk students being in the smallest groupings possible. We also have before school programs, after school programs and Saturday morning programs. Right now we're beginning our NJASK prep for third and forth grade which is a mandatory
after school program in literacy and mathematics, which we feel was successful in the past year and will be just as successful this year as well.

29. Can you tell me a little bit about a group that the principals have formed in the elementary level and how that group has helped in any way?

That’s our ESAC group, Elementary School Administrators Council. We as principals and school administrators several years ago decided that we needed time to just talk amongst ourselves about our programs, our schools and what works and doesn’t work. We can get different suggestions that we are working at other schools that we might try at our school and vice-versa. It worked out very well and developed into, what I believe, is a highly professional and highly respected group especially because our superintendent of schools and assistant superintendent have decided to attend these meetings with us, which are held at an after school time. We can go on for sometimes two hours with very healthy discussions and a lot of great decisions have been made through the ESAC committee.

30. As a principal, what do you think is the hardest part of the job, which is interfering with even bigger gains in student achievement?

Well obviously, it is the time factor, time management. There’s so much, as a school administrator, as a principal, to accomplish in one day that it’s very difficult. I find that I have to stay here after hours in order to feel that I have accomplished what I would like to in one day so that I start the next day without having things left over on my desk. I believe it has a lot to do with the WSP, the mandates and all the reports that are due in relation to that. As an
Abbott District that does make it difficult. But when you put all of it in perspective, and you do look afterwards at the reports you have written, and at the analysis of data that you have done it is also gratifying as well to see that and to see it in black and white and to see the progress that has been made. When you put things in writing, and put all your initiatives and all the work that you're doing in writing it's very satisfying and very gratifying, at the same time as being a little frustrating too.

31. Are there any questions for me or any other comments something that I may not have asked you that you would like to speak about?

Well, I should have emphasized to think a little more about the economically disadvantaged status that our school faces that other schools out there do not have it. We're at a higher level and you know that's something very difficult to control. It seems to be the location of our school and that many families coming in from other countries seem to find their place here in this area because they can get a cheaper apartment or a less expensive apartment. Then as they themselves grow, they move out of this area. Our students are the students that have the less advantage and it's difficult for them as that makes it difficult for us as well. We just can't seem to find what we can do to help them accelerate at a faster pace. It's not that they cannot or that they do not have the ability, but they need more resources and more time to catch up to everyone else. We need to realize that at this school and not allow that to deter us from continuing our progress.
Appendix C

Tables of ESPA and NJASK Scores in Mathematics
Table C1

4th Grade Mathematics ESPA and NJASK Scores 2001 – 2005 for the Total Population

Subgroup of the Blue School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Assessment</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table C2

4th Grade Mathematics ESPA and NJASK Scores 2001 – 2005 for the Total Population

Subgroup of the Green School

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<th>Year of Assessment</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>49.4%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
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