Perceptions of Teachers on the Influence of the Regional Achievement Centers on one Priority School in One Urban District in New Jersey: A Qualitative Case Study

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON
THE INFLUENCE OF THE REGIONAL ACHIEVEMENT CENTER ON
ONE PRIORITY SCHOOL IN ONE URBAN DISTRICT IN NEW JERSEY:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

By
Olivia Russo

DISSERTATION STUDY
Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Education, Management, Leadership and Policy

Under the Supervision of Dr. Anthony Colella
March 2016
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THE INFLUENCE

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Olivia Russo, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2016.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the interventions implemented by the Regional Achievement Center. The Regional Achievement Centers, RACs, were recently put into place through Governor Christie as a reform method for failing schools and are part of the New Jersey Department of Education’s mission to transform the department. Research was conducted using a qualitative design with a constructivist approach to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of those teachers working directly with the RAC teams in one of the states’ lowest performing schools.
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THE INFLUENCE

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I would like to thank my family for understanding what it took to accomplish this task, my husband for being my number one cheerleader, and my children for understanding that mommy “has work to do.” I love you, boys!

Dad, I know you are smiling down, with that twinkle in your eyes - and some sarcastic comment in tow to keep me humble. Mom, you are a saint, and I thank the both of you for everything that you have instilled in me - especially my strength and perseverance, without which I surely would have given up long ago.
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THE INFLUENCE

Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgements................................................................................................................v
Table of Contents..................................................................................................................vi
Chapter I. Introduction..........................................................................................................1
  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 2
  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 6
  Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 7
  Definitions and Terms ....................................................................................................... 8
  Theoretical Perspective ................................................................................................... 9
  Delimitations ..................................................................................................................... 11
  Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 12
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 12
Chapter II. Review of Literature..........................................................................................14
  A Brief History of State Intervention ................................................................................ 14
  The New Jersey Department of Education and Past Reforms....................................... 16
  New Reform Efforts .......................................................................................................... 20
  The Regional Achievement Centers .............................................................................. 21
  Intervention in District X ................................................................................................. 25
  Effectiveness of State Intervention................................................................................... 26
  What Works in Failing Schools? ....................................................................................... 30

vi
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THE INFLUENCE

Summary .......................................................................................... 31

Chapter III. Methodology and Procedure ............................................ 32

Research Design .................................................................................. 32
Site and Participants for the Study ...................................................... 34
Data Collection .................................................................................. 38
Data Analysis ..................................................................................... 40
Establishing Credibility, Validity and Trustworthiness ....................... 41
Jury of Experts .................................................................................... 42
Research Permission and Ethical Considerations ............................... 43
Role of the Researcher ......................................................................... 43
Summary ............................................................................................. 44

Chapter IV. Analysis of the Data ......................................................... 45

Introduction ....................................................................................... 45
The Extent and Scope of RAC Interventions in a Priority School ........... 46
Classroom Practices ........................................................................... 50
Teachers’ Feelings and Perceptions About the Interventions ............... 53
Teachers’ Feelings Regarding the Effects of RAC Interventions ........... 58
Summary ............................................................................................. 63

Chapter V. Results and Recommendations ........................................ 65

Introduction ....................................................................................... 65
Purpose of the Study ........................................................................... 65
THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON THE INFLUENCE
Chapter I

Introduction

There has long been debate over who should be responsible for the state of education in the nation. The role of federal, state, and local jurisdiction over public school systems has been the source of much controversy, ever since the conception of the public school system. When public schools fail, the debate and controversy multiply exponentially, leading to many federal and state reform initiatives, regulatory statutes, and a plethora of other measures aimed at fixing the problems of the public school system. A major problem currently facing our public schools is the achievement and proficiency of students in low-performing schools across the nation.

The federal government made it clear that education is primarily a state responsibility in the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954), when the Supreme Court stated that “education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments…under our federal system, primary responsibility clearly has been vested in the states” (Brown 347 US, 493). Many researchers argue that the state is ultimately responsible for the education of its citizens (Burns, 2003).

However, federal reform initiatives, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, have attempted to close the achievement gap and to improve the education of impoverished and minority students in low-performing schools. These acts, notably the NCLB, enacted to hold schools accountable for their performance and tie school funding to achievement and assessments (Oluwole, 2009).

Under NCLB, states that receive Title I funds to improve upon their schools must implement an accountability system founded on state achievement standards and assessments (Oluwole, 2009). If schools fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress, as determined by the state,
they are subject to corrective action, takeover, and/or a loss of funding. According to Baisell, besides NCLB-mandated penalties, two-thirds of state education systems have their own additional policies to penalize persistently low-performing schools (as cited in Chiang, 2009, p.2).

New Jersey has been at the “forefront of interventions into faltering districts and unsuccessful schools” in an attempt to turn them around for quite some time (Brady, 2003, p.1). New Jersey had long since taken a proactive approach to the improvement of its education system when it added the Education Clause to the New Jersey Constitution in 1875. This Education Clause mandated that legislature must provide a thorough and efficient system of public education (Lenihan, 2009).

This notion of a “thorough and efficient” education has plagued the state legislature ever since, and there have been countless movements of education reform in the hopes of equalizing education for all. New Jersey has aimed to improve public school education through various amendments to the Education Clause, as well as through several Abbott rulings, the Quality Education Act of 1990, the Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act of 1996, the School Funding Reform Act of 2008, and many, many more.

Many schools in the United States continue to fail, however, and the states have continued in their efforts to close the achievement gaps, raise student proficiency, and improve student performance. Some of these efforts often include various forms of state takeover and intervention.

**Statement of the Problem**

Across the United States, there are over 8,000 schools that are failing to educate the students they serve (nearly 4 million of them) to meet state academic standards. Fewer than half
of the nation’s low-income students are able to meet the minimum standards in Math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and by twelfth grade, 43% of students cannot meet the minimum criteria in Reading (Brady, 2003).

Efforts to turn these schools around, including state intervention and the takeover of school districts are forms of education reform that are designed to promote educational and financial stability in school districts (Oluwole, 2009). Takeover can take many forms, ranging in degrees of severity, and can produce a wide variety of effects that are still being uncovered.

Much research has been done into failing schools and how to turn these schools around, however many researchers repeat the notion that it is much more difficult to actually do. In Can Failing Schools Be Fixed, Brady (2003) found that although much is known about how effective schools work, far less is known about moving an ineffective school from failure to success. “Surprisingly little is known about what kinds of interventions are most likely to turn faltering schools into successful educational institutions” (Finn, 2003, p. iv).

According to Ziebarth (2002), state takeover is the “ultimate sanction” (p. 1). State takeover is currently legislated in twenty-four states throughout the nation (Brady, 2003; Burns, 2003; Oluwole, 2009; Ziebarth, 2002), and 15 states have policies that allow them to take over due to academic problems (Ziebarth, 2002). According to DiLeo (1998) “state takeovers constitute one of the latest trends in urban education policy” (as cited in Burns, 2003, p.288). Other researchers note the increase in state intervention as well (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999, as cited in Burns, 2003, p. 287).

On October 4th, 1989, New Jersey became the first state to ever take over a school district when the New Jersey Board of Education decided in a unanimous vote to take control of the Jersey City Public School District (Dolan, 1992; Oluwole, 2009). The district was initially taken
over due to corruption, political interference, nepotism, mismanagement, poor academic achievement, and fiscal problems (Oluwole, 2009). That was roughly twenty-five years ago.

Controversially, the State still holds control of the Jersey City School District, along with several others, (including Paterson, Newark, and Camden) although it has relinquished some control in some of those districts.

A new form of state-led educational reform is currently underway in approximately 79 districts and 260 schools across the state of New Jersey as per Governor Christie’s Executive Order 58 of April 4th, 2011. This order led to the formation of an Educational Task Force that was responsible for reviewing all state statutes and regulations as well as reviewing the Quality Single Accountability Consortium (QSAC) and making recommendations for its improvement. The Task Force, along with the formation of seven Regional Achievement Centers (RACs), whose primary concern are the state’s lowest performing schools, are all part of Christie’s Education Reform Agenda (NJDOE, 2010).

Governor Chris Christie and Former Education Commissioner Chris Cerf have described this new model of reform as a fundamental shift from the “inadequate” and “often contradictory efforts” at providing support from the past, and a movement away from a “bureaucratic, compliance based organization” (NJDOE, 2012a, n.p.). According to the New Jersey Department of Education, the RACs “represent the Departments most ambitious, focused effort to date to improve student achievement across the state” (NJDOE, 2012a).

The Regional Achievement Centers, acting as the turnaround agent for the Department of Education, are responsible for supporting the state’s lowest-performing schools, which have been identified as Priority and Focus Schools (NJSA 6A:33-1.1a). Currently, the RAC teams are
implementing targeted interventions in the 75 Priority Schools and 183 Focus Schools that have been designated throughout the state.

Despite many years of failed state interventions, New Jersey officials reportedly believe they have “struck the right balance between state-driven priorities and …each struggling schools needs” (as cited in Ujifusa, 2012, p. 26). Although the State Department of Education aims to reform the system and turnaround failing districts, there are others who question their effectiveness (Seder, 2000; Ziebarth, 2002; Wong & Shen, 2001), their conformance with state regulations (Education Law Center, 2012), the potential violation of voter rights (Ziebarth, 2002), and still others who have many more concerns (Oluwole, 2009).

There is a considerable amount of literature that supports the notion that state interventions are ineffective and contrary to best practices, which demonstrates the need for more research in this area. Despite the many turnaround efforts, “no particular intervention strategy has a success rate higher than 50%, and most interventions yield positive results in less than half of the schools they touch” (Finn, 2003, p. iv).

Researchers in this field have noted the considerable need for more research on the effects of takeover and interventions, noting a “lack of strong research evidence” and a “scarcity of research on the effects of state takeovers” (Ziebarth, 2002, p.4). State turnaround and reform efforts focus on a wide variety of methods to improve upon the failing schools, and all of these efforts have a huge influence on the teachers who work in these failing schools. Teachers are an integral part of the education process and they have a considerable amount of influence on a school community and on student achievement.

This study aims to take a deeper look into the turnaround efforts of the Regional Achievement Center, New Jersey’s latest reform effort, by interviewing those who deal directly
with these state interventions. This study seeks to add to the body of knowledge of state interventions and takeovers by studying those who have been under the RAC mandates and identifying their perceptions of the influence of these new reform efforts.

**Purpose of the Study**

As it has been said, that which happens, happens first in New Jersey (Yaffe, 2007). As New Jersey was the first state to initiate state takeover of education, it is often a model for the rest of the country in terms of reform in education. The recent formation of the Regional Achievement Centers as a means for monitoring, intervening, and improving the failing schools of our state is an extremely expensive endeavor that is sure to have had a considerable impact on the way teachers and administrators are running their schools and classrooms.

With approximately 79 districts being affected by recent RAC interventions, 75 schools in New Jersey having earned the label Priority School and hundreds more having earned the label of Focus Schools, the Regional Achievement Centers have certainly had a large circle of influence over those whom they are meant to serve, and will certainly continue to have influence over our children and schools for many, many years to come. Hundreds of schools throughout New Jersey are following the recommendations of the Regional Achievement Center. Hundreds of teachers in School District X alone are following these recommendations, utilizing the Model Curriculum that has been supplied by the Department of Education and assessing thousands of students using the state’s common benchmark unit assessments every five to six weeks.

This study seeks to develop an understanding of the Regional Achievement Centers and their influence on failing schools. It is important to understand what these Regional Achievement Centers do, what they aim to do, what is actually done in our schools, and what has occurred as a
direct result of these interventions. It is critical to identify the perceptions of teachers on these RAC interventions as a step towards improving failing schools and intervention/reform strategies. A major goal of this study is to understand how teachers feel about and perceive the RAC interventions in the Priority Schools in District X, NJ, so as to understand their influence on education throughout the state and to help improve failing schools.

Failing schools continue to be a huge problem in the education system. Currently to date, there have been a number of studies on the history of state intervention, reform, and takeovers. There has been a reasonable amount of research on the effects of state takeover and its effectiveness on student achievement. However, being that the Regional Achievement Centers were only created in 2012, there has been little research on this state intervention approach and even less data to determine its effectiveness in low-performing, high-poverty schools. There is still much to be learned about this entity and its approach to school reform. Understanding the RAC team and their interventions is critical to the education system of New Jersey and other states who may follow this model of state intervention. Understanding the perceptions of those whom the RAC teams influence is an integral part to understanding this new intervention strategy.

Research Questions

The primary, over-arching research question for this study was: How do RAC interventions influence school life in Priority Schools in District X, New Jersey? The following questions are sub-questions and must be answered in order to develop a full understanding of the research problem:

- What is the extent and scope of RAC interventions in a Priority School?
● How do the RAC interventions influence classroom practice in a Priority School?
● What are teachers’ perceptions of the RAC interventions and their influence in a Priority School?
● How do teachers feel about the RAC interventions in a Priority School?

Definitions and Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a measure for student achievement; under NCLB schools who fail to make AYP are subject to sanctions including state takeover.

District Performance Review (DPR) is a self-assessment tool in the form of a checklist which is used by the state to review schools under the QSAC. The DPR checklist covers five categories and contains over 400 indicators to determine a school's performance range. A school must score at least 80% in each section in order to achieve a rank of “high performing.”

A Focus School is a school that meets one or more of the following criteria: graduation rates lower than 75%, large achievement gaps between subgroups (43.5 % or higher), or a proficiency rate of 29.2% in any of the subgroups. There are 183 Focus schools in New Jersey (NJSA 6A:33-2.1a).

Interventions are strategies identified in a School Improvement Plan by Priority schools which fall under seven main categories.

Priority Schools are schools that have been identified as among the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools in the state over the past three years, or any non-Title I school that would otherwise have met the same criteria (NJSA 6A:33-2.1b).
Quality Single Accountability Continuum Act of 2005 (QSAC) is a comprehensive accountability system for consolidating and monitoring various state and federal requirements. Under QSAC, public schools are evaluated in five main areas through the use of a tool known as the District Performance Review (DPR).

Quality School Review (QSR): used by RAC, evaluates a school’s current performance, determines high priority needs, focuses on eight turnaround principles (NJDOE, 2010).

Regional Achievement Centers (RACs): field based turnaround teams put in place by Governor Christie in September of 2012 in order to turnaround New Jersey’s worst performing schools.

School Improvement Plan (SIP): a plan that schools, together with RACs must develop to set goals and target improvement throughout the year.

Takeover is a reform strategy which may include gubernatorial appointment of an executive office or board, state board of education takeover, or mayoral appointment of officials or board to manage the district (Oluwole, 2009).

Title I Schools are schools in which 35% of students are from low-income families. These schools receive federal grants under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which has been reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Turnaround is the significant focus of school reform efforts, especially in persistently low-achieving, urban schools (Peck & Reitzug, 2014).

**Theoretical Perspective**

Education reform and state intervention are extremely controversial topics (Wong, 2000; Wong & Shen, 2001), even though they are quite commonplace in today’s schools. From a
historical perspective, education reform has been looked at through classical organizational
theories including Frederick Taylor’s Scientific Management and Max Weber’s Bureaucratic
Theory. These theories both apply in Governor Christie’s new reform efforts, which demonstrate
a hierarchy of offices, a focus on productivity, and benchmarking (Bolman & Deal, 2011).

Mintzberg, another theorist of the structural or organizational frame, describes the use of
performance control, which “measures outcome objectives and action planning” and “specifies
methods and time frames for decisions and actions” (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 54).
State reform interventions are notorious for imposing time frames for change and the use of the
threat of takeover if goals are not met. From this perspective, schools are organizations expected
to produce results- currently in the form of assessment scores. Teachers are the ones expected to
produce those results, and when the results are not desirable, i.e. low proficiency rates, it is often
the teachers who are blamed.

Many other theories and historical perspectives can be taken into consideration in state
intervention and urban education such as Market Theory, Crisis Theory and Class Theory, which
discuss startling ideas in which the rich and powerful purposefully keep the low-income
populations poor in order to ensure their continued control of society.

This researcher is looking through the lens of Change Theory to help gain insight into
how RAC is attempting to change the education system in primarily low-income, low-
performing schools. Several theorists have devoted much of their studies to change theory,
particularly Michael Fullan (2006) and Kurt Lewin.(1946). Change theory is defined by Weiss as
the “theory of how and why an initiative works” (as cited in Connell & Klem, 2000, p. 94).
Education reform is certainly a change process, or an attempt to change the organization. In the
case of the RAC teams and their reform efforts, the nature of the change they are attempting to bring to the organization is certainly reflected in change theory.

Fullan (2006) says that change theory can be an effective tool in education reform if used properly. Standards-based reform initiatives, such as the one underway in New Jersey’s Priority Schools, “assume that by aligning key components and driving them forward with lots of pressure and support, good things will happen…what is missing is any notion about school or district culture…Standards-based reform does not address changing the setting in which people work” (p. 4).

Change theorists identify several critical steps in the change process (Fullan, 2008; Fullan, 2006; Morrison, 1998). It is important to utilize the change process in order to implement and bring about successful change in an organization. Prior research and available data show the failure to bring about change in low-performing schools or districts and suggest a possible misuse or lack of change theory.

Through interviews, this study will get a deeper look at the change that has been implemented in a Priority School and aims to reflect a true picture of what is occurring in one failing school in New Jersey in order to understand the changes that are occurring in education as a result of these interventions.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations of this study include:

1. The study will be confined to one Priority School in District X, New Jersey.

2. Participants’ responses will be reflections on previous experiences and interactions, which occasionally may differ slightly in hindsight and/or memory.
3. This study will provide for teachers’ perceptions of the RAC team interventions and their influence on school improvement.

4. The study focused on the perceptions of teachers in one building. The perceptions of administration were not included in this study.

   This study is not an attempt to study the history of intervention, but rather a look at the perceptions of those who experience interventions in failing schools.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include:

1. The qualitative data collected through interviews will reflect the nature of memory and perception, which is known to vary over time.

2. Because qualitative research is open to interpretation, readers may reflect on their own prior knowledge or bias when evaluating information.

   The researcher works as a teacher in a low-performing district in New Jersey, and so there may be a potential for bias due to the researcher’s prior knowledge (although limited) of the RAC team. However, the researcher remains neutral about the Regional Achievement Center and their interventions, as she does not work in a Priority or Focus school. Although this is not enough to eradicate the possibility of bias, the researcher firmly believes in remaining neutral and reflecting the true research without injecting bias.

Significance of the Study

   The startling facts surrounding failing schools and the current movement towards state interventions and turnaround efforts make this study extremely important. This research will contribute to the existing research on state interventions of failing public schools as well as
expand the body of knowledge about the effects of interventions on teachers and school life. This study will also shed light on the Regional Achievement Centers and their role in the public school system as an agent of change. This study could certainly be of significance to the New Jersey State Board of Education and the Regional Achievement Centers, which could benefit from the insight that various perspectives provide on their interventions in public schools. This study is also of importance to educators, parents, and taxpayers, who deserve to be informed about the efforts of the State Board of Education to intervene in failing schools and particularly this new reform movement.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted extensive reviews of literature through the Seton Hall Library, the Education Law Center publications, numerous State Department of Education documents, and many other resources such as newspapers, journals, and more. A thorough investigation of this topic revealed little research about the interventions or effectiveness of the Regional Achievement Centers, as there have been no data reports from the RACs or the State Board of Education on their effectiveness at the time of this study.

Although literature and research on the Regional Achievement Centers are somewhat scarce, the researcher found it important to illuminate the RACs by providing background information that was compiled from state websites, reports, newspaper articles, and state documents. In an attempt to provide insight into this new reform method, the researcher studied previous research on failing public schools, state intervention, takeover, and reform. The researcher has examined many topics, including the effects of poverty on student achievement, the effects of state takeover and reform on achievement, and more.

The literature research has been divided into sections including a brief history of state intervention, state reform efforts in New Jersey, the Regional Achievement Centers, a look at the district of study, the effectiveness of state intervention and takeovers in general, and what has been found to work in failing schools.

A Brief History of State Intervention

When public schools fail, many states intervene with what is known as state takeover or turnaround- reform strategies aimed at improving failing school systems (Wong & Shen, 2001). State takeover is a form of education reform designed to promote educational and financial
stability in school districts (Oluwole, 2009). According to Wong & Shen (2001), “takeover strategy has the potential to turn around low performing communities” (p. 3). Moreover, “the idea behind intervening in a failing school is to transform it from failure to success” (Brady, 2003, p. 8).

There are many different forms of intervention and takeover, which include replacement of the Board of Education, State Board of Education takeover, or a mayoral appointment of an official or board to manage a district (Oluwole, 2009). In an extensive study on the implications of the NCLB and failing schools, Brady (2003) categorized approximately twenty types of interventions ranging from mild (identification, planning, professional development, tutoring, and more) to moderate (adding school time, reorganizing, changing principals) to strong (reconstitution, curriculum change, redirection or withholding of funds, and closing of failing schools or districts).

Education reform and state intervention are not new ideas in this country as it has been around for over twenty-five years. The first state takeover in the United States occurred in New Jersey in 1989 (Carr-Lambert 2005; Forster, 1986; Oluwole, 2009) when the State voted to take over the Jersey City School District in a move that many called “unprecedented” (Kimbrough & McElrath, 1990; Bowers 1989; Stanza, 1993, as cited by Carr-Lambert, 2005, p. 2, Rettig, 1992, p.3). Since then, there have been many other state takeovers, including that of Logan County, West Virginia, 1992, Chicago in 1995, both Cleveland and Baltimore in 1997, and more. As of March 2013, twenty-four states have policies for state takeovers, and at least twenty states have taken over local school systems (Symons, 2013; Seder, 2000; Ziebarth, 2002). Generally, districts have been taken over for two main reasons - financial and academic, the latter being the focus of this study.
In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act made a provision for state takeovers that required states receiving Title I funds to implement an accountability system consisting of state achievement standards and assessments. It also stated that districts that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress, AYP, are subject to sanctions including state takeover (Oluwole, 2009).

Under NCLB, the state must make at least one corrective action to address the failure to make AYP, including replacing district personnel relevant to the failure to make AYP, appointing a trustee of receiver through the State Department of Education, or the restructuring or dissolving of a district (as cited in Oluwole, 2009). In addition to the NCLB mandated penalties for failure to meet AYP, two-thirds of state education systems have their own policies that penalize the persistent low-performing schools (Chiang, 2009).

In 2009, then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced a $3.5 billion federal Title I School Improvement Grant, S.I.G., to turnaround the persistently lowest-performing schools (USDOE, as cited in Peck & Reitzug, 2014). To apply, school districts had to show that they were adopting one of four reform strategies, similar to the forms of takeover previously mentioned. Those strategies include the turnaround model (which involves replacing 50% of a school staff and its principal), the restart model (closing and restarting as a charter school), school closure (closing and redistributing students), and the transformational model (replacing the principal and implementing comprehensive reforms) (Peck & Reitzug, 2014).

**The New Jersey Department of Education and Past Reforms**

The Department of Education is a principal department in the executive branch of New Jersey’s government and is responsible for the general supervision and control of all elementary and secondary public education in the state. The State Board of Education serves as the head of the department (Dolan, 1992). The Board has thirteen members that are appointed by the
Governor with advice and consent from the State Senate. These board members are unpaid and serve six-year terms. A Commissioner of Education oversees the board and serves as its secretary and official agent. The board also includes one non-voting student representative. The New Jersey State Board of Education (NJSBOE) currently governs New Jersey’s 2500 public schools serving approximately 1.38 million students. The NJSBOE is responsible for advising on public policies, confirming staff appointments, and adopting administrative codes that set the rules needed to implement state education law (NJSBOE, n.d.)

New Jersey has often been a trailblazer when it comes to education. In 1871, New Jersey enacted a landmark statute that provided for free public schools and a reliable state revenue source that would pay for their maintenance and operation (Mazzei, 2007). The Education Clause of the New Jersey Constitution, inserted in 1875 (Lenihan, 2009) stated that legislature must provide a “thorough and efficient” system of public education (N.J. Const. art.VIII, pt. IV). This notion of a “thorough and efficient” education has been brought up time and time again, and has been the basis of multiple legal proceedings in the state. According to Peter Mazzei (2007), “In New Jersey’s recent history, the ‘thorough and efficient’ clause has been, and continues to be, the source of major education finance litigation, most notably a series of New Jersey Supreme Court decisions: Robinson v. Cahill and Abbott v. Burke.” (p. 1087).

These cases are certainly not the only cases in New Jersey to have an impact on education, but they have received remarkable attention nationwide. Cases such as Hedgepeth-Williams v. Board of Education, Trenton, NJ (1944) helped pave the way to end segregation when it was cited as precedence in the landmark United States Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, KS (1954) which banned school segregation nationwide (Cane, 2009). In the aforementioned Robinson v. Cahill, 1969 case, the courts found
that using tax dollars to fund education denied children in poor districts the “thorough and efficient” education that led to the Public School Education Act of 1975 (PSEA). The PSEA established guidelines and monitoring procedures to ensure efficient education. The Abbott case, which has been revisited time and time again, started in 1981 with *Abbott v. Burke* where the courts found that the PSEA was unconstitutional in the fact that it led to spending disparities (Dolan, 1992). Numerous attempts have been made to remedy the spending disparities among the 590 school districts in the state and even within districts.

As a result of the aforementioned court decisions, then Commissioner Fred Burke decided that all districts needed to be assessed annually on more than three hundred items. In 1984, that assessment was reduced to 51 state standards spread out over ten categories. Those districts that did not meet the standards would be monitored for a period of five years (Dolan, 1992). According to Margaret Dolan (1992), “the history of such interventions in New Jersey was not encouraging…but perhaps the most troubling memory for state officials…was the state’s experience in the state capital city, Trenton” (p. 5). After a number of deficiencies were found in Trenton and the local board refused to institute a remedial plan, a monitor general had been appointed to supervise all activities from 1979-1982. In 1981, the Supreme Court ruled that the commissioner had the right to appoint a full-time supervisor to oversee all operations. By 1986, Commissioner of Education Cooperman stated “efforts were not ultimately successful because the state had to contend with local board of education which did not support state intervention” (Dolan, 1992, p. 7).

Commissioner of Education Cooperman turned to a business model to fix academically bankrupt schools with New Jersey’s Plan to Intervene in Deficient School Districts of 1986
which added a final step in the monitoring policy in which the state could be called in to perform a comprehensive compliance investigation (Dolan, 1992, p. 7).

In 1987, New Jersey passed a law making New Jersey the first state allowed to take control of a local school district. This would mean that the State Board would have authority to order a state-operated school district. The school board would be removed, the chief school administrator would be removed and a state appointed Superintendent would be put in place at the district’s expense. The superintendent would have one year to evaluate all principals and dismiss those who were not efficient. If deficiencies were remedied, local control of the district would be reinstated after five years. The bill for state operation was passed by then Governor Kean and signed into law in December of 1987. In October of 1989, New Jersey took over the Jersey City Public School System, followed by Paterson in 1991, Newark in 1995, and most recently, Camden in 2013 (Symons, 2013).

Schools that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for four consecutive years would be identified for corrective action and under No Child Left Behind would have to make at least one corrective action to address that failure. Schools would be evaluated by the QSAC in five main categories- governance, personnel, financial management, operations, and instruction and programming. Any district meeting less than 50% of quality performance indicators in four or fewer categories must create an improvement plan to address the issues. The state could take partial control of any district which failed to satisfy at least 50% of the performance indicators in four or fewer categories, and if any district failed to satisfy at least 50% of the performance indicators in all five of the categories, the state could take total control over that district (NJDOE, 2011).
New Reform Efforts

The New Jersey Department of Education has engaged in a transformation, aiming to “undergo a fundamental shift from a system of primarily oversight and monitoring to service delivery and support” (NJDOE, 2011, p. 1). Governor Christie led this reform in his hope to “challenge the status quo” and “move public education in New Jersey away from an antiquated, ineffective model that props up failing schools and toward a system that demands accountability and ensures each child receives the quality education they deserve” (NJDOE, 2010, n.p.). The Governor’s Executive Order 58, states that “overly prescriptive rules and regulations inhibit the initiative of teachers, school leaders, and administrators, and dilute accountability for local decision making” (p.1), which implies that new reform efforts will aim to be different than what New Jersey has seen in the past.

This reform is an attempt to improve not only the educational system, which has been plagued with failing districts for years, but to improve the Department of Education’s reputation with schools as well. In New Jersey’s ESEA Flexibility Waiver Request, the Department of Education revealed that in a recent survey given to district superintendents, the DOE found that many “on the ground” saw little value coming from what the D.O.E. was doing when it came to student learning (NJDOE, 2011). The DOE has decided that it will stop playing a traditional role and will transition into a department that is performance-based and a high-quality service provider. The reform comes with many, many changes, as revealed through various press releases through the Department of Education and the ESEA Flexibility Waiver Request.

New Jersey began implementing the aforementioned federal turnaround models in nineteen S.I.G. schools in 2010 and 2011 with the support of a Network Turnaround Officer from the state. The Department reviewed the interventions and practices and used these to form
the basis of the interventions that are now being used by the Regional Achievement Centers (NJDOE, 2012a). In April of 2011, Governor Christie issued Executive Order 58, establishing an Executive Task Force that would be responsible for conducting a review of all education-related statutes and regulations and making recommendations for improvements (NJDOE, 2011).

In a letter from then Education Commissioner Chris Cerf to Chief School Administrators dated July, 2013, Cerf writes that New Jersey was one of the first ten states to receive waivers under NCLB: “In exchange for this waiver, we developed a new school accountability system…We developed seven Regional Achievement Centers to ensure that we have on-the-ground support from expert educators to help schools improve” (p.1). Cerf states that the waiver gives the “majority of New Jersey’s districts greater flexibility while allowing the state to focus its resources towards improving the lowest-performing schools” (Cerf, 2012, p. 1).

In New Jersey’s Waiver Request, Cerf wrote “New Jersey has sought to improve low-performing schools by primarily working through Local Education Authorities (LEA’s). The State has taken over several districts, embedded State monitors in others, and created complex systems for assessing LEA capacity. These tactics alone have not transformed our most persistent underachieving schools” (NJDOE, 2011, p. 16). These Regional Achievement Centers were put in place to oversee the turnaround of the state’s lowest performing schools and to focus on service, support, and targeted intervention in persistently failing schools (NJDOE, 2011).

**The Regional Achievement Centers**

After a thorough search of literature, it is clear that there is little material about the Regional Achievement Centers (herein referred to as the RAC), and what there is comes from the State Department of Education on the state’s website about the RAC teams. The following information from that website and the linked resources provides necessary background
information on the RACs. Seven Regional Achievement Centers were to be created throughout the state of New Jersey, operating in regions numbered one through seven. However, one small region that only had five Priority Schools merged with another. According to the state’s website (www.nj.gov), the field-based RACs are staffed with expert school turnaround teams. The teams are comprised of State Turnaround Coaches, Elementary Literacy Specialists, Secondary Literacy Specialists, Mathematics Specialists, Instructional Specialists, ELL Specialists, Climate and Culture Specialists, Data Specialists, Human Capital Specialists, Intervention/Special Education Specialists, and Project Managers. Each team, or RAC, will be led by an Executive Director and will work with Priority and Focus Schools to implement proven turnaround principles and dramatically improve student performance.

According to the Career Overview section of the RAC website, in order to be a member of the RAC team, one must have a proven record of driving improvements in student learning. After becoming a member of the RAC team, one will be provided world-class training led by national experts during a three-week summer academy as well as monthly professional development sessions.

The RAC teams will focus on the schools themselves and will also work closely with districts in order to help facilitate the process. The RAC operates under the following guiding principles, as found on their website:

- Partnership
- Research Base
- Support
- Accountability
These guiding principles show that the RAC team aims to work with schools and districts, using proven turnaround principles, providing high impact professional development regularly, and using clear goals and data to drive decisions and to hold RAC teams, schools, and districts accountable for results.

The RACs mission statement, available on the state government webpage, reads as follows:

New Jersey’s Regional Achievement Centers, struggling schools, and their districts will partner to set clear goals for student growth, put proven turnaround principles into action, and use data to drive decision-making and accountability. Working together, we will meet our shared goal of closing the achievement gap and preparing all of our students for success in college and career (nj.gov.education/rac/principles).

The RAC approach is to perform a Quality School Review (QSR) to evaluate a school and determine its needs. The QSR evaluates the school based on thirty-seven indicators and uses a rubric that can be found in the Appendix section of this study. These indicators focus on eight research-based turnaround principles, which will be discussed in length later on in this paper. After the QSR, a school is then required to develop a School Improvement Plan along with the RAC and the district in order to address the designated needs with specific targeted actions.

After the SIP has been developed, the RAC will use a School Accountability Management System (SAMS) to provide end of unit assessment systems to support instruction, data analytic tools to gain timely insight to guide instruction, allow teachers to see the learning progress for each of their students based on ELA and Math standards-based curriculum, allow administrators data to collaborate on instructional best practices, and allow the RAC to measure school progress and performance. Priority Schools will be measured and monitored using 6-8
week instructional cycles which will culminate in a formative benchmark assessment that is aligned to the Model Curriculum. RAC teams will also review NJASK and HSPA performance annually.

The Regional Achievement has several guiding principles that (according to its website) it follows in order to affect Priority Schools. These are through partnership, research base, support, and accountability. They aim to turn around low-performing schools through the use of eight turnaround principles that are:

1) School Leadership
2) Climate and Culture
3) Effective Instruction
4) Curriculum, Assessment, and Intervention System
5) Effective Staffing Practices
6) Enabling the use of data
7) Effective use of time
8) Effective family and community engagement
9) Effective use of time

According to the RAC website, these research-based turnaround principles will be a collaborative effort of the RAC, the schools, and the districts.

Priority Schools are required to implement the NJDOE model curriculum in Mathematics and English Language Arts, as well as aligned unit assessments. The RAC team will conduct detailed walkthroughs and reviews every seven weeks to assess progress against each intervention strategy. According to the RAC FAQ webpage, quantitative data in the form of survey results, attendance rates, student discipline data and formative assessment results will be
used along with qualitative data in the form of quality of classroom instruction and school leadership data will be used to track progress (NJDOE, n.d.b).

According to a NJDOE RAC presentation from June of 2012, districts will be required to set aside 30% of their Title I funds in a “Priority and Focus Intervention” reserve. Other Title I funds are available for use in the district for other interventions and technology upgrades to support the Common Core. An education blogger, Laura Waters, says that the RACs could potentially replace our current system of twenty-one county offices that are overseen by twenty-one Executive County Superintendents (Waters 2012).

**Intervention in District X**

New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the U.S., houses 590 school districts. Thirty of the poorest districts in the state serve roughly one-quarter of the student population (Dolan, 1992). These poorest districts, including Newark, Camden, Jersey City, and Trenton, also happen to have a high number of low-performing schools. District X ranks in the bottom 25 of 702 cities for per capita income, with the average income being $14,621, which is less than three other large, poor, urban, predominantly non-white districts that have been taken over by the state.

District X is approximately eight square miles and has a population of approximately 85,000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Of these 85,000, approximately 13,000 are students enrolled in the public school system, which has a District Factor Group rank of A, the lowest of eight groups. In addition, District X has twenty-three schools, of which eleven have been designated as Priority Schools and seven as Focus Schools. Priority Schools are schools that have been identified as the lowest five percent in the state over the past three years, as determined by state assessments and graduation rates. (NJDOE, n.d.c.).
Effectiveness of State Intervention

Does state takeover and/or intervention work? Ziebarth (2004) contends that there is a limited, but growing amount of research on the effects of state takeovers, but they “seem to be yielding more gains in central office than in classroom instruction” (p. 4). A 2004 study shows that accountability systems that are based on standards may be able to redirect fiscal, human, and material resources more effectively and state that systemic reform also results in higher student achievement (Fusarelli, 2004, p. 76). Chiang found that mandates raised school spending on things such as instructional technology, curricular development, and teacher training (2009). Seder (2000) found that “state interventions have proven to be an effective strategy for…fiscal management…and the elimination of corruption…however (they) have not been successful with student academic results” (p. 26).

Paul Tractenberg, who has studied takeover efforts as a law professor and founder of Education Law Center stated that interventions work “at best, to a limited degree” (Symons, 2013, p. 1). Kenneth Wong and Francis Shen (2001), who have conducted numerous studies on state takeover, seeking to answer the fundamental questions “do school district takeovers ever work?” and “how effective can state takeover be as a strategy to promote higher quality teaching and learning?” seem to agree with Tractenberg. Many researchers find that there is a lack of evidence and some have found that “no particular intervention strategy has a success rate higher than 50%” (Finn, 2003, p. iv).

As Dolan (1992) pointed out in her study of the Jersey City State Takeover, there is very little evidence that Jersey City received valuable assistance from the Department of Education, who claims that the state had very little time to meet with the schools and did not have enough power to make change. Speaking on the state control of Jersey City, David Sciarra of Education
Law Center stated “what’s so tragic is that...in ten years, we know very little” (as cited in Wong & Shen, 2001).

The New Jersey Board of Education has had control of Jersey City for nearly 25 years now, 23 years in Paterson, and 19 years in Newark. As reported in USA Today, State Senator Ronald Rice said of state takeover “it’s no longer takeover. It’s occupation of those cities under the auspices of trying to educate the kids” (as cited in Symons, 2013).

Symons reports that it is widely agreed that after years of state control in several districts, academic performance has not improved (2013). Wong & Shen (2001) state that “takeover initiatives tend to hold schools and students accountable to system-wide standards…and takeover tends to use non-traditional leaders to change existing organizational patterns and cultures, which many educators see as an “infringement of their professional autonomy” (p. 3). There are many who argue against the effectiveness of state takeover. In a 2001 policy brief for the Education Commission of the States, Todd Ziebarth wrote, “there is a scarcity of research on the effects of takeovers” (as cited in Wong & Shen, 2001). Seder (2000) stated that state takeover does little to fundamentally change a system as student learning is multi-faceted and that deficiencies are not easily fixed (p. 22).

Standards-based reform, like what New Jersey has seen in most of its takeover efforts, is generally a test-driven reform. Much of the research about state takeover and state led reform points to this as a problem with this type of reform. Wong and Shen wrote, “too often, takeover reform pays primary attention to standardized test achievement as the most important measure of school improvement” (2001, p. 3). Lucy Steiner of the Center for Comprehensive School Reform argues that state officials who are responsible for turning around low performing schools seem to place more value on research and data-based decision making than they have in the past.
(2005). Jack Jennings, the President and C.E.O. of the Center of Education Policy stated that a “major problem with standards-based reform is that it has become a test-driven reform” (2012, p.5)

Macedo (2000) maintains that narrow focused measurable performance outcomes are inadequate as they “ignore the primary goals of education- the development of civically minded, democratic citizens” (as cited in Fusarelli, 2004, p. 80). Ziebarth (2002) found that using narrow learning measures does not get to the root of social problems and is therefore ineffective, producing “mixed results at best”(p.5) Others feel that interventions (such as the ones in place due to NCLB) decrease a teacher’s flexibility, limit the creativity of both teachers and students and leave little time for the development of critical thinking skills and even fear the demoralization of teachers and school administrators (Fusarelli, 2004, p. 79).

Many argue that this narrowing of the curriculum and focus on test achievement leads to teaching to the test (Fuhrman, 1999; Ladd,1996; O’Day, 2002; Thomas, 2013). Steiner wrote that school employees respond to these new requirements in ways that the law did not intend (2005). In a 2002 study of low-performing schools in Chicago, O’Day found that many schools responded to the threat of sanctions not by focusing on student learning, but by teaching test-taking skills (Steiner, 2005). In some scenarios, such as in Atlanta, this has even led to teachers falsifying test results. Jennings (2012) reported that:

The accountability provisions in particular have created a culture in which teachers actions are motivated by the need to meet annual state targets for the percentage of their students that must score proficient on state tests…In most egregious cases…this has led to teachers falsifying test results. In other cases, teachers have set aside their regular
lessons during the weeks before the state test in order to spend time preparing students on material that is likely to be tested (p.6).

Jacob and Levitt (2003) also reported that schools under pressure have been observed to manipulate testing conditions through cheating (as cited in Chiang, 2009, p. 3). Teachers are often at the frontline of dealing with these mandates, and cheating is just one response. Ingersoll (2003) found that too much control resulted in “factory-like” conditions, denying teachers autonomy, and de-professionalized and demotivated teachers (p. 191).

In Essential Ideas For the Reform Of American Schools, researchers DiPaola and Hoy (2007) found that several factors influenced the success of a school: humanistic pupil control, organizational climate, organizational health, organizational trust, and the collective efficacy of a faculty. They reported that organizational climate, based on collective perceptions affected teacher actions. Likewise, organizational trust- the “faculty’s willingness to be vulnerable to others based on confidence that the other party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (DiPaola & Hoy, 2007, p. xix) is very important as well.

Little research has been done on the impact of state mandates and interventions on teacher practices or teacher efficacy, however there is plenty of research that points to the importance of efficacy. Teacher efficacy, or a teacher’s confidence in his or her ability to promote student learning (DiPaola & Hoy, 2007) is certainly of interest when state mandates and other interventions land in their classrooms. DiPaola and Hoy (2007) view the school’s setting as having a potentially powerful impact on a teacher’s sense of efficacy so it is logical that changes in the school setting due to state interventions have had an impact on teachers and perhaps how they feel about their effectiveness.
There are many factors that can impact teacher efficacy and they include “feedback that highlights effective teaching behaviors while providing constructive criticism and providing suggestions for ways to improve” (Protheroe, 2008, p. 43). Teachers’ beliefs about their effectiveness are extremely important to the success of their students. In fact Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith (2002) found that collective efficacy “was more important in explaining school achievement than socioeconomic status” (as cited in DiPaola and Hoy, 2007, p. xix). Teachers with high efficacy are more successful in their teaching, and a faculty with a collective efficacy of their school is a “potent force” for student achievement (p. xx).

**What Works In Failing Schools?**

Numerous studies have been conducted in order to find out just what does work in turning around failing schools. Two leading researchers on this topic, Samuel Casey Carter and Ron Edmonds, have identified several components of successful high-poverty schools (Brady, 2003). In 1979, Edmonds identified such characteristics as strong leadership, high expectations, a clear focus on academics, and an orderly and quiet atmosphere as being important for an effective school (Brady, 2003). Nearly twenty years later, Carter (2000) studied twenty-one urban schools and found that successful urban schools had principals who were “freely able to use their resources to run the school as they saw fit, principals who established a culture of achievement, and employed master teachers who brought out the best in the faculty” (as cited in Brady, 2003, p.8).

Success rates have been exceedingly low, with a success rate for some intervention types of around 50%, while most interventions are much less productive (Brady, 2003). Seder (as cited in Wong & Shen, 2001) stated that only one comprehensive takeover has been completed- Logan County, West Virginia. He credited the success due to the “use of collaboration and building
institutional capacity” (Seder, 2000, p. 11). A study on state takeover by Carr-Lambert points out that the Logan County Public School Takeover is one of three sustained, successful school takeovers that have been documented in the nation (2005).

Carr-Lambert reported that in many takeover cases, the school districts returned to existing conditions in the absence of the takeover authority and were unable to sustain the success (2005). This was reflected in a 2000 study by Koppuesi and Walker that suggested the lack of success in the Jersey City takeover was due to an inability to sustain that success (as cited in Carr-Lambert, 2005). Steiner pointed out that there has been animosity from communities towards the state (2005), an idea that is reflected by Wong & Shen (2001), who describe a controversial relationship between city or state and the schools themselves. Steiner has described this resistance as the most daunting aspect of state takeovers (2005).

Summary

Chapter II provides a thorough review of the various research and literature surrounding the topic of education reform including takeovers and interventions and relates it to the interventions that have been underway in New Jersey. Although there has been much research on the topic of interventions, researchers agree that there is not enough evidence to support its effectiveness and there is clearly much more research that needs to be done on the subject as more and more states invest millions of dollars into the turnaround and reform of their failing schools.
Chapter III
Methodology and Procedure

Research Design

Qualitative research has been chosen for this study for several reasons. One theoretical assumption of this study is that process and meaning are crucial in understanding human behavior and that it is important to collect descriptive data (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). According to Creswell (2003) a study warrants a qualitative approach if the concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it (p. 23). In addition, Morse (1991) argues that qualitative research is “exploratory” and “is useful…(and) may be needed because the topic is new, the topic has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people, or existing theories do not apply with the particular sample or group under study” (as cited in Cresswell, 2003). This study is being conducted on a relatively new topic, the “new” reform efforts of the Regional Achievement Centers that began in 2012. These interventions have not been addressed in School District X, which make this an appropriate topic to be explored qualitatively.

This study takes a single case study design and will look at one Priority School in one district in New Jersey that will serve as the unit of study. The researcher has chosen a case study approach based on the nature of the research problem that seeks to understand the experiences of teachers who deal directly with the interventions of the Regional Achievement Center, a new reform effort in the state of New Jersey. A case study has been defined as a “detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007, p. 59). The case study approach will include semi-structured interviews. Biklen & Bogden (2007) state that when studying individuals who share
traits, but do not necessarily form groups (such as teachers), interviews are valid methods of study.

This study takes an approach that is based on the constructivist paradigm explained by Cresswell as the “multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern” (2003, p.18). The researcher will interview a minimum of eight and a maximum of ten participants who have been selected due to their working in a Priority School and thus their dealings with the Regional Achievement Center. These participants have been selected using purposeful sampling. According to Patton, “for qualitative research, most sampling is neither probability nor convenience sampling but falls into a third category: purposeful sampling” (as cited in Maxwell, 2012, p. 97). “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 97). The participants were solicited through a letter of solicitation and out of those who responded, participants were chosen based on the subject they taught (language arts and math having been selected since they are tested subjects) and based on the length of time they had taught in the school (participants with at least three years in the school were chosen due to their employment during the RAC interventions).

One-on-one interviews will be included as they are particularly useful for getting the story behind participants’ experiences and allow the interviewer to pursue in-depth information around the topic (McNamara, 1999). The researcher will conduct one to two interviews per participant to ensure that all interview questions are answered thoroughly and to provide ample
time for follow up questions as the researcher sees fit. The interviews will be conducted using a semi-structured interview approach as to allow for a more fluid narrative to develop based on individuals’ experiences. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A and have been reviewed by a jury of experts.

According to Maxwell (2005), the activities of qualitative research are on-going throughout the study, occurring simultaneously, and should continue to evolve throughout the study as data are collected and analyzed. Maxwell stated “design in qualitative research is an ongoing process that…does not begin from a predetermined starting point or proceed through a fixed sequence of steps, but involves interconnection and interaction among the different design components” (p. 3). Merriam, in her extensive description of qualitative design stated that “the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (2014, p.18). For this reason, the researcher reserves the right to alter the design section of this study as she sees fit throughout the study.

**Site and Participants for the Study**

This study will be conducted in District X, New Jersey, a chronically low-performing district that currently has eleven schools designated as Priority Schools. Although there have been studies done on the state takeover of cities in New Jersey, after extensive research the researcher could find little on the new reform efforts of Governor Christie in any of these districts, and nothing on the influence of the RACs in District X, nor any research regarding teachers’ perceptions of their interventions. District X is a large, comprehensive school district within the state that educates roughly 12,000 students and is representative of many of the states lowest performing districts. The researcher selected District X due to her ease of access to the
schools and her expectation that these schools will yield valuable data due to the interactions and interventions that have been in place by the RAC since 2012.

One of the districts’ eleven Priority Schools served as the site for this study, as it is the Priority Schools in which the Regional Achievement Center spends a majority of its time - 90% of it, according to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2012d). This school, represented herein as School A, has been chosen as a typical representative of a low-income, low-achievement Priority School in New Jersey.

The unit of study, School A, is one of many Priority Schools in District X. It has roughly 900 students and is reflective of many of the failing schools in the state in that it has low achievement as has been defined in its’ state report card as a school that “significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state…and is below the 19.9th percentile in the state” (NJDOE, 2014). The student population is 65% Hispanic, 29% Black, 4% White, and 2% Asian. Ninety three percent of the population is economically disadvantaged receiving free/reduced lunch, and 10% are classified as Limited English Proficient. The school employs approximately 80 teachers, one principal, two vice principals, one climate and culture leader, one literacy leader, one math leader, one data interventionist and many others, including paraprofessionals, custodians, and more.

The researcher solicited participants for this study by sending a school-wide email after receiving permission from the Principal and the Board of Education and used the Letter of Solicitation that can be found in the Appendix at the end of this study. The Letter of Solicitation directed the interested participant to respond to the researcher, the researcher then used purposeful sampling in order to select participants for this study. Participants of the study were limited to include no fewer than eight and no more than ten teachers, who are or have been
employed in the Priority School for three years or more. Since the RAC team focuses mostly on the tested core subjects of Math and English Language Arts, participants chosen were to be teachers of these two subjects. Teachers will be represented through the use of pseudonyms and it will be noted whether they are ELA or Math. Participants have been selected for this study due to their employment in the Priority School, their length of employment in the school, and their willingness to participate in this study. In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms have been assigned (See Table 1).

**Table 1**

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Pseudonym</th>
<th>Length of years employed in the school</th>
<th>Subject Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A: Alice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B: Betty</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C: Chase</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D: David</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher W: Walter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher X: Xavier</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Y: Yulissa</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Z: Zena</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alice is a Language Arts teacher who has been teaching in the school for four years. She has been in one other district previously and taught there as an aide for one year after she graduated from college with a major in education. She teaches eighth grade, teaches three blocks
of language arts per day, and has a prep and a lunch built into her schedule, as do all teachers in this Priority School.

Betty is a long-time Language Arts teacher and has been teaching in the school for sixteen years. She teaches three seventh grade classes, each of which has approximately 25 students. She has been a teacher for twenty-one years and, prior to working in the Priority School, she taught Language Arts in another district for five years.

Chase has been teaching Language Arts in the district for ten years and taught previously in another failing district in the state. He teaches seventh and eighth graders who range from severely below grade reading level (3rd and 4th grade levels) to above reading level (9th grade reading level). He was voted teacher of the year in the school year 2014-2015 and is finishing his doctorate in educational leadership.

David has been a teacher in this school for the past 25 years and has taught Social Studies and Language Arts. He has taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade over the years and is currently teaching eighth grade language arts, which he has been doing for the past five years. David became a teacher because he wanted to reach his students and help make a difference in their lives the way his teachers had made a difference in his.

Walter is a teacher who has been in the district for fifteen years but in the Priority School for five years. He teaches grade seven and eight mathematics. He is a member of the School Leadership Team, works for the after-school program, and teacher summer school in the school as well.

Xavier has been a math teacher in the same building for the past ten years and before that he taught in a few other schools in the district. He teaches math to seventh graders, coaches the school basketball team, and runs an after-school chess club in the off-season.
Yulissa is a math teacher at the Priority School and has spent her twenty-four yearlong career working in the same school teaching sixth graders math. She is finishing up her career and will be retiring in two years. She teaches three blocks per day and sees the same 75 students every day. She has a preparation period and a lunch each day which is spent either planning or in meetings with her department.

Another math teacher in the Priority School is Zena, a middle aged woman who has been teaching in the district for nine years, all of them at the same school. Zena teaches seventh grade. She currently works with an inclusion teacher who assists her with students who have an I.E.P. (Individualized Education Plan).

**Data Collection**

After appealing to the Assistant Superintendent and following all district guidelines for research, I was granted approval to conduct my interviews in the district once I received approval from the Seton Hall Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval for this study was then requested from the IRB in September, 2015 and was granted in December, 2015. Interviews began in December, 2015 and the researcher subsequently began the process of transcribing, coding, and analyzing data during that time. The interview participants of this study were solicited by way of the Letter of Solicitation and were then selected, as described earlier, by means of purposeful sampling for their length of employment and subject area taught. The researcher then met with participants, explained the nature and scope of the study, and explained to all subjects that participation was voluntary and that there would be no compensation. All participants signed and were given copies of the informed consent form prior to being interviewed.
The data collected for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with teachers who worked in one of the eleven designated Priority Schools in District X, New Jersey. These teachers worked with the Regional Achievement Center in some context during the school years 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 at the time of this study. Interviews were conducted in person, in a natural setting— the participants’ classrooms. Following Patton’s guidelines (as cited in Merriam, 2009) the researcher developed interview questions aimed at understanding teachers’ feelings, experiences and opinions of the phenomenon they have been undergoing in the Priority School. Prior to the interviews taking place, in an effort to ensure validity, the interview questions had been submitted to a jury of experts and their recommendations had been considered and are represented in the final set of interview questions.

These interviews varied in length due to the nature of qualitative research but lasted between thirty and sixty minutes each and took place throughout the school year in classrooms. Interviews would follow a semi-structured format so as to allow the participant enough flexibility and to “offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview” (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007, p. 104). The researcher was to interview all participants between one to two times to ensure that adequate time is allotted for each interview question and follow-up questions as needed.

All interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy and in order to provide a true account of what has been said. Various documents including transcripts, field notes, and researcher memos were also reviewed for this study.
Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2014), “data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read- it is the process of making meaning” (p. 176). Data was analyzed in an interpretive manner and grouped according to themes and patterns that reveal themselves throughout the course of the study. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes and patterns. The researcher transcribed each interview as to gain a deeper understanding of the data herself. “Rather than hiring someone, transcribing your own interviews is another means of generating insights and hunches about what is going on in your data” (Merriam, 2014, p. 200).

Field notes were kept and thoroughly analyzed. Each piece of information was reviewed and examined using a multistage process of organizing, categorizing, analyzing, and writing about the data (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2013, p. 471). The researcher worked carefully to use helpful qualitative data analysis tools such as a concept maps and coding, which are useful in determining consistencies and inconsistencies that may exist between the participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2013, p. 472). This open coding protocol evolved as interviews were held and reviewed for commonalities.. The researchers’ analysis procedure was comprised of open coding as well as analytical coding, which Richards describes as “coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (as cited in Merriam, 2014, p. 206).

Table 2

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Establishing Credibility, Validity, and Trustworthiness

In order to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the data in this study, the researcher respected and responded to established criteria when conducting the study. Gay, Mills, & Airasian 2012, as cited in Dey, 1993), who identified six questions to help researchers check their data, which include determining whether bias played a role in reports, if observations could be corroborated, and whether motivations may influence a report (as cited in Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2013). By continuing to reflect on these questions, the researcher aimed to establish credibility for this study.
Validity, according to Maxwell, “is a goal, rather than a product: it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted” (as cited in Merriam, 2014, p. 214). In an effort to maintain validity, the researcher also plans to keep field notes during interviews, as well as audio recordings in order to capture “the meaning and context of the interview more completely” (Biklan & Bogdan, 2007, p.119). The researcher will transcribe audio recordings in order to ensure their accuracy.

The researcher triangulated the data by listening to recordings, transcribing and coding interviews, as well as reviewing original artifacts such as state documents, researcher memos, and more. “Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods to study the program. If the conclusions from each of the methods are the same, then validity is established” (Guion, Diehl, & MacDonald, 2011, p. 1).

As the researcher developed theories and interpretations of the data, she used member checks in order to ensure external validity, seeking feedback and clarification from participants (Merriam, 2014).

**Jury of Experts**

In an effort to ensure the validity of the interview instrument, the researcher consulted with a jury of experts who read and offered advice on the interview protocol. The jury of experts included the superintendent of a large, urban district in New Jersey, a principal of a Priority School in New Jersey, a teacher in a Priority School in New Jersey, and a college professor of English. With the exception of the English professor, each was selected with regards to their knowledge of the Regional Achievement Center so as to assure their understanding of the questions and their knowledge of the topic to ensure that all pertinent questions were included. There were a few additions to the interview protocol, such as the addition of two questions...
relating to personal accounts and experiences when dealing with the RAC teams. Slight wording changes were made in accordance with suggestions made by the jury of experts, for example “or interactions” was added to question #1g.

**Research Permission and Ethical Concerns**

In order to gain access to the Priority School and to conduct research in the form of interviews, the researcher requested permission from the Board of Education pursuant to the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board. In an effort to maintain credibility and to ensure ethical practices, the researcher obtained letters of consent from all participants. The initial letter asking for permission to conduct research as well as the letter of consent can be found in the appendix of this dissertation. The researcher has provided confidentiality to all participants, as confidentiality is important for protecting research informants from stress, embarrassment, or unwanted publicity as well as for protecting participants should they reveal something that could potentially be used against them by others (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). All information has been stored privately on a password protected flash drive that is only accessible by the researcher.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2014). As Creswell (2003) states, “the researcher’s intent…is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 6). Crotty identified several aspects of qualitative research:

- Human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world they are interpreting; therefore qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can express their views. Another assumption is that humans...
engage with their world based on their historical and social perspective, thus qualitative researchers seek to understand the context… through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researchers’ own experiences and backgrounds and that the process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected (Crotty, 1998, as cited in Cresswell, 2003, p.9).

In addition, Merriam argued “all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret the meanings”(Merriam, 2014, p. 25). It was this researcher’s intent to provide a thorough and meaningful account of what teachers experience in a Priority School in New Jersey under RAC interventions. All attempts have been made by the researcher to protect and maintain accurate documents, to store documents using password protected flash drives, and to examine interviews thoroughly and purposely for the sake of providing a meaningful account.

Summary

Chapter III identifies the methodology of this study and provides a detailed description of the procedures and methods used in this study, which includes the use of semi-structured interviews held in teachers’ classrooms in order to gain a deep understanding of their thoughts and perceptions regarding the turnaround efforts of the Regional Achievement Center in one Priority School in New Jersey.
Chapter IV
Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to take an inside look at a new intervention model and its effects in one Priority School in New Jersey as seen through a teacher’s eyes. The intervention model, by means of the newly formed Regional Achievement Centers, aims to improve the seventy-five Priority Schools and over one hundred and fifty Focus Schools in the state. The Regional Achievement Center certainly has an impact on schools throughout the state- but how do teachers perceive these interventions? It is important to understand how teachers experience these interventions in order to truly understand just what is going on in our failing schools.

The findings of the interviews I conducted are presented here in this chapter, in a narrative format, and are an attempt to answer the overarching research question: How do RAC interventions influence school life in Priority Schools in District X, New Jersey? The following questions are sub-questions and were researched in order to develop a full understanding of the research problem: What is the extent and scope of RAC interventions in the Priority School? How do the RAC interventions influence classroom practice in the Priority School? What are teachers’ perceptions of the RAC interventions influence on student achievement in the Priority School?

This chapter is organized according to the major themes that emerged from the coding process of the interviews and are as follows:

- The extent and the scope of the RAC interventions in the Priority School
- Role of the RAC team
- Frequency of the Visits
- Description of Visits
  - Classroom practices: How classroom practices have been influenced
    - Mandates
    - Interventions
    - Assessments
  - Teacher feelings and perceptions regarding R.A.C. interventions
    - Feelings about the visits
    - Lack of Communication
    - Concerns
    - Negative/Positive Interactions

These themes are explored as they provide an important perspective on the interventions and influence inflicted on a Priority School in New Jersey.

**The Extent and Scope of RAC Interventions in a Priority School**

**Role**

In order to get an idea of just how teachers perceive the RAC, teachers were asked what the role of the RAC team was in their building. Responses varied from words such as “ineffective” (David), “aggressive” (Betty), and “a nuisance” (Xavier), to “this year, helpful” but in other years “complaining, you’re not doing something right” (Alice). Walter described the role of RAC as “defined by them” and added that they “are supposed to help.” Chase offered a description of the RAC team when he stated that the “RAC team is an implementation team from the state that is a team of supposed specialists who are here to, uh, help the school supposedly get out of priority status and move from a failing school and raise our test scores. I think the role is supposed to be helpful, it’s supposed to be to get us out of priority school status.” Many teachers
expressed something similar in their interview about the RAC team being “here to help,” “with good intentions” (Betty) while others expressed concern as to their real reason for being there such as “they’re supposed to be here to help and support us but really what they do is just tell us the way that they think it should be done, so, their role is to help us but it’s not happening” (Zena). These concerns about the RAC team came up frequently throughout the interviews and are reported more in detail in the section titled “Teacher Feelings.”

**Frequency**

Analysis of teacher interviews reveals that teachers view the RAC interventions very differently within a school. When questioned about the extent of their contact with the RAC team, teachers revealed that there were very different experiences within the school as to when and how often they came into contact with the RAC. Teachers responded that they have contact with the RAC team once or twice a week, twice a week, once a month, twice a month, all the time, and hardly ever. According to the teachers, the frequency of the RAC visits in the school has changed over the course of the past three years, and has always been more prevalent in Language Arts.

Alice reports that “the first year that the RAC was here at this school I felt like we saw them at least once a week. Last year I feel as if we saw them a lot less, I feel as if we had no contact with them really. This year RAC is in the building, I see them probably once every other week but not necessarily in my classroom, whereas in the first year they were in my room often. This year I see them more in meetings.”

Chase, when asked about the frequency of his interaction with the RAC team responded, “In the first year they were here we had a few professional developments with them, if you would even call them professional developments, then the second year they started doing
walkthroughs whenever they felt like it, about every other week. This year we have a head literacy person and she comes to most of our meetings so I guess once a week at least, but they come into the classroom less this year.’’

Betty felt as if she only sees them “when they come in to watch a class session and do their walkthroughs” but then states that they have a supervisor for Language Arts that represents the RAC team and that she sees this person two to three times a week at meetings. She said that in previous years she saw them every two months when they came into her classroom.

Math teachers report a different trend — one of an increased intervention in which they see RAC much more frequently this year than in other years. Yulissa who stated that she saw the RAC much more in the beginning of this school year, noted that “I don’t think we’ve ever had interventions in math from anyone. Usually the people who come in from the RAC are not math people. I have never felt the interventions before, I feel this is probably the strongest year for that, at least in math.” Zena supported those sentiments when she replied that “I never had an issue with RAC until this year” and that she was seeing RAC a “couple times a week in the beginning of the year but she’s (the math RAC representative) kind of teetered out a little bit, so maybe once a month.” Walter shared the same information that this year the math specialist was around frequently in the beginning of the year and then “just stopped coming.”

**Visits: What the RAC team visits are like**

Although there is some discrepancy as to how often the teachers felt that the RAC was in their building, there seems to be more agreement in what the RAC visits are like when they do come into the building. All of the teachers spoke about what is known as a “walkthrough” in which one or more members of the RAC team, along with others such as administration or math and literacy coaches walk into the classrooms to conduct observations. These walkthroughs are
typically unannounced and can vary in length. One teacher, David, described the walkthroughs in detail:

They are usually coming into the classroom with the principal to observe what is going on, looking for non-negotiables and objectives, and our room, the usual stuff. How the room is set up, what you are doing. They walk through at any given moment, just go off and look around. They’ll ask students what are they learning about and what are they doing. Show me. On occasion, they’ll ask to see a portfolio or a data binder or ask to see where your lesson plan is.

According to five of the teachers interviewed, once or twice a year the RAC team conducts more thorough reviews in which they walk through and using a checklist they evaluate the school according to what they find in the classrooms. These visits are scheduled, and teachers are notified ahead of time as to which classrooms will be visited. “We’re informed of when they are coming, we are pretty much told and we actually know who they are coming to see. It’s planned” (Yulissa). Betty referred to this review as a “dog and pony show” and Chase explained that:

We had some scheduled checkups, maybe a QSAC, and you knew which room they were going to and you were given a big checklist to make sure you had this and make sure you had that. I guess the administration selected maybe the twelve best teachers. You were told about a week ahead of time to give you time to plan a lesson, make sure your room was up to par, that kind of stuff.

Walter described these “big observations” as “the day of the walkthroughs” and reported:

Four or five people in suits with clipboards come and don’t introduce themselves or say hello. They just walk around and look at everything and pick everything up, and pick
some random kid and ask him the objective for the day. Show me what you’re learning and what you’re doing, and they walk out.

Besides the walkthroughs and the more thorough reviews, the RAC also reportedly works with the administration, attends department meetings, and more. Despite these activities, many teachers are not quite clear as to the extent of what the RAC mandates or exactly what interventions are coming from the RAC, as discussed in the section below.

**Classroom Practices**

**Mandates and Interventions**

There were many variances in response to the questions about RAC mandates and interventions. Overall, teachers were not clear as to the extent of what the RAC team was actually doing in their school. When teachers were asked “What interventions have there been in your school as a result of the RAC team?” responses were varied. One teacher responded, “Um, I guess different approaches to learning tactics, environment to the classroom” (Betty) and another teacher replied (Alice): “What interventions have their been. Have there been any?” and then thought of some- the use of benchmark assessments, including checks for understanding, although she noted that she “wasn’t sure” if that would be considered an intervention. Xavier responded “the administration tells us something different every week. I don’t know if you would call them mandates.” Yulissa, in her response, stated, “We have had our curriculum changed quite substantially. It has now been completely changed to what the RAC math representative wanted it to be...the order we are teaching things and the way we are teaching math concepts.” Walter, Xavier, and Zena repeated the same sentiment- large changes to the curriculum, reordering of the curriculum, and new teaching methods.
Zena spoke of the interventions that have taken place this year in a much more negative light. “In the beginning of the school year we were told we were using the RAC teams new style of teaching math, and she revised the whole model curriculum and rearranged all the units...we got an initiative today saying that we’re not using her revised curriculum anymore so we’re a little bit confused as to what we are supposed to be doing.” Walter concurred that the order had been changed then changed back and that teachers were left “in wonderment.” Other teachers described interventions including organizing students into small groups, using fewer worksheets, writing three part objectives on the board, and giving formative assessments.

The biggest intervention teachers reported, however, is what the RAC team has done with scheduling as a result of a problem they witnessed in their first visit to the school this year. Nearly all of the teachers interviewed discussed the recent addition of a fourth lunch due to overcrowding in the cafeteria as it was deemed “unsafe” by the RAC team. This creation of a fourth lunch, though chaotic and disruptive at first, “I wish they had done it in September, I believe it was recommended but it wasn’t implemented, and then that caused a bit of chaos...it just made the schedule crazy” is a change the has been seen by teachers to be “huge” (Yulissa) and “something positive that came out of the RAC this year” “making it safer for students in the cafeteria” (Alice).

When asked about what mandates have been handed down from the RAC, teachers relayed to me over the course of the interviews that mandates included changing how they taught, what they taught, and when they taught it. David replied “they wanted you to teach a certain way at a certain time...it was almost like we want you to do this type of writing within this time frame. It’s like a revised curriculum sort of thing.” Other teachers had similar ideas of
the mandates. According to Chase, “You’re basically told what to teach, when to teach following the model curriculum, when to test, how to test.”

**Assessments**

All of the teachers who were interviewed spoke about benchmark assessments from the state that are to be given every five to six weeks, at the end of every unit. Feelings about this assessment will be presented in the section titled “Teacher Feelings.” Benchmark assessments are given on the computer and test the skills that were supposed to have been taught in the previous unit in accordance with the New Jersey Model Curriculum. Chase: “We gotta give tests on the computer through a program called edconnect where the students have to type their answers, half of them don’t even know how to type, they don’t get the practice on the computer.”

The Language Arts test, according to Alice, is given “about five weeks after the unit starts. It’s multiple choice now, in years past it has been open ended and multiple choice. They are to answer a question about a story that they have read or about a text that they have read and then they need to find evidence to support that text.” David mentioned that the benchmarks were “stringent to looking at the data to see how the kids are doing in a particular skill.” In math, the lead RAC person created her own assessment for the school as opposed to the previously used assessment from the state model curriculum website. The assessment is “a two day ordeal, because part of the test is on the computer...and then we have the written portion, it’s a one or two question written test that takes about half a period” (Yulissa).
Teachers’ Feelings and Perceptions About the Interventions

RAC Presence/Visits/Walkthroughs

It is clear from the interviews that teachers view the RAC presence in many different ways. A few of the respondents were hopeful that the RAC team arrived with good intentions. Yulissa talked about the RAC visits saying that “she comes once or twice a month, she spends some times going over things...I’m sure that they would love to pull us up from being a priority school but I’m not sure.”

From separate teacher accounts, it is clear that not all teachers feel that the RAC is really there to help, though. Alice stated that in their first year in the building, the RAC adopted more of a scare approach, “trying to scare us into believing or doing what they said.” She continued, “I think they were trying to bully us into whatever it is they were trying to accomplish” and then added “I think they were willing to make up information that they believe they saw but they didn’t.” Alice continued to recount her story of a time she thinks they made up information:

We were being given a presentation. It was all the teachers in my subject area, watching a PowerPoint and in it the said that zero percent of teacher had rules and procedures down, and this was after a lot of negative slides… I felt as if they were trying to bring us down, trying to tell us how terrible and awful we were, they had nothing nice to say. The first year they were here they made us feel really terrible. I felt as if I was never going to be able to teach, that I was never going to be good enough.

Alice admitted, however, that this year is different and that the RAC “became more helpful” after sending a new head person this year who “has come in, shown us different things, and is more willing to be open and honest and talk with us.”

Betty described the intervention as aggressive and said that:
I know it’s mandated and with good intention, but a little overwhelming at times...I think that everything that has been put in front of us has only been put there for a positive reason. Everyone wants to make something that is not right or good to be in the right place as far as with scores. I mean, they have great intentions, and I’m sure that they have read or written many books but it’s not always what they put forth that is going to make it right. You have to live here, you have to breathe here, you have to know the environment, you have to know the students and where they are coming from.

When discussing how her experience has made her feel, Betty expressed that it intimidated her, that the RAC team seemed to have an “upper air about them.” She described how she feels “a little bit less confident when I feel like I’m under the supervision when they are physically in my room. I don’t feel comfortable with it,” and that she has heard of others having very negative experiences with the RAC visits. “There have been colleagues of mine where the RAC team has gone into their classroom and spoken to them a little bit aggressively, in front of their students, where I felt...that matters should have been taken care of privately.”

Chase described a similar experience where a co-worker had come to him crying over being embarrassed after being chastised in front of her class, although he describes quite a different experience that he had with the RAC team himself. After one of their visits to his classroom, a lady came up to him after his class was over and told him that she loved his atmosphere and the way he related to the students. He described this as the first time he ever heard anything from them face to face and says he felt surprised. Still when asked how he would describe his experience with the RAC interventions he described them as a “thorn in my side— you know it’s there and it’s not going away.” When he spoke of the walkthroughs he said that it
is unfortunate because the RAC is not getting a true picture of what the school looks like” which was something that came up in three other teachers’ sentiments.

Other teachers did mention positive interactions they had with RAC. For example, Yulissa mentioned a time when the Math RAC representative gave her kudos after she observed her teaching lessons the way she wanted, counting around the room, and told her “you’re off to a good start, good job, keep it up.” Alice mentioned a positive interaction that happened “at the end of the year after all year just having felt as if they were trying to push us and not listen to us.” She retold the story:

One particular time the RAC team had come in...they came into my room and observed what I was doing in my class and then instead of being negative and telling me all of the things I did wrong she wrote on a post it note one of the things that she liked that she saw and then put it on my desk. I think it was the first positive interaction I had had with the RAC.

Perhaps the most compelling story of a teacher’s experience with RAC is that of Zena, who was near tears while she spoke of her feelings about the interventions. Zena said that her experiences with the RAC have been “horrible.”

I hate every minute of this year and I can speak for some of the other math teachers that they hate it too. It’s frustrating. We’re being told over and over and over again that we’re ineffective teachers, that we stink at our job, we’re the worst math teachers, department in our district. It’s very deflating.

Zena stated that she feels “miserable” and that she “hates her job.” She mentioned why as follows:
In the past they’ve come into my classroom and found things wrong here and there; they always find things wrong. It’s basically known that when the RAC comes they are out to look for things that are not right. Because if they find that everybody is doing everything right then they don’t have a reason for them to be here. No one is going to get a perfect score, but it was never like it is the way it is now. I mean I never minded the RAC when they came into my classroom but now I don’t even want them in my room.

Startlingly, Zena revealed that she didn’t know whether she would be staying in the district after this year as a direct result of her experience with the RAC this year. “I hate this year. I hate it more than anything. It’s a struggle everyday.” As Zena spoke, she began to quiver and it was obvious that what has been going on in her school is very upsetting to her.

Teachers worry about the motives that RAC may have for being in the building. Yulissa expressed her concern when she stated, “I’m hoping it’s more of a positive thing and not a negative thing. It’s hard to tell at this point. We could be headed for who knows what, we could be headed to be a charter school at some point.” Out of the teachers interviewed, two voiced concerns over the possibility of privatization and/or becoming a charter school. David brought up the idea that the RAC may be here for a “diabolical reason” such as “privatizing the school”, “Charter schools” and included that “some teachers are worried about that, some think it could possibly happen.” Zena expressed her concern about motives, stating that “if they find that everybody is doing everything right then they don’t have a job and there’s no reason for them to be here.” Similarly, Chase spoke of the RAC team needing to “justify their own existence.”

**Lack of Clear Communication**

A recurrent feeling that was expressed throughout the course of the interviews was uncertainty, not knowing, or being unclear about just what exactly comes from whom, what
interventions there really are, what the RAC team mandates and what is not. For example, Alice stated that “I don’t know of anything we have to do because of them, maybe write the objectives on the board...but I don’t even know if that was mandated by them or by the administration” Chase mirrored that sentiment when he replied “I guess there are always different things we are told, and we are never really told who it comes from.” Later on in that same interview, Chase stated that he didn’t “know if that is district or RAC-wide, but it’s a mandate and I’m sure the two have something to do with each other.”

This seemed to be a common theme: most of the teachers interviewed repeated throughout their interviews that they were “unsure” about many aspects having to do with the RAC. Yulissa noted “it’s hard to know what comes from the RAC team and what’s from our new principal.” “Other than the lunch changes, I don’t know what the heck they are doing to be honest with you. I really don’t” (David). Xavier stated, “What they specifically make us do? I don’t really know.”

Teachers voiced concern about the lack of clear direction and open communication from the RAC team. “I imagine our principal definitely sees more of the intervention than we do, we just hear about it, um, it’s not that they speak to us directly in any way” said Yulissa. Teachers felt that much of what is expected of them is unclear as it is passed down “from the RAC to the principal to the literacy/math coach and then to us” (Zena).

During my interview with Alice she discussed what she thinks the plan is for next year but added, “the RAC doesn’t tell us anything, but having a key person from RAC at our meetings has been helpful.” When discussing the RAC interventions with Betty, she said the following: “Nobody has given us a straight answer on that. I think that people don’t know how to pass information along properly and it’s a lot of “I don’t know,” “I’ll find out,” “I’ll get back to you”
and it gets swept under the carpet before the next meeting.” Walter described the communication as insufficient and simply stated. “I don’t think there is enough communication.”

According to five of the teachers interviewed, feedback is rarely given to the teachers on the walkthroughs and most of the time when it is given, it is by way of the principal. One teacher said that “other than seeing them in the building and meetings a few times, you don’t hear from them. No contact” (David). Four of the teachers relayed that information from walkthroughs was at times reported to the school by way of a memo from the principal or in a data meeting. David responded that he receives feedback only “on occasion, through a principal. I’ve never gotten feedback from a RAC person unless it’s been in a collective staff meeting.”

**Teachers Feelings Regarding the Effects of RAC Interventions**

**Classroom Practices**

Is what the RAC team doing working to help the school in the eyes of those who work in them? There was agreement in nearly all aspects of this question: regarding most aspects of school life, teachers reveal that they feel there are relatively few positive effects from the RAC interventions and many feel that there are even negative effects. Areas of possible change discussed were classroom practices, student achievement, and climate and culture of the building.

When asked about the effects on classroom practices, Betty stated “we should all be open to new ideas and new ways of teaching. They’ve pushed learning centers, group work, more technology, and in some cases that’s worked out well.” She added, however, “I believe that the urban district has its own personality and some things that they have suggested are not conducive to this type of environment.” When asked what she would be doing differently if it weren’t for the RAC interventions, Betty replied that she’d be “having fun teaching” and followed up by
saying that they have “taken the fun out of teaching. Too many deadlines, too many tests, too much teaching to the test...every teacher teaches differently, no two teachers should be giving the same test at the end of every week because they didn’t all teach it during that time.”

Alice discussed the influence on classroom practices and said that she hasn’t really “seen RAC as having an influence or as being helpful in (her) classroom at all. This year the RAC person just showed us how to create tests on edconnect. I think that will be helpful in my classroom, I will be able to make different assessments based off common core.” She went on to say that were the RAC not involved in the school she “wouldn’t be doing anything differently.”

Zena explained her feelings of the effect of the RAC on classroom practice as negatively affecting teachers and described the changes that have gone on in the way they teach this year as “crazy.” Zena: “Everything is different. We have a whole new multiplication subtraction model. We are not teaching any of the traditional algorithms of math. I mean every aspect of teaching is supposed to be done this new bizarre method.” And if the RAC interventions were not in place, what would Zena be doing then? “I would be teaching rules and procedures, which doesn’t work for everyone, granted. But when you add differentiation and modifications for certain kids at least they get some of it! I don’t think these kids are getting any out of this way.”

Walter expressed that although there are definitely things he would be doing differently he’s not quite sure what. “They just change things. Their presence changes things,” (Walter).

David said that the walkthroughs have different effects on different teachers, saying that “it depends on the teacher. If the teacher is prepared and knows what he or she is doing then it’s not intimidating at all. I think it may put teachers on panic mode but I think that’s up to the particular teacher. If you are doing your job then you have nothing to worry about...but to be fair I’m not in my third or fourth year. I’m well over twenty years so I pretty much know what to
worry about and what not to.” “I can’t say I’m doing anything different from what I was doing nine or ten years ago.” When asked if there was anything he would be doing differently if the RAC weren’t in the building, he replied, “No. Other than perhaps I would teach less toward the state test, because that’s obviously a real priority.”

Chase discussed his feelings of the effects of the interventions, describing them as “mostly about test scores” and as not “getting to the root of the problem, the poverty.” He said that his classroom practice has changed as he is now “on a rigid schedule” due to the RAC and if the RAC wasn’t in his school he would like to be teaching more novels, letting the students explore fiction and to “hook them with a good book.”

Assessments

Teachers in this school are required to give benchmark assessments every five to six weeks, as well as other exams the district requires, such as those to determine reading levels, math levels, and even PARCC tests. When teachers were asked about the benchmarks, all replied negatively about the testing. “It’s time wasted. Taking all the kids and putting them on a computer, giving them a test every five to six weeks. It doesn’t even give you enough time to get into the unit...It’s a setup for failure, really” (Chase). When speaking about the benchmarks, Alice described the effects of the benchmarks on her students. “These tests have only frustrated our students.” She explained that the benchmarks sometimes “disappear” on the computer during the administration and also how “they get really frustrated when they work really hard for an assessment and then they find out they only got one or two correct.” She went on to tell what she thinks of the tests themselves, saying that “the answers are incorrect or ambiguous..the teachers have caught many mistakes with the benchmark.” She discussed how the reading levels don’t seem to match up to the grade level of the test, something that Chase alluded to when he said that
the texts are very difficult, and that they are the types of texts that his students are not used to, and are never going to read. Chase reiterated that “the questions are misleading and beguiling” and that it is “frustrating” and that there is “too much testing.”

**Student Achievement**

Teachers seemed to have different opinions on what effects the RAC involvement has had on student achievement. Zena said quite frankly that she believes the RAC has lowered student achievement. She sees the results in terms of lower test scores for her students, and remarked that this past benchmark the school scored three percent proficient, which is much lower than how the school usually scores. When asked if he had seen any improvement in student achievement, David replied that he hadn’t seen any improvement in the school. “I see the school as probably stagnant is the best word…I haven’t seen anything fantastic done while RAC has been here…I’m sure other people think opposite as far as looking at the data and seeing improvement but I don’t see any of it. I didn’t expect grades to be that low for PARCC.”

Alice responded “I don’t think they have made any difference on student achievement” and Betty said quite easily, “No. Because if student achievement had changed we wouldn’t be a priority school anymore. I don’t see our scores-if anything I don’t think our scores are higher if anything they are on the low side compared to years past…I don’t think it’s improved at all…again, if they would just let the teacher’s teach.” Xavier responded “the students are lower and lower each year. I would imagine if RAC was working we’d see some signs. But we don’t get any data that shows they are improving.”

Yulissa, however, felt that there were changes for the better in student achievement. She described one of the new techniques they are using, counting around the room, and said, “I think it’s important. I think it did help the kids because so many of them do so poorly in math. The
way we learned is not working with these kids so we are trying something else. My kids did much better on this benchmark and as a sixth grade most of the kids did do better on it this time then the first benchmark, so it does make you feel, makes me think I am doing something right.”

**Climate and Culture**

When asked about climate and culture, teachers responded in many ways. Betty commented on the RACs impact “I think they’ve tried to influence our school and of course, in a positive way, from children walking down the hallway, the cafeteria. I think it’s a good idea. I think every room should be a learning environment, and some rooms aren’t, I’ll be honest with you” but added that she thinks the RAC adds a level of stress to the building, “it’s just one more thing, one more added thing.”

Yulissa spoke about the RAC and their effects on climate and culture in the school. Yulissa: “I don’t see a lot of change there. We have so many other problems right now, but because of the fact we don’t have any disciplinarians and very few consequences for behavior in this school now it’s very difficult. I wish the recommendation would be to get some disciplinarians in here or set up an ISS.”

Chase spoke of the atmosphere of the school: “The whole atmosphere of the school has changed. It’s pretty negative and we used to hear constantly how we are failing, that our kids are failing.” “I mean it’s natural when you’re told your class is not doing well, it’s natural you question yourself. Sometimes you look at it and you feel like we’re lost, like there’s no hope. But I think the RAC is not here forever. This makes me look at my school and wish it was different, wish we had freedom.”

Zena repeated Chase’s feelings of a negative atmosphere and stated that, “It’s no big secret- there really aren’t too many happy people in the building anymore, it’s pretty miserable.”
In another part of the interview, when talking about the RAC influence on the school, Zena said that “the whole school year is a mess” which is pretty similar to what David had to say about this school year as well. David said:

I think the interventions just aren’t working. I think that our major problem right now is it’s just chaotic and it makes it very hard to implement anything when a school is chaotic.

I haven’t seen it like this in a good fifteen years.

Alice spoke about climate and culture in this way: “I think they were trying to get us to perceive the school as this really terrible place. I feel like they don’t see the good because they don’t want to see the good, but we see the good because we are here everyday and we see what goes on in the building.”

Many teachers did point out a change that could be a positive one. Alice said that this year the RAC in particular has made a positive change on climate and culture with the addition of the fourth lunch. “Students in the cafeteria were too crowded, and they initiated a fourth lunch...it has become safer in the cafeteria for the students.” Most of the teachers shared those thoughts on the lunch, all but one mentioning it to some extent. Yulissa also commented that the added fourth lunch made the cafeteria safer. Chase mentioned how they rearranged the schedules to add a fourth lunch, as did David, Walter, and Zena, who added that she “heard it made it safer in the cafeteria.” Most teachers expressed that they hadn’t seen it for themselves but Walter described the hallways as “much quieter. Still too loud, but much quieter. Less running.” He then added that he “hadn’t heard of any fights in the cafeteria.”

Summary

Basic notions of what the RAC team is and what exactly they do should be clear to everyone, especially those whom they are supposed to impact. It became quite clear over the
course of these interviews that this is not the case- those whom the RAC teams serve and are meant to help do not know the full extent of what the RAC does, what it is supposed to do, and just how they are attempting to make changes. It also became quite clear that most teachers feel as if the RAC has not made much progress, especially in the areas of student achievement and even more alarmingly that many teachers had very negative feelings and perceptions of their interaction with the RAC team.
Chapter V

Results and Recommendations

Introduction

In Chapter IV, I presented the many different viewpoints of some of the faculty in one Priority School in New Jersey. This information was gathered through semi-structured interviews of those teachers directly affected by the Regional Achievement Center. Chapter V presents the findings of this study of the perceptions of teachers in a Priority School. I will discuss the previous research on state interventions as it relates to this study and also make recommendations for practice and further research.

Purpose of the Study

This single-case study set out to look at one Priority School in the state of New Jersey in order to further the research on state intervention and school turnaround. The new reform efforts of the state’s newest reform initiative, the Regional Achievement Centers, are widespread throughout approximately ninety Priority Schools in the state. The RAC teams are charged with raising student achievement, but there is little research to attest to any success in regards to intervention and turnaround. This study looks at the perceptions of teachers who are deeply involved and at the forefront of the battle to improve performance in our states severely challenged schools.

Research Questions

This study began with one overarching research question, “How do RAC interventions influence school life in Priority Schools in District X, New Jersey?” In order to fully answer this main question and to fully understand the phenomena of the RAC interventions, I found it important to answer the following sub-questions as well:
● What is the extent and scope of RAC interventions in the Priority School?
● How do the RAC interventions influence classroom practice in the Priority School?
● What are teachers’ perceptions of the RAC interventions and their influence in the Priority School?

Throughout the process of interviewing, reviewing field notes, and transcribing interviews, a fourth research question emerged: How do teachers feel about the RAC interventions in the Priority School?

**Findings and Conclusions**

**Primary Research Question: How do RAC interventions influence school life in a Priority School?** It is clear from the interviews conducted that RAC interventions do influence the Priority School in some ways, although, according to the teachers in this study, that influence may not be consistent with the RAC’s intentions. According to the RAC mission statement and its turnaround principles, the Regional Achievement Center aims to affect student achievement by creating strong school leaders, improving climate and culture, providing high impact professional development, utilizing a curriculum, assessment, and intervention system, and ensuring that teachers utilize research based effective instruction to meet the needs of all students. It aims to do this in accordance with its guiding principles of partnership, research base, support, and accountability.

This study primarily looked at teachers’ perceptions of the RAC interventions and how they affect school life. In order to fully answer the primary research question, it was important to look at the main components of school life, including climate and culture, student achievement, and teacher practices in order to get a clear idea the effects of RACs in a Priority School.
An overall finding of this study is that teachers have a perception of the RAC interventions as being ineffective in a Priority School and having predominantly negative effects on school life. Teachers do not feel that RAC interventions have positively influenced the achievement of students or the culture and climate of the building, have not provided useful professional development, and have not positively influenced their classroom practices and teaching. These issues and their findings will now be broken down by sub-questions. After the findings, I will relate major findings to theory and then make recommendations accordingly.

**Sub-question 1: What is the extent and scope of RAC interventions in the Priority School?**

In order to answer the overarching research question, it was important to gain an understanding of just how often the RAC is in the building, how frequently teachers have contact with members of the RAC team, and just what the RAC team does when they are in the building. Interview questions #1a-1i queried the extent and scope of RAC visits. It is a finding of this study that teachers’ perceptions of the extent and scope of RAC interventions varies greatly in this Priority School. As far as the frequency of the RAC visits, some teachers reported feeling as if they see the RAC team or members of the RAC rarely while others repeated feeling as if they see them quite frequently. Teachers’ responses ranged from once a week, twice a week, once every other week, to monthly, and more.

It is clear according to the teachers’ responses that the frequency and type of RAC interventions have changed over the course of the three years. Some teachers report that there was more classroom visits (referred to as walk-throughs) in the first year and more presence in departmental meetings in the third year. Other teachers report having very little interaction or contact with the RAC team in the first two years and much more contact in the third year.
When talking about the different type of interactions that teachers have with the RAC team, it was reported that a typical RAC visit would be unannounced and could last from five to fifteen minutes per classroom. A RAC member would walk into a classroom with the principal or teacher leader and look for certain indicators of learning such as learning objectives on the board, data binders and lesson plans on teachers’ desks, and evidence of rigorous instruction including frequent check for understanding strategies throughout the time they were in the room. RAC members would question students as to what they were learning, how they were learning it, and how they would be assessed on the learning. Students were expected to repeat the learning objective from the board to the RAC member. At times the RAC was reported to have “talked down” to the teachers in front of their students, which was found to be very unprofessional. The majority of teachers reported a huge disconnect between the walkthroughs and feedback on how they were doing in the classroom. Teachers felt as if they received feedback indirectly in the form of general anonymous statements to the staff or from teacher leaders or administration. Only three of the teachers interviewed could share positive feedback that they had received from the RAC team.

Teachers voiced concerns over not seeing the RAC team enough, not having direct contact with the RAC, and most importantly, not having clear, direct information as to what is expected of them. A majority of teachers voiced concerns of the RAC interventions as being inconsistent and changing frequently, resulting in feelings of confusion, frustration, and of being overwhelmed.

A major conclusion regarding the RAC visits and interactions with teachers is that there has not been enough of an attempt at developing strong relationships between the RAC and the teachers. According to the leading research on changing organizations and effective leadership,
establishing trust and building relationships are keys to success (Bolman & Deal, 2011; Fullan, 2006). In 2004, the Annie Casey Foundation found that core capacities, such as a collective vision, effective partnerships, and communication were “the building blocks that enable powerful strategies to become actualized” during school turnaround. The lack of clear communication, expectations, feedback, vision, and relationship is a major issue that could be a hindrance to the success of the RAC interventions in Priority Schools.

Sub-question 2: How do the RAC interventions influence classroom practice in the Priority School? Although the RAC aims to improve instruction, there was no clear finding that their interventions have effectively done that. In an effort to find what influence the interventions have had on classroom practice, teachers were asked a series of questions, particularly interview questions 2a-2d. Some teachers stated that the RAC had no influence whatsoever on what they do in their classrooms although they did go on to discuss changes in curriculum, increased assessing, “teaching to the test” and other practices that are directly a result of the interventions of the RAC. One particular teacher felt as if the RAC had total control of her classroom as they had completely changed the curriculum and what and how she was able to teach. While two of the teachers interviewed did identify that they had some feelings of success in new approaches to teaching that the RAC had implemented, these same teachers shared the views of the other teachers as well that their teaching was not greatly influenced by the RAC interventions.

Most teachers voiced concerns about the lack of freedom in the classroom and stated that they would be more effective if they did not have the RAC involved in their classroom. Teachers expressed feelings about being told what to teach, how to teach, and more. These feelings ranged from frustration to anger to ineffectiveness to intimidation. This directly relates to the findings of researchers such as Ingersoll (2003) who found that takeover denied teachers autonomy and
resulted in teachers who felt de-professionalized and demotivated and those of Fusarelli (2004) who found that takeover and interventions took away flexibility and creativity.

While teachers are such an important part of the education process, and play a critical role in student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2010), it has been found by many researchers that teachers’ feelings are just as important to student success and therefore are critical to school turnaround. Research has found that teachers are one of the most significant drivers of success in a turnaround situation (Wallace Foundation, 2010) and that teachers have a bigger impact on student academic progress than any other factor including race, socioeconomic status, and class size (Sanders and Horn, 1998, as cited in Salomonowicz, 2001). It is also important to note that efficacy, according to Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith (2002) “is more important in explaining school achievement than socioeconomic status” (as cited in Protheroe, 2008, p. 44).

The teachers’ feelings of being bullied, lacking freedom, being intimidated, and more are congruent with previous research that have found takeover and turnaround ineffective. According to Kanter (2003), who studied more than two dozen turnaround situations in various fields, including education, this type of “insufficient communication and perpetual restructuring created a culture of fear and reduces employee initiative” (p. 4) In her studies of the psychology of turnaround, she finds that these “organizational pathologies...create a culture that makes an already bad situation worse” (p. 4) and that those involved, in this case teachers, share a phenomenon that psychologists call ‘learned helplessness’ in which they feel there is little they can do to make a difference (Kanter, 2003, p. 5).

An interesting finding of the study is the effect of walkthroughs on classroom practice. Although teachers did see the walkthrough as being intimidating to some, they did worry that the RAC team was not getting a clear picture of the whole school when the visits were announced
and teachers had a chance to prepare for them, as is the case with the QSR. Three teachers referred to these visits as a “dog and pony show” which is a term referring to a false presentation or a “putting on” in order to impress others. Three of the teachers voiced their opinion that they would rather have these visits unannounced and even more frequently so that the RAC could get a true representation of what is really going on in the school.

Sub-question 3: What are teachers’ perceptions of the RAC interventions and their influence in the Priority School? It was important to take a look at what teacher’s thought of the frequency and type of visits from the RAC team, as well as how these visits and RAC presence in the building have influenced classroom practices, it was also important to look at how teachers perceived the interventions and the interventions’ influence in the Priority School.

It is a major finding of this study that teachers simply were not clear on just what the interventions were, or what they are supposed to accomplish. Not one of the teachers interviewed had a clear definitive answer for exactly what the interventions were- most could respond with what they thought were interventions, but all had some sense of not knowing and not being sure what mandates there were. This supports a finding in sub-question one, that there was a clear lack of communication and of direction- a lack of a shared vision. This aligns with prior research of takeover in which there is a lack of clear communication, and “insufficient communication” under which “problem solving is impossible if people do not have all the facts” (Kanter, 2003, p.6).

Previous research and literature surrounding the ideas of school turnaround show that in order for a turnaround to work, it is imperative that all parties be involved and made aware of a clear vision, complete with goals and understand how they are to reach those goals (Wallace Foundation, 2010). Teachers in this Priority School perceive the interventions of the RAC as a
presence in the building that creates stress and tension, even for those teachers who believe the intentions of the RAC are to help the school. Teachers expressed that they are hopeful that the RAC is trying to bring them up out of Priority Status but still some had fear of further takeover or conversion to a charter school.

Teachers described feelings of fear, intimidation, feeling territorial, and wishes of being left alone. Two teachers expressed feelings of being set up for failure and three of the teachers interviewed identified the RAC team as needing to justify their own existence by finding the “bad” in the school as opposed to the good so that they could keep their own jobs. These feelings of distrust are common according to the research of school turnaround and takeover, and in Kanter’s research have been found to create a culture of fear which reduces employee initiative. In this type of environment, Kanter found that employees begin to “do the bare minimum” (2003, p. 4) which is just the opposite of what is necessary in order for school turnaround to work.

According to the interviews, teachers did seem willing to change and try new things; however, not all of the teachers seem to believe in the changes that RAC was attempting to implement. Many of the teachers expressed a desire to improve their teaching and were open to ideas that the RAC team had taught them during their common planning time. Such ideas were counting around the room for math and creating common assessments on the computer for students to showcase what they had learned. At least three of the teachers shared that there weren’t many opportunities to learn new things from the RAC team and that they had not learned anything worthwhile from the RAC team during professional development.

The major intervention in this particular school that teachers noted was the implementation of a schedule change which added a fourth lunch to the school schedule to
promote safety in the cafeteria. All teachers interviewed mentioned this change as being positive, initiated by RAC as a direct result of an observation, and as a move towards making the school better, although teachers’ opinions varied as to the effectiveness of this change on the safety of the cafeteria. Most teachers believed it made the cafeteria safer although they did not know first hand if that was the case.

Another major intervention that teachers discussed as being implemented by the RAC team was the use of common assessments, known as benchmarks that test the student’s progress in each of the units that are aligned to the common core and the New Jersey Model Curriculum. Teachers explain that these unit tests are delivered online and take about two or three days every five or six weeks to administer. This strongly correlates to the work of Wong and Shen (2001) and Jennings (2012) who found that school turnaround was often too test-driven and too focused on testing.

**Sub-question 4: How do teachers feel about the interventions in the Priority School?**

Perhaps the most poignant finding of this study is that not only do teachers feel that the interventions are not effective, but interviews reveal that teachers are feeling overwhelmed, bullied, intimidated, frustrated, powerless, put down, and miserable- even to the point of wanting to give up and leave the district. Teachers expressed all these feelings and more- and all in regards to the RAC interventions that have been going on in their school for the past three years. Many teachers voiced being unhappy and having the feeling of being pressured and intimidated by the RAC interventions.

Teachers revealed that there was a lack of communication, lack of direction, and no real sense of knowing exactly what was expected of them. Teachers were concerned over not receiving feedback from the RAC and explained that they often do not receive feedback at all.
The overall feeling from the teachers was really a sense of not knowing what the RAC was doing in their building, which reiterates the ideas presented in sub-questions one, two, and three that teachers not only need to be informed, but they need to be respected, included, and built up in order to best initiate change.

It is imperative to note just how unhappy so many of the teachers reported being as a clear result of the interventions, interactions, and involvement of the Regional Achievement Center. It is also necessary to point out just how important teachers’ outlooks on the intervention process are to the success of school turnaround. According to Salmonowicz (2009), “teachers and students bear the brunt of the changes that occur during a turnaround; their buy-in to the process is therefore essential” (p. 21). In fact, Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith (2002) found that collective efficacy was “more important in explaining school achievement than socioeconomic status” (as cited in Protheroe, 2008, p. 44).

Governor Chris Christie himself spoke of the importance of teachers in New Jersey’s Race To The Top application when he wrote that “no single factor influences student academic success more that the quality of his or her teachers” and then the “the quality of a child’s teacher is the most important factor in his or her educational attainment” (2010). Teachers are certainly an important component of the education process and according to some research, they are particularly important in areas of economic hardship and low academic achievement. In fact, according to Sanders and Horn (1992), “teachers have a bigger impact on student academic progress than any other factor, including race, socioeconomic status, and class size” (as cited in Salmonowicz, 2009, p. 22). As such an important part of the school, teachers feelings of their school, their impact on their students, and their ability as a teacher is clearly an important part of any school’s success.
Results and Theory

The researcher chose to look at this phenomenon through the lens of change theory. Change theory is rooted in scientific management and is the “implementation of a series of building blocks required to bring about a long-term goal.” Change theory is described as “being used by social scientists, program evaluators, educational institutions, organizational leaders, and government organizations as a tool for bringing about effective long-term changes” (Hoffman-Miller, 2013, n.p.).

According to Hoffman-Miller (2013), there are three change theory models — those of Kotter International (1996), Kurt Lewin (1946), and Michael Fullan (2006). All three models include three distinct phases including an identification of desired outcomes, a method to achieve those outcomes, and a way to measure whether or not those outcomes were achieved.

In change theory, or the study of organizational change, several recommendations have been made for the success of any organizational change. For example, Kotter (1996) suggests an eight stage process which includes creating a sense of urgency, developing a vision and strategy, communicating that vision, empowering employees, and anchoring new approaches in the culture (as cited in Burke, 2013, p. 3). Much of the research regarding change theory includes identifying clear goals, establishing strong relationships, empowering employees, and strong leadership (Burke, 2013, Demers, 2007, Fullan, 2006, et al.).

When looking at the results of this study through the lens of change theory, it is clear to see that the RAC interventions taking place in this Priority School are an example of a failed change theory. Michael Fullan, a leader in the field of change theory and education, describes that “change theory...can be very powerful in informing education reform strategies and, in turn, getting results” (2006, p.3). Fullan explains that typical strategies that use standards-based
reform (which includes using a system of assessments mapped to the standards, similar to the benchmarks discussed earlier) may appear strong, but that they are “seriously incomplete theories of action because they do not get close to what happens in classrooms and school cultures” (Fullan, 2006, p. 6). He goes on to identify critical components of change theory which include a focus on motivation, capacity building, learning in context, and persistence and flexibility, among other things. Other researchers who have studied turnaround and change theory have identified the need for teachers buy-in, capacity building, communication, trust, and shared ownership all as key ingredients of school turnaround (Aladjem, 2014; Elmore, 2004; Salmonowicz, 2009).

Teachers’ responses in this study show that there has been little capacity building in this school, little focus on motivation, little relationship or trust building, none of the things that research on school turnaround and change theory have found to increase the chance of turnaround success.

**Recommendations**

After looking at the findings and results of this study, prior research, and studying the theory of change, there are several recommendations to be made to the State Board of Education, the Regional Achievement Center, and any other turnaround agency seeking to improve their turnaround efforts in failing schools. The recommendations have been categorized into three main components and are as follows:

**Recommendation 1:** Development of Relationships

**Recommendation 2:** Clear Communication

**Recommendation 3:** Shared Vision and Capacity Building
Recommendation 1: Development of Relationships

In order to successfully change an organization, such as a school, it is important to establish relationships with those who are involved in the organization. In the case of school turnaround, this would include teachers, students, parents, community members, unions, and administrators in the building and/or district. This inclusion is part of the organizational structure theory and change theory as well. It is important to understand the culture of an organization before attempting to change things, and if that understanding and relationship building are not present at the outset of the turnaround, it is not going to be successful. Daniel Aldajem (2014), in his work on school turnaround found that “strong professional relationships between and among key actors at all levels can greatly facilitate progress” (p. 160).

Building relationships establishes trust and will help to eliminate many negative feelings of teachers who may feel territorial or under attack by outsiders who come in to conduct observations. By first establishing relationships, this will begin to create an atmosphere of collaboration and cohesion, which is extremely important in facilitating change.

It is suggested that RAC team members fully embed themselves in the school of change by introducing themselves to teachers informally, meeting with teachers in their natural habitats and engaging in informal conversations. It is also recommended that RAC members travel throughout the school openly, as part of the school team, rather than with administration (which may be seen as evaluative in nature) and simply observe the activities of the school. This should take place as frequently and often as possible so as to eliminate the “dog and pony show” effect and help the RAC to capture a true picture of what is going on in the school BEFORE making recommendations and issuing mandates to make changes.
It is important, as with any relationship, to foster these relationships by being open and honest, clear about intentions, and by maintaining professionalism. Teachers are much more likely to engage in collegial conversations and to receive advice from someone whom they respect and see as a professional, fellow teacher, rather than an outsider. Once relationships are built, feedback may not be taken as criticism and may actually help to raise teachers’ level of commitment to the change itself.

**Recommendation 2: Clear Communication**

This recommendation is tied to recommendation number one and will also help in the development of relationships. A lack of clear communication has been found in the Priority School studied and it is evident to the researcher that there is a dire need for better communication among all stakeholders in the school and in outside agencies, such as the Regional Achievement Center. With so many teachers (who happen to be the number one unit of change in a building) not knowing just what is expected of them or what they are mandated to do, it is clear that communication has not been effective in this building.

After much research, this researcher recommends more communication from RAC members, not only through the administrator or teacher leader, but in the form of direct communication from the RAC to the teachers themselves. This should be done in staff meetings, departmental meetings, and through other forms of communication such as emails and memos that are sent to the entire staff.

**Recommendation 3: Shared Vision and Capacity Building**

Although these could be separated out into two recommendations, it is the feeling of the researcher that they go hand in hand and should, therefore, be considered together. By opening lines of communication and building relationships, it is natural that the RAC team, or any other
agent of change, will help to give teachers a feeling of being included and important in the process of changing the school.

It is the belief of this researcher that by developing a shared vision of the change that is desired in the school, and then creating a roadmap to achieving that change, it is the belief of this researcher that RAC members will obtain a higher level of teacher buy-in which is critical to success. Rather than “de-professionalizing and demoralizing teachers” (Ingersoll, 2003), it is important to build capacity and to motivate teachers by including them in the change process.

In order to develop a shared vision, it is important to provide the teachers with all of the facts and relevant data so that they can collaborate and bring their hands-on expertise to the enterprise. As teachers, they will certainly provide important insight into the needs and problems that they see in the classroom and will have great information that data from test results will not show. This is the type of invaluable information that the RAC team would not obtain otherwise—certainly not in short walkthroughs and classroom observations. Not only is it important to include the teachers in this change, but it is also necessary to empower them and raise their feelings of “can do” so that they achieve. This can be done by including them in the process and by building capacity. Albert Bandura, a renowned psychologist found that “faculties’ belief in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools’ level of achievement” (1993, p. 117). Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy (2000) report that “teachers’ shared beliefs shape the normative environment of schools...and are an important aspect of the culture of the school” (as cited in Proetheroe, 2008, p. 43).

This researcher found that many of the teachers of the school reported a feeling of being put down, bullied, losing freedom, and more— all signs that capacity is not only NOT being built but quite the opposite, it is being depleted. Much of the research of school turnaround identified
that such feelings caused the demoralization of teachers (Fusarelli, 2004), the decrease of motivation, and the de-professionalization of teachers (Ingersoll, 2003). Fullan reported that in order for a theory of action to work, in this case the turnaround of a failing school, teachers must be motivated to “put in the effort necessary to get the results, otherwise improvement is not possible” (2006, p. 8).

The practices uncovered in this study are not practices that will help the students of this Priority School and, if they are consistent with the RAC practices in other schools, will hinder progress and achievement in any failing school in the state if they are not modified to fit change theory. It is strongly recommended that in order to build capacity in this school, there needs to be a focus on improving the climate and culture of the building and on empowering the teachers. Although the suggestions in recommendations one and two will aid in empowering and building capacity, other key improvements must be made. For one, in order to improve the overall culture of the school, it is important to decrease the negativity that is associated with the interventions. The researcher recommends an end to reported behaviors such as providing negative feedback. Without first building strong relationships and providing ample opportunity for RAC observations and data gathering— in effect “getting close to what happens in classrooms and school cultures” (Fullan, 2006, p. 6), any feedback that the RAC provides is liable to be taken as offensive by the teachers and hence ineffective.

This researcher recommends providing teachers with ample opportunity to observe each other throughout the school and to make their own recommendations for what they think they need in order to succeed. Fullan recommends that capacity building is crucial to achieving results
and that includes “any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning, helping to develop knowledge and capacities, resources, and motivation (2006, p. 9).

I suggest offering meaningful professional development, including teachers in decisions and drastically increasing the amount of positive praise and highlighting any success that is seen in the building. By providing positive feedback, the RAC team would be helping to restore teachers’ faith in their own ability that would in turn restore their feelings of effectiveness. Protheroe identified that “feedback that highlights effective teaching behaviors while providing constructive suggestions for ways to improve” was a proven way to impact a teacher’s sense of efficacy (2008, p. 43).

Focusing on the positive and noting success will increase teachers’ efficacy and promote a positive culture in the school. Psychologists agree — Kanter found that “restoring confidence raises aspirations” and reported that “the small wins that newly empowered people create are the first signs that turnaround is on track, and this is the true test of leadership — whether those being led out of the defeatism of decline gain the confidence that produces victories” (2003, p.11).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Considering the extent and reach of the RAC team into the schools and classrooms around New Jersey, and the great need for turnaround in many of the nations low-performing schools, there is much research to be done on this topic. The researcher plans to use this study as the basis for further study and suggests that further research be done in the following areas:

- Teachers’ perceptions of the RAC in other Priority Schools in this same district
- Teachers’ perceptions of the RAC team in Priority Schools in other districts
Administrators’ perceptions of the RAC in School A in District X

Administrators’ perceptions of the RAC in Priority Schools in New Jersey

Quantitative studies on student achievement in the Priority Schools in New Jersey

RAC member perceptions of the change process in the Priority Schools in New Jersey

Summary

It is important to recognize that teachers are incredibly important stakeholders in a school community and their confidence in their ability to help students succeed is an equally important aspect of a school’s success. Although RAC interventions are aimed at improving the climate and culture of a school and in turn improving test scores and student academic success, it is important that the RAC, as well as any other agency attempting to turnaround schools, does not try to implement a “one-size-fits-all” approach. It should be known that “the quality of a school consists of more than test scores and includes such things as the level of parental and student satisfaction, curricular variety...safe environment...and the quality of teachers and administrators” (Jones, et al, 2003, as cited in Fusarelli, 2004).

Teachers’ thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the interventions and influence of the RAC team in this Priority School are just one side of the story, however, and the researcher warns against taking one side of an argument without evaluating others. It is therefore suggested that further research be done to look at not only other Priority Schools in the same district, but others as well, and to continue the same type of study with other stakeholders- including administration and RAC members as well in order to form a cohesive look into the process of intervening and making changes in Priority Schools across the state.
There is currently a significant lack of evidence and data surrounding state interventions and turnaround, and looking further into this phenomenon through the eyes of all of those affected would prove to be quite valuable given what we know about efficacy, motivation, and change theory. In conclusion, I believe that one statement best sums up the need for future research: “With so much invested in school turnaround, and so much at stake in terms of students’ futures, states can ill afford not to take every opportunity to ensure the success of their turnaround efforts” (Aladjem, 2014, p. 164).
References


New Jersey Department of Education (2012a, April 11) *Christie administration moves forward to turn around lowest-performing schools in the state, provide targeted support for improvement, and to reward successful schools.* Retrieved from http://www.nj.gov/education/news/2012/0411rac.htm


NJDOE, State Report Card, 2014


Appendix A

Quality School Review Rubric Indicators : NJDOE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 1: Ensure that the principal has the ability to lead the turnaround effort.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The principal uses data to establish a coherent vision that is understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>The principal develops and promotes a coherent strategy and plan for implementing the school vision, which includes clear measurable goals, aligned strategies and a plan for monitoring progress and driving continuous improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>The principal uses data to work collaboratively with staff to maintain a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>The principal communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and supports students to achieve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>The principal ensures that a rigorous and coherent standards-based curriculum and aligned assessment system are implemented with fidelity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>The principal ensures that classroom level instruction is adjusted based on formative and summative results from aligned assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>The principal uses informal and formal observation data and on-going student learning outcome data to monitor and improve school-wide instructional practices and ensure the achievement of learning goals for all students (including SWD and ELLs).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>The principal ensures that the schedule is intentionally aligned with the school improvement plan in order to meet the agreed upon school level learning goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>The principal effectively employs staffing practices (recruitment and selection, assignment, shared leadership, job-embedded professional development, observations with meaningful instructional feedback, evaluation, tenure review) in order to continuously improve instructional and meet student learning goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>The principal uses data and research-based best practices to work with staff to increase academically-focused family and community engagement.</td>
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**SCHOOL CLIMATE & CULTURE**

**TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 2: Establish a school environment that supports the social, emotional, and learning needs of all students.**

**INDICATOR**

| 2.1 | The school community supports a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment. |
| 2.2 | The school community maintains a culture that values learning and promotes the academic and personal growth of students and staff. |
| 2.3 | High expectations* are communicated to staff, students and families; students are supported to achieve them.  
*Expectations of professionalism, instruction, communication and other elements of the school's common teaching framework to staff; Expectations of attendance, academic performance, behavior, postsecondary attainment, etc. to families |

**EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION**

**TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 3: Ensure that teachers utilize research-based effective instruction to meet the needs of all students.**

**INDICATORS**

| 3.1 | Teachers ensure that student-learning objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely, and are aligned to the standards-based curriculum. |
| 3.2 | Teachers use multiple instructional strategies and multiple response strategies that actively engage and meet student learning needs. |
| 3.3 | Teachers use frequent checks for understanding throughout each lesson to gauge student learning, and to inform, monitor and adjust instruction. |
### TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 4: Ensure that teachers have the foundational documents and instructional materials needed to teach to the rigorous college- and career-ready standards that have been adopted.

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<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.1</strong></td>
<td>The district or school curriculum is aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.2</strong></td>
<td>Teachers and school leaders collect classroom level data to verify that the adopted and aligned CCSS curriculum is the “taught” curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.3</strong></td>
<td>The district provides formative assessments in literacy and math to enable teachers to effectively gauge student progress and inform instructional decisions at the classroom and team levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.4</strong></td>
<td>Instructional materials and resources are aligned to the standards-based curriculum documents.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.5</strong></td>
<td>An intervention plan designed to meet the learning needs of students who are two or more years behind in ELA and Mathematics is planned, monitored and evaluated for effectiveness based on defined student learning goals.</td>
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## EFFECTIVE STAFFING PRACTICES

### TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 5: Develop skills to better recruit, retain and develop effective teachers.

### INDICATORS

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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Hiring timelines and processes allow the school to competitively recruit effective teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>School leadership uses teacher evaluation to provide feedback for improving classroom practices, informing professional development and increasing learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Teachers are provided professional development that enables them to continuously reflect, revise, and evaluate their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes in both a structured collaborative setting and individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Staff assignment is intentional to maximize the opportunities for all students to have access to the staff’s instructional strengths.</td>
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### 5.5

Teachers are provided professional development that promotes independent, collaborative, and shared reflection opportunities for professional growth.

## ENABLING the EFFECTIVE USE of DATA

### TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 6: Ensure the school-wide use of data focused on improving teaching and learning.

### INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Multiple forms of data are presented in user-friendly formats and in a timely manner to drive all decisions for improving climate and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Multiple forms of data are presented in user-friendly formats in a timely manner.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
manner to drive all decisions for improving student achievement.

| 6.3 | A specific schedule and process for the analysis of on-going formative assessment data tied to the CCSS aligned curriculum that includes the specific goals for improvement, defined strategies, progress monitoring and evaluation. |

**EFFECTIVE USE of TIME**

**TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 7:** Redesign time to better meet student and teacher learning needs and increase teacher collaboration focusing on improving teaching and learning.

**INDICATORS**

| 7.1 | The master schedule is clearly designed and structured to meet the needs of all students. |
| 7.2 | The master schedule is clearly designed to meet the intervention needs of all students who are two or more years behind in ELA or Mathematics. |
| 7.3 | The master schedule is clearly structured and designed to meet the professional development needs of staff. |

**EFFECTIVE FAMILY and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**TURNAROUND PRINCIPLE 8:** Increase academically focused family and community engagement.

**INDICATORS**

| 8.1 | Families are engaged in academically related activities, school decision-making, and an open exchange of information regarding students’ progress in order to increase student learning for all students. |
| 8.2 | Community groups and families of students who are struggling academically and/or socially are active partners in the educational process and work together to reduce barriers and accelerate the academic and personal growth of students. |
Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following interview questions will be considered during the interview process.

1. Extent
   a) How often have you had contact/intervention with the RAC team?
   b) What interventions have their been in the school as a result of the Regional Achievement Center?
   c) What mandates have been handed down from the RAC team?
   d) How would you describe the role of RAC interventions and their influence in a priority school?
   e) What has the experience been like with the RAC interventions?
   f) Can you describe a time when you witnessed the RAC interventions having an influence on the school?
   g) Can you describe a time when you had dealings or interactions with the RAC team?
   h) Can you describe how you felt at that time?
   i) How are these interventions any different from other interventions that you have seen?

2. Classroom Practice/Teacher Efficacy
   a) How do you feel the RAC interventions have influenced teachers and teacher practices?
   b) Describe a particular aspect of your classroom practice that has changed due to the RAC interventions.
   c) What would you be doing differently if it were not for the interventions of the RAC
team?

d) How have the RAC interventions influenced your feelings on your own efficacy or ability to effectively influence your classroom?

3. What are teachers’ perceptions about RAC interventions influence on school life (climate and culture, student achievement, leadership)?

   a) How have the RAC interventions influenced your perceptions of your school?

   b) Can you describe a time that RAC interventions have influenced the school?

   c) How do you feel the RAC interventions have influenced student achievement in a priority school?

   d) How have RAC interventions influenced instruction in the Priority School?

   e) How have RAC interventions influenced student achievement in the Priority School?

   f) How have RAC interventions influenced climate and culture in the Priority School?
Appendix C: Interview Transcripts

I: Today is Friday Dec 11th and this is Interview 1 Teacher A

So how often have you had contact or interaction with the RAC team with your time here at this school?

T: Contact...uhhhh….the first year that the RAC was here at this school I felt like we saw them at least once a week. Last year I feel as if we saw them a lot less, I feel as if we had no contact really with them last year. This year RAC is in the building, I see them probably once every other week but not necessarily in my classroom, whereas in the first year they were in the classroom often, they never really wanted to talk to us outside in meetings, this year I see them in meetings more than doing walkthroughs.

I: Ok so, in meetings you see them every other week, about?

T: Yeah

I: What interventions have there been in this school as a result of the Regional Achievement Center?

T: (whispering) What interventions have there been….Have there been any? (laughing)

I: Can you think of any interventions that they’ve handed down or anything they have done

T: (interrupts) We have to give the assessment now, the benchmark assessment, I don’t know if that would be considered an intervention, checking for understandings, we’ve been guided towards doing lots more checks for understanding in the classroom, that came from them, although it’s just a good teacher practice.

I: Do you know of any other mandates that have been handed down from, other than, besides the end of unit assessments?

T: Any mandatory….?
I: Like anything you have to do because of them.

T: I don’t know of anything we have to do because of them, maybe write the objectives on the board, the three part objectives. Um, but I don’t even know if that was mandated by them or by the administration.

I: Your three part objective, do you think it’s helpful for the classroom? Does it change

T: No.

I: No. Alright, how would you describe the role of RAC interventions in a priority school?

T: This year I feel as if our RAC person has been helpful. They have come in and have shown us how to do different things, um, more willing to be open and honest and talk with us. In the past, I felt as if those people had just judged us, not had much information or, um, uh helpful tips or hints for anyone, it’s been more of a complaining, “you’re not doing something right.”

I: And it’s a different person this year?

T: Yes, this year it’s a different person for our group of teachers

I: So its just one person that comes in most of the time

T: Mm hmm…for our section of teachers I know there are other RAC people that come in

I: So would you say they’ve had an influence in the priority school?

T: Yes, um I believe the first year here their influence was more of a scare, they were trying to scare us into believing or doing whatever they said I think they were eve willing to make up information that they believe they saw but they didn’t I remember seeing something where it said zero percent of teachers have um zero percent of teachers have classroom management or something um procedures, rules and procedures that’s what it was, zero percent of teachers had rules and procedures in this building which I thought was incredibly inaccurate uh um
I: so that was something that they had reported back to you and you thought that they had made that up?

T: Yes.

I: Ok so in the first year you thought it was more of a scare, scare tactics, in the second year what did you think?

T: Up until this year I think they kind of disappeared, you didn’t really see them, I don’t know if administration was dealing with them more, I know they did walkthroughs but it was twice a year and we didn’t really have to deal with RAC in any other form, this year I think they’re I think this lady is really trying to help us

I: Um overall what has your experience been with been like with the Regional Achievement Center?

T: Uh I my experience? I said in the begin I think they were here trying to bully us into whatever it is they were trying to accomplish…I think when we called them out on certain things they were saying and doing they kind of became more helpful they kind of disappeared for a few years now they are back and I think this year I think she actually cares I think she knows what she is doing. She still doesn’t come into classrooms but she comes into meetings

I: Can you describe a particular time when you had an interaction with the RAC team?

T: One particular time the RAC team had come in, this was after they had given us inaccurate information about zero percent of teachers and we had called them out on it they came into my room and observed what I was doing in my class and then instead of being negative and telling me all of the things that I did wrong she wrote on a post it note one of the things that she liked that she saw and then put it on my desk I think that was the first positive interaction that I had
ever had with a RAC person and it was at the end of the year after all year just having felt as if they were trying to push us and not listen to us (7:02)

I: OK so that’s a time that you felt positive about the interaction?

T: Yes.

I: Do you have a particular time when you had a negative interaction with them?

T: What comes to mind is the moment that I had talked about earlier. We were being given a presentation it was all the teachers in my subject area watching a PowerPoint and in the pot they said that zero percent of teachers had rules and procedures down and this was after a lot of negative pot slides had been shown one teacher in particular called them out on it and they changed the pot for the next group of teachers, removed that side out of it but I felt as if they were trying to bring us down trying to tell us how terrible and awful we were they had nothing nice to say, and I feel as if on whole we are a pretty good bunch of teachers we try to work hard for our students give them the best education

I: Ok, um, so this particular section is about classroom practice and teachers. So how do you think that RAC interventions have influenced teachers and teacher practices?

T: Well we have to put up the uh objectives, we have to make sure that this year objectives are student friendly but in past years we had to have three part objectives and that was by RAC, which I think is a problem because they change their mind every year with what they are expecting of us how can you expect us to ever become proficient in it, to become a master of what you are asking.

I: So the mandates change?

T: Mm hmm.
I: Ok, Can you think of a particular aspect of your classroom practice that has changed based on their interventions? Just the objectives or anything else in particular.

T: I Really haven’t seen RAC as having influence or as being helpful for my classroom at all. I don’t even really see them. This year the RAC person has um been showing us or just showed us this week how to create tests or where to find edconnect which we briefly talked out previously but really never got in depth with so she went through that and walked us through the process, I think that will be helpful in my classroom, I will be able to make different assessments based off common core wording.

I: What do you think you would be doing differently if it weren’t for the RAC team interventions in your classroom?

T: I don’t think I’d do anything differently. I think this is the first year I finally figured out what I want to teach and how I want to teach where I want to be going.

I: So I think we kind of touched on this earlier but I think it might just be worded differently. How do you think their interventions have influenced your own feelings of efficacy or effectiveness?

T: The first year here they made us feel really terrible. I felt as if I was never going to be able to teach that I was never going to be good enough I’ve gained more confidence having taught more years now and then having taken a step back I think has just helped me gain confidence I don’t have someone telling us how terrible we are all the time um so

I: So its nothing they did to make you feel effective or it’s just something you gained through time.

T: Mm hmm.

I: Have the RAC interventions influenced your perceptions of the school itself?
T: I think they were trying to get us to perceive the school as this really terrible place in the beginning I you know what I feel like even today they see what they want to see they don’t see the good because they don’t want to see the good, but we an see the good because we are here everyday and we see what goes on in the building

I: How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced student achievement in this school in particular? Have they made a difference on student achievement?

T: No. No I don’t think they have made a difference on student achievement, and if anything I think I think the benchmarks and these tests have only frustrated our students more.

I: Can you think of a situation in particular when you’ve seen a student frustrated with the benchmarks?

T: Every time they take it, most recently the benchmarks have started to disappear while the students are taking them, they’ll be halfway through typing and then the benchmark will be gone, that’s frustrating, it may be a computer glitch but it is something that is frustrating..they also get really frustrated when they work really hard for an assessment and then they find out they only got one or two correct um they can become frustrated and give up not want to take the next part of the test.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about the assessment that you are talking about?

T: The benchmark assessment is given after every unit, its supposed to be every seven weeks but you have to give yourself a few weeks to reteach so its about five weeks after the unit starts, its multiple choice now in years past it has been open ended and multiple choice they are to answer a question about story that they have read or about a text that they have read and then they need to find evidence to support that text. One of the problems with the test is that the answers are incorrect or ambiguous. The teachers we have caught many mistakes with the benchmark on the
benchmark where we believe that the question was wrong or a lot of the answers were ambiguous

I: Do you know who writes the exam?
T: State. No I don’t know the person or the group, its just handed down from the group.

I: Do you feel it’s a fair assessment for the grade level you are teaching?
T: I feel as if some of them are fair I feel as if a lot of the reading is more difficult than the grade level I think that sixth grade had found that some of their stories that their students were expected to read were higher and were in other textbooks not in our district but in other schools were more seventh and eighth grade stories. I’ve found that my students’ stories the next one coming up in particular is very difficult,

I: Ok and last um how do you think the RAC interventions have influenced climate and culture in this school?
T: This year um I think we are on the right step forward I think that something positive came out of the RAC this year m they cam in for a initial walk through and found that our students in the cafeteria were too crowded and they initiated a fourth lunch so they have had scheduling influences, it has become safer in the cafeteria for the students. I think the plan is for next year to make it a house environment where students, sixth grade is together, seventh grade is together, eight grade is together and then one step further I think they even want to put teachers closer together so like if I have these students and another teacher has them too we’d be moved closer together or next to each other

I: Would more direction from the RAC be helpful?
T: The RAC doesn’t tell us anything. having a key person from RAC at our meeting has been beneficial
I: Is there anything else you’d like to add about the RAC?

T: ((Laughing)) Leave us alone…..

I: Today is Monday Dec 14 Interview 1 with teacher B. I’m here to talk with you a little about interventions with the Regional Achievement Center. How often have you had contact or interactions with the RAC team?

T: Only when they came in to watch during a class session and do their walkthroughs.

I: So do you see them at meetings, or...

T: (Interrupting) Yes, we have a um supervisor for Language Arts that represents the RAC team.

I: And how often have you seen him or her?

T: Weekly. Biweekly. Two three times a week I mean during meetings.

I: Do they come into your classroom?

T: Not as, not this year, not yet

I: In previous years was it different?

T: We did see them in the dates that they came, every two months

I: Ok, what interventions have there been in your school as a result of the Regional Achievement Center?

T: Um, I guess different approaches to um learning tactics and how to um test taking strategies, um, environment to the classroom,

I: What specifically with the classroom environment, what have they

T: Well they changed...charting...a lot of charts, wall centers, student celebration of work, current.... um...clutter free

I: and have there been any mandates handed down? anything that you absolutely have to do?
T: I don't see that you have to do it, but you have to work it in to your teaching, it does give direction to your teaching it is a different way of teaching, um I think the way you teach it, um as long as you apply it, doesn't really matter, as long as you're comfortable with it

I: How would you describe the role of the RAC and their interventions in the priority school?
T: Aggressive. Um, I know it's mandated and with good intention but a little overwhelming at times.

I: Can you describe a time in particular that was overwhelming or a time that you had felt overwhelmed by the interventions that have been passed down?
T: Uh, no, but there have been colleagues of mine where the RAC team has gone into their classroom and spoken to them a little bit aggressively, in front of their students, where I felt you know that matters that should have been taken care of privately, you don't want to make the teacher feel belittled, I myself have not had that kind of interaction with them, but they do seem to have an upper air about them, almost to he point where you know, (inaudible) (laughter)
I: So does it make you feel intimidate...
T: (Interrupting) Yes, intimidated, a little bit less confident when I feel like I'm under the supervision when they are physically in my room I don't feel very comfortable with it. I think learning styles, teaching styles are independent and I fell sometimes like it is dictated how I should teach, very scripted, I almost feel like I'm a facilitator at times more so than a teacher
I: So is it different than ways you have taught in the past?
T: At times, yes.
I: Ok, uh, can you describe a time when you witnessed the RAC having an influence in the school either positive or negative?
T: Um, I do believe some of their interventions are in a positive way, and we should all be
opened up to new ideas and new ways of teaching. You know, they've pushed learning centers, group work, more technology, and in some cases that’s, that has worked out well, um I also think that it is a priority school but I also believe that the urban district has its own personality, and some things that they have suggested are not conducive to this type of environment and I only wish that they take a snap shot of a day or um a class time and its not the whole picture unless you see the whole picture I think then there’s judgment that can be passed but its very difficult for a teacher to see their way of thinking when they don’t see the whole picture.

I: Um is there a time that you had dealings or interactions with the RAC team that you can remember?

T: Um, I do remember a time when they came in, um, it was last year so it was 2014/15 school year and observed a lesson of mine and when I sat down to listen to the results I was a little take aback that one of their comments was they didn't like where my desk was, and I find that very (laughs) I was a little taken aback by that. I would think that you were here to observe my teaching not to where I placed my furniture, I found it very...

I: And whom did you receive the feedback from?

T: The principal.

I: Did you ever receive feedback from them or was it always from

T: interrupting No, the principal, passed down

I: So besides being taken aback did it make you feel any other type of way?

T: What do you mean?

I: When they gave you feedback and told you that your desk was in the wrong place did it make you feel any other way?

T: No, I just think all teachers are very territorial about their classroom, this is home away from
home and I don’t think that another set of people should just come in and pass judgment as to where you know a teacher places her desk or therefore even the students desk, this is what makes her room work its a personal thing and yeah I did feel taken aback and very territorial.

I: So did they give you any positive feedback about your teaching?

T: Yes, I’m a wonderful teacher. Laughing

I: How are the interventions from the RAC team different from any other interventions you have seen in your district?

T: From different kinds of people walking in, other than them, I think they are all looking for the same thing, from the superintendent down, they are all looking for the structure of the..students understanding the objectives and, does the lesson move forward, from administrators, RAC team, same thing.

I: How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced teachers and teacher’s practices in your buildings? Have they had an influence?

T: Yes, You have to do it. You have no choice. You have to do it their way whether you like it or not. Some teachers like to do more direct teaching rather than um you know present something in a mini lesson and then it falls upon the children to carry it through and you know I feel some teachers are very pressured into rushing the lessons so that they keep with the structure that the RAC team has set up and its very its you know minute by minute fifteen minutes for this, twenty minutes for that, so I do think that they have an influence over the teachers work day, yes.

I: So they provide a schedule that you are supposed to follow?

T: Yes.

I: Can you tell me about a particular aspect of your classroom practice that you have changed, something that you are doing differently as a result of the RAC interventions?
T: Right, I do do literature circles, group work, I guess I'm more of the old school direct teaching but I have let a lot of that go and I do a lot of one on one conferencing, we have very large classes so I feel that some students are left out of the picture that I don’t reach that day, so yes my practices have changed I have grown
I: So you've improved?
T: In the eyes of the RAC maybe but I don't always agree with it....
I: What do you think you would be doing differently if the RAC team wasn't in the building?
T: Having fun teaching.
I: So their interventions have taken the fun out of teaching?
T: Taken the fun out of teaching. Too many deadlines. too many tests. too much teaching to the test, to o many skills being told when to teach the skill, how to teach the skill, um common assessments, every teacher teaches differently, no two teachers should be giving the same test at the end of every week because they didn't all teach it during that time.
I: Does the RAC team have you giving common tests?
T: yes.
I: How often?
T: Its twice a month now because the units are short so in that 6-8 week period its twice a month.
I: And then is it an end of unit assessment?
T: Well from what I understand um we should be done right now, there used to be five, four or five, but I think now its just two, nobody has given us a straight answer on that.
I: and is that something that you think happens a lot? You don't get straight answers from anyone
T: Um, I think that people don't know how to pass information along properly and it's a lot of I don't know, I will find out, I will get back to you, and it gets swepted underneath the carpet
before the next meeting, and a lot of the interventions don't get started early enough in the year, so if they see something that is not working and then all of a sudden in April they wanna try something new well you should have tried that in September.

I: Ok, so um, teacher efficacy is when a teacher feels like they are able to impact or influence their students successfully, and it is actually one thing that has been found to have an effect on students in areas of poverty. Have the RAC interventions influenced how you feel about your efficacy?

T: No. I think that my personality is too strong to really let it affect how I'm teaching. um, no. Maybe not, maybe I don't feel as accomplished during certain periods of time during the marking period because I am waylaid because of how much is expected to be done but no its not gonna affect how I teach or how I feel about teaching

I: So you're in the district a long time, how about a teacher who is not here that long

T: I think that it is very overwhelming for a new teacher but then again they haven't set their ways yet so it is easy to mold somebody who is new versus someone who has been teaching a very long time, um and I think, I don’t know if you mean young people or new teachers

I: Just a new teacher, someone who is new to the profession

T: Yeah, someone who is new to the profession I think they are easier to take on some new ways, they are not set in their ways yet like old timers.

I: Um, has the RAC team and their involvement in the schools influenced how you perceive your school?

(pause)

I: like do you look at your school in a different way because of their involvement?

T: No, I think there is so much going on in our school building it is just another added, you
know, another just another thing to do...you know teachers have to be multi task ed, they have to be able to, every year it is something new, I have been working here for 16 years and this year I'm on my twelfth principal so every year that a new principal came on a lot of things could change or little things could change and you just have to be able to go with the flow, you know that's the nature of the profession,

I: Do you think the principal turnaround, does that have anything to do with the state or with RAC?
T: you know, I 'm sure it does, I’m sure the movement from one they don't become stagnant, I think they think one would do better in another school, some have done very well, but they move they move em around, I think its very hard on the teachers, you have to become accepting, you don’t know, its a whole new personality that you have to get used to everyone has their own way of doing things, everyone runs it differently, its a business

I: can you describe a time that RAC interventions have influenced your school?
T: I think they've tried to influence our school and of course in a positive way, from children walking down the hallway, the cafeteria, they, the last thing that has been influenced is that we've created a fourth lunch because they felt that our population is so large that is wasn't safe to have that many students in one period, and that has caused a little bit of problems because teachers’ schedules have changed, but again, you have to be able to go with it, this is a job, there’s no choice.

I: um, you mentioned two times that teachers just "had to do it" do you know, what happens if the teachers don't follow the mandates or the interventions? Have you seen any pushback?
T: well I haven’t seen any repercussions from it but I know that if you don’t follow orders it's insubordination, um, it's like any other job, there are rules and you have to follow the rules. I
think that everything that has been put forth in front of us has only been put there for a positive reason. Everyone wants to make something that is not right or good or to be in the right place as far as scores, I mean they have great intentions, and I am sure that they have read or written many books but its not always what they put forth is going to make it right. You have to live here, you have to breathe here, you have to know the again the environment, you have to know the students and where they are coming from and years ago you were ’t aloud to put you know, don't touch the student, now they want you to embrace them they come with so much baggage, every year it's a different approach

I: How do you feel that interventions have influenced student achievement in a priority schools? Has student achievement changed in your eyes?

T: No, because if student achievement has changed we wouldn't be a priority school anymore. I don't see our scores, if anything I don’t think our scores are high I think they are on the low side compared to the years past, um I don’t think its improved at all no, again, if they would just let teachers teach,

I: and then the last question is about climate and culture. How do you feel the RAC presence has influenced climate and culture in the building?

T: Well that I think is a good idea, um, and not to put down anybody that, my own colleagues, but I think every room should be a learning environment, and some rooms aren't I’ll be honest with you, but I think that push for a good climate and culture, a positive mood, and some teachers you know still don’t do it. Celebration of work, that should be you know something where you know that should be up and it should be current, word walls, but you you cant force people, they have to do what’s comfortable for them but I Do believe, I know for me it has pushed me to have a different kind of room.
I: And how do you think the teachers, how is the feeling of the teachers as a whole? Do they feel like the RAC is helping do they feel like the RAC is bullying?

T: It's stress. I think they see the RAC as it's stressful. I would rather have the RAC walk in on a classroom in any given day, not knowing they are coming, then prepare for a RAC visit.

I: So they have scheduled visits and teachers prepare for those visits?

T: I, I, believe they do. And if you're a good teacher and you are here for the sole reason of teaching you should be prepared at any time any day, and I would rather have it be like that then be on my toes, I'm on my toes all day long, and I'll be the first to say I work very hard, I shouldn’t have to put on a show, what did we call that, a dog and pony, horse and pony show....

I: Do you know what they are looking for when they come in?

T: I think they are looking for the three part objective, you know, their learning, which is all a give, they are looking for less direct teaching and more students talking, turning and talking and discussing their outcomes, all in a snapshot they are gonna see this.

I: How long do they stay when they come in?

T: um, not long, fifteen minutes. Maybe the better teachers they stay longer.

I: And do they provide any type of training or any sort of professional development?

T: Well, I think the PLC’s is where we pick up on where we are not doing well, and it directs our teaching to areas that we could improve, areas we are weak

I: and the teachers decide that or the RAC?

T: I think that your administrator brings that to you from the RAC, I am sure they have their meetings and then it just dominoes down to us.

I: Ok, thank you very much.

T: you're welcome.
Today is December, I’m sorry January 7th, 3:30 p.m. this is interview one with teacher C.

Today we are going to talk about the RAC interventions that are taking place in your priority school which you’ve been working in for the past three years, um how often have you had contact or interaction with the RAC team?

T: Uhhhh, well, let’s see in the first year they were here we had a few professional developments with them, meetings I guess, if you would even call em professional developments they showed us some Powerpoints they attended our meetings, then the second year they started doing walkthroughs, which is where they came into your classroom whenever they felt like it, it seems like they were doing that, I felt like they were in my classroom about every other week, I don’t know how many times they went into other classrooms but I felt like my classroom was pretty common and uh, then we had some scheduled checkups I guess maybe a qsac or some time of yearly quarterly review something like that and you knew which room they were going to and you were given a big checklist to make sure you had this and make sure you had that, so this year, uh I don’t know I haven’t seen much this year at our weekly meetings, we have a head literacy person and she comes to most of our meetings so I guess once a week, but they come less into the classroom this year

I: Ok and uh, during these walkthroughs that you mentioned, you said you would know ahead of time which rooms they were coming in?

T: Yeah, for the quarterly review or twice a year one I guess, we would hear it ahead of time you were selected off a list I guess the administration selected maybe the twelve best teachers they wanted them to go into their rooms I guess we were told about a week ahead of time to give you time to plan you know a lesson, make sure your room was up to par, that kind of stuff
I: So, what exactly were they looking for when they would come in for a through?
T: Well some of the things I remember off the list were no boxes piled up to the ceiling, students working in groups, um make sure your student is able to recite the objective, make sure you have a three part objective on the board, um make sure whatever you are teaching is the objective on the board, we would be told we had to have current student work posted, there was a format for how we should post it, we always have to provide comments on everything we post, and you know those things change from time to time, at first it was don’t post comments then it was you have to post comments so its always something different but yeah there was a big check list going around
I: ok, and what would happen if you didn’t do those things during the walkthroughs?
T: well, sigh, we were given feedback from the administration, not every time, but one time in particular they sent out a memo that they found out of 12 classrooms they found number one in classroom abc and d, and number two they found number two in classrooms b, c, d, and e, and teachers didn’t like that
I: Ok, was your classroom one of the ones that was singled out?
T: Yeah, for that particular instance mine had shown up as having all the things they were looking for so
I: Ok, and how did you feel about that?
T: Well I guess I felt proud that it had all the things they were looking for, but there was a lot of complaints to the union, the teachers who didn’t have all the things they were looking for felt singled out
I: Ok, um, what interventions have there been in your school as a result of the Regional Achievement Center?
T: Hmm….interventions, well, I guess there’s always different things that we are told, and we are never really told who it comes from, so for example uh three part objectives was something we had to have, we had to have three part objectives, so we were given some, some power points on how to have three part objectives, and then everyone who came into your room, administration included, was looking for three part objectives make sure you have three part objectives, uh, less teacher instruction, no worksheets, no workbooks, ummm, they wanted to see groups and uh last year I guess there was a huge push for check for understanding, there was no check for understanding going on, so we actually were told once I remember at a meeting, if the RAC team walks in no matter what you are doing do a check for understanding a turn for talk, turn and talk sorry um, thumbs up thumbs down. I remember uh actually it was two years ago I guess, maybe even three I’m not sure, the RAC team had come in and they were uh pretty young I would say they looked to be about in their early twenties and I know they couldn’t have been teaching that long, and they gave us a whole presentation on check for understandings, and I thought it was odd because the whole time the young kid didn’t do a single check for understanding, he just talked to us about check for understanding and then he would say things to us do you understand? Do you know what I mean and I just thought it was odd, you wanna teach us how to do check for understandings but you yourself are not checking correctly for understanding, so for me myself I just felt like if your gonna give us a lecture at least give us someone who is going to teach us correctly what to do, and they never really did that, they never taught us what to do they just told us to do it so, uh, that’s one of the things let me see… really just have the bulletin boards up have current work up like I said earlier they wanted feedback then they didn’t want feedback, it changes, you don’t know what comes from who
I: Ok, so, I guess you talked a little about the mandates that have been handed down is there any other mandate that was handed down that you've been told you have to do
T: No, pretty much other than what I just said, I mean if I think of something I'll say it but I think I just gave you a few
I: OK, so we can come back to that if you think of anything
I: Um how would you describe the role of the RAC interventions in the priority school? If you were to describe them.
T: well the RAC team is a uh implementation team from the state that is a team of supposed specialists who are here to uh help the team supposedly get out of priority status and uh you know move from a failing school and raise our test scores, its all about test scores, really to them I think its mostly about test scores. The role what did you say the role of their interventions, I think the role is supposed to be helpful its supposed to be to get us out of priority school status. Has anything been shown to do that nah I don’t think so…um the role of intervention, I you know like anything else, any intervention its meant d to help, or look like its helping, but you know, they have to justify their own existence really. Its coming from the state, I don’t believe its uh, I don’t believe it’s a team of people who absolutely know the best thing for education, their solution is assessing, assessment assessment assessment, so, you can give all the kids you want an assessment, if they just keep failing it your not really doing any difference
I: So what would you say your experience has been like with the RAC interventions?
T: My experience. Well they’ve been in my classroom a lot as far as saying anything to me personally we haven’t had very much contact so my experience with like uh, like a thorn in my side I guess you know they there and its not going away and its just kind of a nuisance
I: Can you describe a time when you had an intervention I’m sorry an interaction with them and it was maybe something positive?

T: Well, uh, yeah one time they did come into my classroom a lot and I would say probably last year it was a new lady I had never seen here before and she came up to me afterwards telling me how positive everything was and how she loved my atmosphere and how I related to the students she kind of came out of her way after the class was over to tell me that and I was taken I was kind of like taken by surprise because I’ve never really heard anything from them face to face other than uh you know maybe a hi if that at a meeting but I was kind of surprised

I: Ok and how about anything ever negative with them? Did you ever have any negative interactions with them?

T: Uh, personally like geared towards me no but geared towards the school or my colleagues yeah they’ve said negative things and been quite negative.

I: Ok, can you give me an example when that happened

T: Well one of my colleagues I remember a story or uh well she had come to me crying right afterwards that they had gone to her classroom and apparently it was half way through the lesson and they hadn’t seen her model a lesson yet I guess she was doing test review or something and they called her out in front of her students basically she was crying and said she felt embarrassed and just like it was so unprofessional and you know, they chastised her in front of her class and I don’t think that’s very professional I just don’t think you should do that

I: and I imagine she felt terrible about it since she was crying

T: yeah she was upset about it for days, but you know, you move on

I: Ok thank you, so how did that make you feel?
T: Well I guess I was relieved it wasn’t me, I mean I take my job very seriously and I know I try very hard to do a good job, so I think I would be really angry I guess if that happened to me...and upset

I: Can you describe some influence that you’ve witnessed them having over the school?

T: Oh yeah they have a ton of influence over the school I mean the whole atmosphere of the school has changed its pretty negative and we used to hear constantly how we were failing and how it was basically the blame game we were being blamed almost that it was our fault that our kids were failing and how it was our fault and how we had no classroom management and we had no this and you know they try to make us feel a certain way but come on, I mean the test scores have been the way they are for a long time, and the RAC team is a new thing and it’ll come it’ll go and uh, you know at the end of the day, blaming teachers is not the way to go, its not teacher problem it’s a society problem society is the one who just looks the other way at so many kids who are not reading on grade level and so many kids who can’t do the math so you know we can blame whoever we want but until we start looking at the root problem then nothing is gonna change

I: and what do you think the root problem is?

T: Oh it’s the poverty! You know you look at the facts it’s the poverty. Parents don’t get involved they don’t have the tools to get involved, they don’t know what the kids are doing because they never learned it themselves you know it’s a lot of young mothers or single mothers or fathers in jail you know it’s a problem it’s a society problem you look at the city and you know the city is a mess...and not just here, either.
I: Uuhh, so back to when you had said um you described how you felt when they gave you a positive comment, how about when they gave negative comments, how did you feel when that happened?

T: To be honest I felt like it was a uh load of crap if I can speak my mind freely, you can’t walk into a group and tell them 0% of them were doing it right that’s asinine. You know that’s just there’s no place for that kind of put downs were professionals we are all educated we went to school we have degrees we’ve been doing this a long time.

I: Ok, um, how are the interventions of the past three years different from previous interventions than you’ve seen.

T: Well I don’t know if the RAC interventions are really any different we always had walkthroughs but usually it was administration and now its administration and the literacy leader, the RAC team the superintendent. So it’s just the amount of people in your room. Whatever superintendent we have comes with a new initiative a new agenda so I don’t know that its exactly the RAC team so I guess its just their presence and the label, the label of being a priority school we were never labeled before I mean you knew what schools weren’t doing well because of the school report cards and everything but we were never labeled like priority failing bad school, now I feel its like a label.

I: All right, so how do you feel RAC interventions have influenced teachers and changed their practices?

T: Well its changed a lot, you know, for language arts they rearranged the whole language arts block, we are on a very tight schedule, I mean you have 5 minutes for a do now you have ten minutes for a read aloud you have ten minutes for a mini lesson twenty minutes for a work period uh five minutes for sharing and five minutes closing we are pretty much stuck to a
schedule, oh uh, three days of readers workshop, two days of writers workshop, I don’t know if that’s district or RAC wide but it’s a mandate, and I’m sure the two have something to do with each other but your basically told what to teach when to teach following the model curriculum, when to test how to test we gotta give tests on the computer through a program called edconnect where the students have to type in their answers half of them don’t even know how to type they don’t get the practice on the computer, they say its all practice for the parcc but I don’t know we just uh its definitely a change from the past, less freedom.

I: And do you think these have had a positive influence on your classroom?

T: no, no no, its time wasted, time wasted taking all the kids and putting them on a computer giving them a test every uh 5-6 weeks it doesn’t give you enough time to get into the unit school starts in September by the middle of October you’re already giving them the first test you’ve had maybe three weeks of actual teaching going on they all fail its expected they’re all I mean you know they are all going to fail and I mean your classroom is labeled you talk about your scores through the whole school how each classroom did it’s a setup for failure it really is

I: and so can you describe a particular aspect of your classroom practice that has changed due to their interventions

T: uh I kind of just did I mean the whole schedule of testing your on a rigid schedule of what you gotta teach and when you gotta test it.

I: What would you be doing differently if the RAC team wasn’t in your school

T: Pshh….everything! Probably teaching a lot of novels and let the kids explore fiction, you know the common core the push is on non-fiction and I don’t think that’s how you get kids to wanna read I mean yeah sure they wanna learn and non fiction has a place, there’s a place for
that in science and social studies but literature I think we’re killing the way that our kids love to
read we’re shoving non-fiction down their throat and you know three quarters of my kids say
they hate to read, they hate to read so they don’t even wanna try, you gotta hook them with a
good book,
I: ok thank you so how have the RAC interventions affected your feelings about your ability to
influence your classroom
T: Uh I mean its natural when you’re told your class is not doing well its natural you question
yourself you know am I doing the best? No I think I could do better if I didn’t have them telling
me every second what to do, if I could have some freedom to teach, there’s an art to teaching and
when you try to script it its like a robot you’re not gonna reach the kids so I try to do my own
style even though I still have to follow certain rules but I think I could do better without having
them uh down my neck.
I: All right um how have the RAC interventions influenced your perspective uh your perception
of your school
T: Uh I mean sometimes you look at it and you feel like we’re lost..like there’s no hope but you
know like I said before everything comes and goes with education and I thin the RAC team is not
here to stay forever so uh I guess this makes me look at my school and wish it was different,
wish we had the freedom you know teachers had some freedom

I: Can you describe a time when the RAC interventions had an influence on the school
T: yeah well they influence the principal I think they meet with the principal every day she has a
mentor from the RAC team overseeing everything she says and does so I’m sure that has an
influence over the school. I think they just have a presence and it the presence is a weight or a
cloud hanging over your shoulders but you know sometimes people forget about it until the walkthroughs are coming up or the quarterly review whatever they call it and then its like a big production everybody’s got to get everything in order and then it should just be like that all the time where its just in order all the time and maybe then we wouldn’t need the RAC team I don’t know (Cough) excuse me

I: all right, how do you feel the RAC team interventions have influenced student achievement in your school?

T: Nah, I don’t think they have influenced student achievement, I mean our scores were always bad but you know there’s no, the test is not tied to anything there’s no grade given there’s no repercussion given there’s no assistance given to kids who can’t pass the test so your just constantly testing them testing them I think um intervention would be better extra help extra hours Saturday classes early education retesting them every six weeks just ensures they still won’t know.

I: Could you talk about these assessments for a minute what are these assessments that you’re talking of

T: Well every six weeks we give a I guess a state test a RAC test I think we have to give them just because we are a priority school I don’t think they’re giving them in any other type of school but I’m not sure about that they’re given on the computer, which there’s always a problem with the computer delivery students have to type in their answers they are usually multiple choice although in other years there were open endeds where the student was expected to write long answers um I think the questions are beguiling and misleading and the…quite frankly I think its material our, the kind of material our students will never read, or are never exposed to it could be a text from the 1800s um the questions are misleading or the answers I know several teachers
have complained they think the answers are wrong or the scoring pattern seems to be uh changes so it’s time consuming, frustrating, so has it influenced student achievement I don’t, I don’t see our students reading any better and I don’t think you know its hard to tell because we’ve moved from the uh..um (pause) …we moved to the PARCC test so we can’t really compare those test results to any other test results but their not good, I don’t think any of NJ did good, so I don’t know if that’s gonna stay either.

I: How do you think the RAC interventions have influenced instruction in the priority school?
T: I think they just put a lot of mandates I don’t know if they have influenced in a positive way its just, its kind of like the teacher teaching with one hand tied behind their back uh you hear complaints in other modalities math I guess where teachers are complaining they have to teach a whole new way its good to teach in new ways its good to try new things but you should have the freedom, teachers need freedom.

I: And how do you think the RAC has influenced climate and culture?
T: Oh negative. Negative negative negative. Teachers don’t want to be here. You got teachers counting down the days to retirement, teachers who can’t wait to get out of here, teachers who feel stuck.

I: And is that because it’s a priority school?
T: Well its stressful. I mean its added stress, you know, one thing after another you feel like, every six weeks you turn around you gotta do another test, then its something else we’re constantly giving SRI to test their reading levels or SMI to test their Math levels this year its iREADY to test their levels and then we gotta give the PARCC and then the PARCC again and then its benchmark after benchmark, teachers are frustrated they don’t feel like they are doing a good job, climate and culture is downhill, students don’t feel good about their school they feel
it’s a you know they have a posit I’m sorry they have a negative attitude about their school anyway its just not in their culture but then the RAC team will come in and ask students what are you learning why are you learning this how are you going to be tested and the students they don’t wanna hear that, they feel like, sometimes they feel like who’s this who’s coming into the room why are they asking me this they feel under pressure when they are asked those kinds of questions they are supposed to be learning and instead they are busy worrying if they memorized what they are supposed to say its not right

I: Do you think that teachers feel the same way?

T: Oh absolutely I have heard many of my colleagues complaining when the states about to come in or how many times they’ve had somebody in their classroom and you know it seems like they keep going in the same classrooms and its unfortunate because they are not getting a true picture they are getting a set up kind of posed picture as opposed to a real true painting of what the school looks like you know you could tell me you are coming in tomorrow and I could make the room look perfect and have the class act perfect and then the next day it could just go back to being chaos you know you got good teachers and bad teachers like any other district any other school in the country they should see that I think sometimes they are blinded they are looking so hard to find something bad they miss the good things going on and its frustrating. I know other teachers feel like that we talk about it constantly it comes up in our union meetings teachers feel stressed out.

I: OK well is there anything else you would like to say anything else you would like to include or add about your experiences with the RAC team for now?

T: No that’s about it I think I’ve said everything I wanted to say for now

I: Ok thank you
I: Today is Wednesday Dec 16 and this is interview one with teacher D. We will be discussing the RAC team and their interventions in the Priority School that you are working in. About how often would you say you have had contact with the RAC team?

T: Maybe once or twice a year at most.

I: And is that when they are coming into your classroom or coming into meetings?

T: They are usually coming into the classroom with the principal to observe what is going on, looking for non-negotiables and objectives, and our room, the usual stuff, how the room is set up, what you are doing.

I: Ok, what interventions have there been in your school as a result of the interventions from the Regional Achievement Center?

T: Uh, most recently they have rescheduled the lunches from three to four, that is the only thing that I have seen by them that I have noticed that is a change done by them. Uh, this year in particular I really don’t see much of them, I couldn't tell you who the lead for RAC looks like this year.

I: And in previous years have they had other interventions?

T: Uh,

I: Mandates that they have handed down?

T: Well with Language Arts, and I ’m sure with math, Language Arts they wanted you to teach a certain way at a certain time it was almost like a we want you to do this type of writing within this time frame. It's like a revised curriculum sort of thing.

I: So all of the Language Arts teachers were to be teaching the same thing at the same time?

T: Right. Say it was argumentative writing or compare and contrast or it was reading the same
I: And did they ever tell you how to teach those things or just to teach them?
T: To teach them, they never really taught us or told us how to teach them. They would come in years ago and model a lesson, nothing we didn't already know how to do.
I: So were the model lessons helpful?
T: Repetitive. They were repetitive.
I: So how would you describe the role of RAC interventions in a priority school?
T: Ineffective.
I: Can you elaborate a little bit on why you think that?
T: Uh, um,,I do not see any difference, in fact I see things regressing because teachers should be give more leniency in how they teach and what they teach, following the curriculum but different teachers have different styles in teaching different ways.
I: So how would you describe their influence in the school? What would you say their influence has been?
T: Other other than a forcing the change in the schedule and the change in the lunch patterns due to their oversize I don’t know what the heck they are doing, to be honest with you. I really don't I wish I could tell you but this year I really do not know.
I: So other than seeing them in the building and meetings a few times, you don't hear from them.
T: No contact. They haven't been in my classroom, and it is now December. They are always welcome. You know if they want to give input they are always welcome. I don’t know what they are doing. If they are behind closed doors all the time with the principal or if they are going through the principal I am not sure.
I: Overall, what would you say your experience has been like with the RAC?
T: I uh, I don't have any particular opinion on it because I don't rally deal with them in any way other than seeing one at a meeting here and then. I really don’t let them affect me to be honest with you.

I: can you describe a time when you witnessed their interventions having an influence on the school? You mentioned the uh

T: The the lunch schedule has changed to try and eliminate the lunches were too big I wish they had done it in September I believe it was recommended but it wasn’t implemented and then that that caused a wee bit of chaos but I guess they had to do that because I I don’t have an issue with that it just made the schedule crazy

I: Ok and when did they do that

T: They did that in um I believe mid October is probably id to second or third week of October it was enforced

I: Ok, so it was chaotic when it was enforced how is it now

T: Its chaotic but I don’t necessarily believe its the lunchroom change that’s made it chaotic its just the uh uh I haven’t seen it like this in I guess a good fifteen years in terms of chaos. Pause I think one of our major problems is I don’t believe discipline is being enforced

I: does the RAC have any influence on the influence in the building?

T: I would assume so, but I cant answer for sure ummm uuum I’m assumin' I’m making an assumption that the principal has to be the mouthpiece for the RAC leader whoever that may be right now.

I: Can you describe one interaction you have had with the RAC team?

T: other than coming in to my room and observing and asking me to show data or a portfolio not really um I've always been on the impression that when they come in and see such things like
that and you can answer what you’re doing and why your doing it and here’s the data and they
kind of move on to the next class.
I: So more of a they can talk to you but only speak to them if they are asking you something?
T: Yeah yeah I have uh I just don’t initiate other than saying hello or good morning
I: So if you had to contact a RAC person to find out something about a mandate would you be
able to do that?
T: uh I guess through enough inquiry yeah I would I couldn’t tell you right off the top of my
head who it would be nor do I have the data to look myself
I: So you’d have to dig a little bit, yeah
T: How would you say that interventions through the RAC are different than other interventions
you may have had in the past here?
I: Uhhhh I think the interventions in this school aren't working I don’t have an answer on that to
be honest with you. I think that our major problem right now is its just chaotic and it makes it
very difficult to implement anything when a school is chaotic
T: and you mentioned earlier you think its worse than in fifteen years?
T: I do I think... I truly believe that....
I: How do you feel the RAC team has influenced teacher practices in the building
T: I don’t really think they have other than uh suggesting what you should be teaching and how
you should be teaching it I mentioned earlier something like argumentative writing or something
like that or a particular strategy other than that they really aren’t doing anything I deem truly
effective.
I: so earlier you mentioned the walkthroughs with the principal I think you said once or twice a
year. How do you think that influences the teachers?
T: Uh it depends on the teacher. If the teacher is prepared and knows what he or she is doing then it’s not intimidating at all uh I think it may put teachers on panic mode but I think that’s up to the particular teacher if you are doing your job then you have nothing to worry about
I: and did it ever intimidate you? were you ever intimidated?
T: No. Nope. But to be fair I’m not a third or fourth year, I’m not in my third or fourth year I’m well over 20 years so I’ve pretty much seen all kinds of, I’ve seen every kind of principal and know pretty much what to worry about and what not to.
I: How do you feel they might influence a third or fourth year teacher
T: Well think that that teacher when they see the principal or a RAC leader come in just may feel intimidated due to the nature of being a young or new teacher and I think that they can be influenced more by a RAC team member or a principal than say a veteran teacher
I: Can you kind of paint a picture for me of what a walkthrough is like?
T: they walk through at any given moment, just go off and look around, they’ll ask students what are they learning what are they doing, show me, on occasion they'll ask to see a portfolio or a data binder or ask to see where your lesson plan is.
I: and this is while you are teaching?
T: Yeah, this is uh um to be fair if the kids are doing learning centers or something like that you do have a moment where you can interact with an adult and the students are still doing work that is student driven.
I: Do you think it influences the students when they come in to do these walkthroughs?
T: Um yeah I think they they have the us who's this approach and ultimately it depends on the class if you have a class that’s uh driven to learn they they wanna know who it is but if you have a class that’s quite the opposite they probably will be just not interested in whoever comes in
I: And do you receive any feedback on any of these walkthroughs?

T: On occasion through a principal I’ve never gotten feedback from a RAC person unless its perhaps a collective staff meeting where its a data presentation and they’ve seen 71% of the classes had objectives on the board so and so had essential questions but they never give names its always a number.

I: and do you have those types of data meeting often?

T: in the past we have had them maybe once every two months or so I think we've had one data driven meeting this year where it was really based on the I believe based on what RAC was seeing.

I: And was that data helpful?

T: The data was obvious. It wasn't helpful. It’s obvious.

I: Do they ever provide suggestions for improvement or do they just show you what they found?

T: Usually they are just showing you what they found, I haven’t seen any worthwhile suggestions or improvement until this point and I don’t believe I ever have to be honest with you.

I: Is there any particular part of your classroom practice that has changed as a result of these interventions.

T: No. no there really hasn’t. No. I can’t say I doing anything different from what I was doing nine or ten years ago unless I’m stealing it from a teachers that’s got a really good lesson.

I: Is there anything you would be doing differently if the RAC team was not prevalent in the building?

T: Uh, no other than perhaps I would teach less toward the state test because that’s obviously a real priority.

I: when you talk about the state test you’re talking about...
T: in the past it was the NJASK, now it’s the PARCC

I: Are there any other tests that you have to give based on the RAC team?

T: Well in language arts we have the benchmarks but the benchmarks are stringent looking at the data looking to see how the kids are doing with a particular skill

I: And in language arts how often do they have the benchmarks

T: Uh, there’s 5 during the course of the year I think it got switched down to five over the course of the year.

I: Do you think that the RAC interventions have influenced teacher efficacy in the building

T: NO I think that’s up to the teacher I don’t think RAC can have anything to do with that. good teachers have good rapports for kids and trying to help all kids as well as they can I don't the RAC has anything to do with that.

I: How has the intervention had any effect on how you view your school

T: I don’t see uh any improvement in my school I see I see the school probably stagnant is probably the best word, I’ve been here a long time I don’t wanna see anything happen to it uh but I haven’t seen there’s nothing fantastic been done while RA has been here I’m sure other people think the opposite as far as looking at data and seeing improvement but I don’t see any of it.

I: Do you see improvement in students you see year after year?

T: I did, I saw improvement as far as students wanting to learn and being respectful I think it’s taken a turn for the worst in the last year and a half

I: so you kind of answered our next question if they’ve influenced student achievement

T: IF RAC is? No I don’t think so. But we all know to be fair, I didn’t expect grades to be that low for PARCC but I knew they would be much lower.

I: Overall how do you think the RA has influenced instruction in a priority school?
T: Uh I um I’m I you know its ineffective. I don’t think they have. I can speak to the younger teachers, I don’t know what they are bringing us to the table that will enable us to succeed.

I: How do you think they've influenced climate and culture?

They haven’t influenced climate and culture. If nothing you just know that someone’s over your shoulder watching you and that intimidates you um it should be more I think RAC should be more the company should present itself as more of a helping company they look like someone that may be here just for a diabolical reason.

I: And what do you think that diabolical reason could be

T: Privatizing the school charter schools

I: is that something that comes us between the teachers? Are they worried about the school becoming privatized or turning into a charter school?

T: Some. some are worried about that some think it could possibly happen

I: Anything else that you would like to add or something that we haven’t talked about?

T: No I’m looking forward to retirement its too far way (laughter).

I: Today is Wednesday January 6th and this is interview one with teacher W. Um we’re here today to talk about the RAC interventions that are taking place in your priority school. And, about how often have you had contact or interactions with the RAC team?

T: Uh, I saw the principal coach today in a PLC meeting, they had no conversation with us they just observed, I last saw the math coach about a month ago and the last time I saw the math coach before that was about a month before, but in the fall, from September to December I saw the math coach every week.

I: Ok, so you mostly see the math coach and you see her about once a month?

T: Yes
I: But more in the beginning of the school year?

T: Yeah. And the principal coach came to one of our PLC’s.

I: Do you know how often the principal coach comes in?

T: I have no clue. She could be in the building all day but unless she comes into my room or into a PLC I wouldn’t know she’s here.

I: What interventions have there been in the school as a result of the Regional Achievement Center?

T: We added a lunch, we went from three lunches to four lunches. That was a very disruptive thing, but it was good that we did it.

I: Do you know why they did that?

T: They said that it was dangerous to have that many students in transition and in the lunch room at the same time and there wasn’t enough seats for the kids in the lunch. So it was a smart move to make. It was just very messily delivered. I don’t know that it could be done without being a mess but it was a mess.

I: Do you know of any interventions or any things that you have to do in the school because of the RAC suggestions or?

T: The school as a whole, no. Math, because I’m a math teacher, I know that there’s lots of things that the math teachers have to do

I: Can you give me an example?

T: I can give you a number of examples. One is that we changed the order of our curriculum, so because it’s a priority school we're supposed to follow the New Jersey Model Curriculum so first we changed the order of the five units, then we modified the units, then we modified the units again, then we changed the order of the modified units
I: Anything as far as how you teach, what to teach, when to teach, anything like that?

T: Yes, we’ve had to um, how do I describe this un-mathematically…

I: You can describe it mathematically; I’m pretty good at math…(giggles)

T: (laughing) I’m sure you are. Statistics and what not. We’ve had to counting, like literally counting around the room, first counting by ones, then tens then multiples of ten, counting backwards, counting down by ten counting down by hundreds, we had to work with blocks I forget what the blocks are called, base ten blocks so we had to do area models and volume models with blocks and count. I would hold up the blocks and if I’d hold up one of these they’d know to go one hundred, two hundred…

I: Ok, so.

T: This is a ten block…

I: Using manipulatives,

T: Using manipulatives but very specific manipulatives and so we would count tens so I wouldn’t say ten twenty thirty, I’d say one ten, two tens, three tens, four tens, five tens, because they really did as a school bite on place value.

I: and did they provide any professional development for this um teaching

T: yes the math coach did um

I: Was the professional development helpful?

T: It was insufficient it was helpful it was good it was passionate it was well though out, what it lacked was…inaudible…

I: You said it was good it was helpful…what it lacked was…

T: Bringing all the teachers together on one page, talking about all the what ifs and how to make it granting enough time to bring about the change, proficient professional development to
practice it and change our behaviors, sufficient time to change our students behavior, and this was a professional development where you are shoving something in and any time you push something in to instruction something comes out, but we didn’t modify the curriculum like we still had to parallel work like we had to do this plus…. I: Oh so you were doing both at the same time.

T: Right. And they don’t mesh well, and it didn’t mesh well with many teachers I like our math leader, she’s a PhD mathematician, she’s taught middle school math when she did all of her students all were meeting standards, but she teaches in a completely different way so you have to kind of jump into the deep end and adopt her ways, and the union pushed back and kept her out of the classrooms so right in the middle of the mess as we are just starting to get confident she disappears, stops being in communication, withdraws from being with us because of the union saying she can’t be in the classroom unless the union is in the room, so all of the math support disappears, and you fall back to the ways you’ve always done things and how you were taught. I: So, two things just to clarify. One you said the PD was through the math leader, was that through the RAC math leader? Or was that.. T: No the RAC coach. Dr __________.

I: So the RAC provided the training T: and also the district because they paid for us, we also had time afterschool where we got paid to go to this not everyone went but I got good at it

I: So it wasn’t mandatory training

T: It wasn’t well there was both there was PLCs and there was optional available paid after school training and last June, after school was offer there was three days where we could come back
I: And then the union pushed back against the RAC being in the building and said she couldn’t be in the building.

T: They said she couldn’t be in your room without an administrator or a math leader or a literacy leader being in the room.

I: And now are they allowed in without a math leader or a literacy leader?

T: I don’t think so. So Dr. C. has not been in my classroom since.

I: And how long ago was that would you say?

T: I think the last time was in December. And if I got that right what’s now, so there’s another change, and they’ve done a lousy job communicating to everyone what is going on, Dr. C. has only been going for the last three weeks has only been going to the sixth grade PLCs and is now only going to focus on implementing the sixth grade because its easier and the sixth graders are more willing to adopt this and so you know if we do it this whole year with sixth graders then next year they’ll be doing it as seventh graders so we’ll be doing sixth and seventh and then the next year the eight graders will be doing it so it will be sixth seventh and eight graders.

I: Ok so how would you describe the role of RAC interventions and their influence in a priority school?

T: Their role? Well their role is defined by them.

I: Is defined by them, is that what you said?

T: That’s their job to define their role. I mean are you asking me to interpret their role?

I: How would you view their role in the school, like um,

T: Well there role is supposed to take us, all their actions are supposed to be correlated such that in a fixed period of time we’ll go from a priority school to a focus school and then from a focus...
school to whatever the heck’s above that because I forget. And that means improving all the data. All the data that we’re measured with. I think they’re doing a pretty piss poor job with that.

I: So what has your experience been like with the RA interventions?

T: Which time frame are we talking in?

I: Just in the last couple of years

T: Three years ago the RAC person didn’t know enough math. And they were telling us how to do middle school uh their experience was all elementary, second third fourth fifth and trying to tell me how to teach seventh and eight graders and it was just sufficiently different that it didn’t match up.

I: And this new person you feel is better?

T: Yes. And in the past the math specialist and the principal talking with the principal coach as I had never met the principal coach before in previous years the biggest thing was that it was always too many things to take on at one time too many initiatives and many of the initiatives made sense to me but there was always insufficient training on the initiatives, there was always insufficient uh time to fulfill on all the initiatives at the same time and and there was I don’t know if I said this there was not enough training on these initiatives

I: Can you describe a time when the RAC interventions had an influence on the school?

T: Well they always have an influence. Everything makes a difference. You might not like the difference it’s making but everything has its influence. Well like we talked about the lunch that was a good change

I: And you mentioned that was for safety, do you notice a difference? Does it make the cafeteria safer or the hallway safer?
T: I don’t spend almost any time in the cafeteria. But the transitions around lunch are quieter, less running in the halls, there’s still definitely too much but there is much less, and I haven’t; observed any fights or heard about fights in the cafeteria or really around the halls since then.

I: And prior to that were there fights in the cafeteria?

T: Yeah. But I don’t. I’m not hip on all that, I might miss all that.

I: And how bout a time you had specifically you dealing with or interacting with a RAC member? Can you describe that?

T: Three weeks ago the principal coach was in our PLC and I taught her …inaudible…those. And I taught her how to solve a problem with algebra tiles and she literally did not know the symbolic representation of $x$ to the second power $x$ squared is the same as that (shows a cube). If this is a one and that’s 1 $y$ and this is $x$, this is $x$ by $x$, this represents that $x^2$ was area, did not know that $x$, she just thought that $x$ squared was this weird abstract she didn’t know that it was actually a square and the light bulb that went off in this woman that’s got a PhD in something in education and went through statistics I taught her that and she went and told $x$, $y$, and $z$, that (I) Walter just taught her what $x$ square was and she was happy as shit..

I: So would you describe that as a good

T: (Interrupting) That was a good interaction well because she, that particular lady is willing to admit what she knows and doesn’t know she’s not embarrassed by it which I have immense respect for and she doesn’t come off as a know it all she’ hasn’t tried to tell me to do anything. Everything I’ve seen from her is asking questions and absorbing everything so she has not been a bother and whatever she says to principal I have no clue because they keep that to themselves.

I: Right. So that would be with the principal’s coach, how about with any of your any of the other RAC members have any of them come into your classroom or
T: Not any one of them can I identify other than Dr, C who does math who is passionate, intelligent, hard working and like I said the only thing she’s off with is that she doesn’t appreciate enough what it takes to turn (inaudible) and get everyone participating. She’s sensitive and she’s caring but…oh, and often in our PLCs she just wants to talk about math and doesn’t give us enough time for housekeeping when does this unit end and when are we starting another one when is the benchmark and who’s providing the copies those simple things you need to know to manage yourself.

I: Would you say there’s good communication between the RAC and teachers in general?

T: What would I say? I don’t think there’s enough communication. For sure.

I: Do you ever get feedback from RAC?

T: Dr. – used to give me feedback but she stopped. And by the way she didn’t say we’re stopping working with you we are only gonna work with the sixth graders I had to figure that out for myself or find out from others so we’re doing this intense push and then all of a sudden it stopped and I’m not literally sure if I’m expected to keep doing these things or not are we getting the support now or are we not so no they are doing a horrible job communicating this is what we’re working on now, this is what we’ve changed um and each individual communication I have found to be respective and appreciated but I am always left with wonders questionings and incompletions so I don’t think of that as effective communications but its nothing mean antagonizing upsetting

I: So it’s professional

T: It’s professional in the sense of being sufficiently professional with each other but when I think of professional work I don’t leave people wondering what’s going on so in that respect I don’t think its professional but I have a high standard for communication
I: Ok so the next phase of questions is about your own classroom practice and the teachers classroom practices. How do you feel that RAC interventions have influenced teachers and teacher practices?

T: Teachers as in general in a whole population, just in general I think it’s just annoyed the poop out of them

I: Do you think it’s affected the typical classroom practices what teachers can do on a daily basis?

T: Say it again

I: DO you think its affected what teachers can do on a daily basis?

T: Like limits? Yeah well you’re often I remember anytime someone would w into my classroom and I would feel like I have to be on guard so I’m always doing the right thing which isn’t necessary expedient easy or the gonna make a difference thing I mean… if you’re not managing the relationships with your students not a damn thing is going to happen so I won’t let anything step between from managing those relationships I trust them

I: Does the RAC tell you anything about developing relationships and that kind of thing or is that just something from your own teaching

T: Oh I have never heard the RAC say that Um I’ve heard the principal say that you have to have a good relationship but no one has ever said to me ever the work it takes to do that the steps you take I only figured that out on my own and watching other great teachers which is figuring it out on my own.

I: Um I think you kind of talked about this before with what has change in your classroom, your classroom practice that has changed based on their interventions I mean you mentioned the counting and using the manipulatives that you showed me is there anything else
T: Well the thing that I’m moving towards and I now realize its good teaching and it was never taught to me in schools is the check for understandings, so since last year when they started talking obsessively about check for understandings I’ve taken on three checks for understanding turn and talk, think and share, where I can now have students do it on a semi reliable basis and I’m eager occasionally to take on a new practice for check for understanding because the other thing I’ve come to realize I’ve come to realize, not anyone that’s taught me but if you’re not teaching in different methods and styles and shake things up they get bored so you have to keep its way beyond your scope you gotta keep things interesting

I: Is there anything you would be doing differently if the RAC team wasn’t in your building?

T: Long pause- I’m sure but I really don’t know what that is because there’s. I mean they just change things there presence just changes things like I said you’re concerned, you’re concerned about two months from now when the next big observation is gonna be

I: by next big observation what do you mean by that?

T: I forget what it’s called, when they do all the walkthroughs. The day of the walkthroughs, what’s that called?

I: So what do they do when they do these walkthroughs?

T: Oh like four people in suits with clipboards come and don’t introduce themselves or say hello they just walk around and look at everything and pick everything up and pick some random kid and ask him the objective for the day show me what you’re learning what you’re doing and they walk out.

I: And how do you feel when that’s going on.
T: Oh I feel in pins and needles, you feel like you’re being closely examined and everything you are doing is being closely looked at with eight eyes and they are only being looked at at that one moment

I: And they do that once a year twice a year

T: Twice a year to three

I: Do you ever get feedback from that?

T: No. You only get a yes or no and if they come to your classroom you get this kind of plus minus kind of thing, it was present or it wasn’t present but no conversation no I like this, no question of can you tell me why you were doing that their observations are factual versus what any one else saw and their version of that.

I: And when you get that plus or minus yes or no does that come from the principal, the RAC team?

T: The RAC writes the report and then the principal disperses it. The only problem with that report is it’s the it means like that’s who you are and that’s what you are doing for the school so the schools evaluated on that that particular moment of time with those few teachers and those few moments in those few classrooms and it upset many of the teachers. It doesn’t upset me but afterwards its completely common for teachers to be yelling why should I even work, I work so hard and this is what they say about me I should just retire now I should just quit now and they are angry and frustrated and staff morale has always gone down afterwards.

I: Do teachers know ahead of time what rooms they are going into?

T: Yes and no. Some administrators leak and say I’m coming into your room and some don’t. Sometimes they don’t come when they say they are going to come and sometimes they come when they don’t say they are going to so it is not guaranteed
I: Have the RAC interventions influenced your feelings of your own ability to teach or influence your classroom?

T: Everything influences everything but I don’t judge my actions and results on them because there is so little feedback. Other then Dr. C. When I got to work with Dr. C. on a weekly basis she was a mentor. But then my mentor walked away and didn’t say she was going to.

I: And how did you feel when that happened?

T: Wonderment. Like you know trying to figure it out. Not upset about up not suffering over it because I know our personal relationship is fine I could pick up the phone and call her but I just know she’s not working with me and she’s working on something else now. I don’t do the abandoned thing.

I: Um, how have the RAC interventions influenced your perceptions of your school? Do you perceive the school any differently with the RAC in the building?

T: Long pause. Well I am of the opinion that this school can stop being a priority school. But the level of interventions this would take is beyond the RAC. And no one has really raised the level of intervention and I don’t know if anyone else has expressed I don’t know if they know it or not but no one has expressed a in my opinion what would start to make a difference which would be everyone’s on board, what’s our strength what’s our weaknesses, and decide together what we’re gonna take on first, do it together, what resources do we need and we go get them. And then we report out our wins on a regular basis, and we occasionally talk about what didn’t work and we briefly discuss what did we learn from that and no one has any shame or a turned around face and we reapply ourselves and really just one maybe two initiatives at a time and we’re working on that and when those things are working than we celebrate the heck out of our wins when they
happen that would be a culture people want to participate in. And get the money we need for things.

I: Resources?

T: Yeah.

I: Do you think the RAC does any of that? Do they let teachers get involved and make any of the decisions? Do they discuss the wins and losses and celebrate wins and do they do any of that?

T: No. Um, they don’t get in the way of that. We had a win in the math extended constructed response, we had a huge breakthrough and we celebrated in front of the math leader who shared it with Dr. C. and she was supportive but the mood in the math department was no one really celebrated because they spent so much time talking about the next gaps and what we have to do and there was no acknowledgement from principal or anybody downtown or we didn’t make a big deal to our students it was like a blip

I: Do you feel the RAC interventions have influenced student achievement?

T: I don’t really like that question. Everything influences everything. So its like how is it influenced is it a positive a negative I…I think in some cases it’s been to the detriment. (Sigh)

Every math teacher for September October November was upset or surprised because like what the curriculum kept changing for weeks at a time we didn’t even know what unit we were going to be teaching I had eighth grade teachers doing one thing and then others doing different units at the same time so we couldn’t compare.

I: Is that because they were confused?

T: The teachers?

I: Or were they told to do different things at different times.
T: I was told to do one thing others said no don’t listen to that and uh..part of the problem was because I teach two grades and I wasn’t able to make all the PLCs part of its because the eighth grade PLC almost doesn’t exist.

I: Have you seen students’ scores going up? If you were to compare this year to previous years?
T: I wouldn’t know I don’t look at that and it really doesn’t interest me. What interests me is the 75 students that are in front of me what can I do with them today?
I: Have you seen their math abilities rise?
T: I have seen my students abilities rise yes. But before their math abilities rise what happens is their student abilities rise they come into class on time they start doing homework they start practicing in class they learn to stop yelling and cursing and pushing each other around
I: Do you think that’s a result of what you do or a result of
T: Totally. That’s totally a result of what I do. I’ve made my class a safe supportive environment. Where I empower the poop out of them doing good things and I give them a mean look when they do something wrong and I say you’ve disappointed me and I don’t do a whole lot of discipline like getting in trouble so they keep doing anything that’s good and I try to acknowledge the hell out of it so they keep doing more.
I: So that’s coming from you as opposed to what anyone else has told you to do.
T: I think an intervention that would make the biggest difference is if I looped and taught the same kids next year started with the relationship I have with them now and I didn’t have to start with 75 brand new students. I think that would be the best intervention
I: And then the last and final question is dealing with the climate and culture of the building. How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced the climate and culture of the building?
T: The only one I know about which we talked about is the lunchroom.

I: The overall climate and culture of the building? Is there a general feeling about the RAC team being in the building?

T: There’s not much talk about the RAC team. They don’t occur to us as anything more than annoyance. Talking about the RAC, other than Dr. C. changing my curriculum and what I do and the RAC changing the lunchroom I don’t know what they do, I don’t know what they say the initiatives are, they have not enumerated that, they have not distinguished them, asked us all to buy into them, I couldn’t say what they were.

I: Is there anything that I haven’t asked that you would like to mention about your dealings with the RAC team or your feelings about the RAC team and their interventions?

T: If I were the RAC team I would have a meeting where I said this is who we are, this is what we are setting out to do, this is the initiatives we’re taking and this is what we would like to accomplish with you. That simple statement has never been made.

I: Great. Well thank you for your time.

End of Interview

Today is Wednesday December 16th and this is Interview 1 Teacher X

I: So can you tell me how long you have been working in this school?

T: I have been here for 10 years. 10 looong years…. (teacher laughs)

I: And in that time, have you had contact with the Regional Achievement Center?

T: Oh sure, we’re a failing school so we have to have the RAC here…by law I think.

I: Can you explain to me what the RAC is?

T: Not really (laughing out loud…it is hard to tell whether the teacher is joking or not)
Well, they are a state department or state…they are here to help us bring up our test scores…we’ve always done pretty bad on state tests so I guess the state is stepping in taking over to help us do better on that.

I: How often would you say you have had contact with the RAC?

T: Like how often do I see them? Or how often do I talk to them?

I: Both.

T: I guess I see them in the building like every week, not always the math people but someone I assume is from the RAC, language arts, or the principals mentor or whoever. Math I’d say they are here like once every other week now, it was more in the beginning of the year. But really before this year I never even had anything to do with them other than when they came in with the principal. They’ve been here like four, no three years now.

I: So this year you see them every other week or so, could you describe that for me?

T: Yeah sure. Well, the RAC woman comes in to our meetings, I guess every other week just to check in and update us on what is going on I guess. In the beginning of the school year she was here more often, coming around to the classrooms. Now really it’s just the meetings.

I: And what does she do in the meetings?

T: The meetings are just talking about what’s coming up really…they were teaching us new ways of teaching that they wanted us to do, in the beginning it was like a mad dash to teach this new way but now its kind of settled down. The meetings now are more like what the principal wants, what the district wants, the RAC leader just observes I think.

I: And the new way of teaching, could you describe what you mean by that?
T: Well we usually follow the model curriculum, but this year they changed it all up, the RAC leader had her own ideas and got clearance from downtown I guess, a lot of counting, figuring things out totally differently. A lot of the teachers aren’t loving it…

I: Are there any interventions that the RAC have put in place in your school?

T: Sure, the uh RAC people in the building I guess is an intervention…I’d say mostly the benchmarks, we have to test the students every six weeks on a new unit, we are accountable for having them pass that. The benchmarks…how they want us to teach I’d say is an intervention, it’s a new strategy.

I: What mandates have there been?

T: The administration seems to tell us something new every week; I don’t know if you would call them mandates. Well, we have to do the test, that’s something we have to do…from the state. We have to have certain things in place, like objectives, lesson plans, but you have to have that anywhere. What they specifically make us do? I don’t really know. I guess what we have to teach.

I: How would you describe the role of the RAC interventions and their influence in a Priority School?

T: Their role? They’re pretty much a nuisance (laughing out loud). They don’t bother me personally but you know they’re there…you know the school is not doing great, I mean in ten years I haven’t seen it this crazy. I just shake my head. But the RAC, I guess they want to help us but the way they are doing it I don’t think they are going about it the right way.

I: What has your experience been like with the RAC?

T: Like I said personally I don’t deal too much with them. They aren’t the nicest people in the building, you hardly ever say anything to them and vice versa, but they are here for a job they are
here to watch us and check that what we are doing is ok and work with the principal. I know the
staff is not too crazy about them.

I: Can you describe a time when you had dealings or interactions with the RAC team?
T: (Long pause) well something that sticks out is a couple years back….I remember they were
here for a staff meeting or something during the day. They were just very negative. Other times I
remember getting ready for their visits, it was like a big deal. The administration would be
making sure you had bulletin boards up and whatnot. They have been in my room quite a few
times over the years, checking this or that. I didn’t like one time they stopped my students to ask
why they were doing something and asked why they were doing it like that…

I: Do you remember what they were doing?
T: No I really don’t. They were doing area around the room or something like that. I’m not sure
really.

I: And how did it make you feel.
T: When they questioned them? It was like an intruder…I just didn’t like it. I think it made my
students uncomfortable because it’s not like they knew them or knew who they were…almost
like they were trying to catch me doing something wrong. They didn’t though.
Well, not in my eyes anyway (laughs)

I: How are these interventions any different from any other interventions you have seen?
T: I…I…they…They’re around in the building helping the principal. I think its another set of eyes
on the building where before it was maybe the superintendent I guess.

I: How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced teachers and teacher practices?
T: Well for myself I can say I teach differently, but I don’t know that it’s really that much better.
I try to do what they want but I also try to do what I think is best for my students too. I don’t
have as much freedom as I would like, or time. I think that’s the number one thing- if I teach what they always focus on I think I’m losing valuable time, I’d rather do things to make it fun for the students but I have to fit in what they want

I: Can you give me an example?

T: They want you to focus on the standards, the tested standards, which is not that much but our students have a hard time with it. Its dry. I prefer real world applications, problem solving but out of real life. Managing money. Bank accounts. School stores, that type of thing. There’s no room in the curriculum for that. According to admin anyway.

I: Describe a particular aspect of your classroom that has changed due to the RAC interventions?

T: Well what I was just saying, freedom. I had more control over what I taught before. This year it’s way less than ever before. The students are lower and lower each year so it’s like going back to the basics.

I: What would you be doing differently if it were not for the RAC interventions?

T: I definitely wouldn’t be giving the benchmark they use that’s for sure. I would drill, but I would use a lot of fun activities to make math real for them.

I: How have the RAC interventions influenced your own feelings of efficacy or how well you think you are doing?

T: They put us down a lot, you’re failing etcetera. I mean I’m sure it gets to me but I try to ignore it I guess. I try to do my own thing and do what they want at the same time.

I: How have the RAC interventions influenced your perceptions of your school?

T: They haven’t. I don’t let them bother me. I know we need help. It’s frustrating most of all because I feel like they never follow through. That may be the administration but it changes so frequently. Nothing ever has time to work.
I: Can you describe a time that RAC interventions have influenced the school?
T: They influence the school all the time. They change schedules, they work with the principal.
I’m sure that they tell her what she can and can’t do. I don’t know that for sure but they must. If she’s not an extension of them then she works very closely with them. And I’d say they have a big influence on her.

I: How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced student achievement?
T: Not really. I think students are low. Lower than I have seen them. I don’t know what it is. There’s an increase in Spanish speakers but math is universal. I would imagine if the RAC is working we’d see some signs, but we don’t get any data that shows they are improving.

I: How do you feel that RAC has influenced the climate and culture of the school?
T: Well I know a lot of the teachers are upset. They’re frustrated. People complain this is the worst year here, you know, people who have been here a long time. I take it as it comes. It’s a job and it beats the alternative. I love my students I love what I do, but I feel like we can’t really make a difference in their education. I try to reach my students and give them hope. I think there’s more that they need than what the state tests says about them. You know some of them learning algebra or math is the last thing on their minds; they got real things to deal with. Gangs drugs, parental problems. No RAC intervention is going to change that. Teachers see that but that’s not reflected in our observations.

I: Do you think the climate and culture is any better in the building than it was three years ago?
T: Not even close. But to be fair we have had three principals in the past our years. Anytime you have a new principal there’s going to be challenges. But teachers are miserable you can hear it at any union meeting. Its us versus them its not a team. It should be a team. I think teachers care
about each other we are like a family but there’s cliques and divisions. And admin is another story.

I: Does RAC do anything to try to improve that?

T: The climate and culture? We have a specialist. But they don’t make any big changes. They do the climate and culture survey and then share the results. We did awful on it. If teachers are even honest on those things, I mean, I think we get like 30% of teachers are happy here, 50% of teachers think kids don’t want to learn, things like that. But looking at a survey isn’t doing anything to change it.

I: Is there anything else that you would like to say about the RAC?

T: No I don’t think so…actually yeah. I think that our school is trying pretty hard. But I think that there’s so much we can’t do and I think that if the RAC just saw what we saw they would want to help, actually help more. We need all the help we can get not just pointing out the obvious.

I: Do you think the RAC wants to help?

T: Well I mean I hope so, if they are educators which they supposedly are I think anyone would want to help.

I: Ok so if there’s nothing else than I think that’s it for now…

T: Ok great thank you…

I: thank you!

Today is Wednesday Dec 16th, Interview 1 teacher Y
Today I am going to task you some questions about your interactions with the RAC team and their interventions in a Priority School. Your time with them, how often have you had contact with them?

T: Um, about once a month.

I: Um, and how long have you had contact with them?

T: Probably at a PLC so it could be one to two periods, so it could be anywhere from a 45 minute period to an 80 minute period.

I: and is it, has it changed throughout the years? Has it been consistent throughout the years, have they been here more in the beginning or less at the beginning

T: I would say she was here more in the beginning

I: And what interventions have there been in the school as a result of their involvement?

T: Well I can only speak for math, and for us we have had our curriculum changed quite substantially. It has now been completely changed to what the RAC um math um representative wanted us..wanted it to be and it has now been approved by the board, so our curriculum has entirely changed I guess as in the order we are teaching things and in the way we are teaching math concepts.

I: So they changed around the order of the curriculum

T: Yes

I: And they changed how you are teaching it

T: Yes

I: In general. Can you describe one of the changes to me?

T: Well, one of the things that we’ve started off the year with was a counting around the room, by different numbers fractions decimals, to get the kids to be more fluent in their number sense,
so that was one of the big ones that we started of with at the beginning of the year and we’re supposed to continue that throughout the year

I: Is that something you see that is working with your students?

T: I think it’s important, I can’t disagree with that, I think it did help the kids because so many of them do so poorly in math, and that could be one of the reasons why they don’t really understand math very well, so anything we do that can help them understand math any better is always good. I think her um main focus is that the kids understand why they are doing things not just memorizing algorithms and methods and little rhymes that we used to do, the way we learned. The way we learned is not working with these kids so we are trying something else.

I: Um, so besides the curriculum changes what other mandates have been handed down

T: Well it’s hard to know what’s from the RAC team and what’s from our new principal. Because we do have a new principal this year so its hard to know what’s been mandated from the state, I know that one of their concentrations is on safety in our hallways so they are mandating changes in um for instance lunch, they have added another lunch, we now have four lunches versus three lunches that we’ve started the year with, so that changed uh, our, our periods throughout the day, we have a teachers lunch has changed, students lunch has changed, so that they could have less students in each lunch and have it be a little safer, so that was huge

I: and have you noticed a change because of that?

T: I don’t really know because I haven’t been in the cafeteria but I’m assuming that going from 350 students to about 250-300 students is significant but I haven’t hear d that it hasn’t helped, I cant imagine that it wouldn’t help

I: How would you describe the role of RAC in the building?
T: well, I imagine that Ms. _ Our principal definitely sees more of the intervention than we do, we just hear about it, um its not that they speak to us directly in any way, and our reports, quite honestly, we ….

T: We don’t see them we have one person who is in the building but she’s a language arts person so I would imagine the language arts people would probably see her more often at their plcs, she’s never at ours

I: So you don’t have a math RAC person?

T: We do have a math RAC person but her home school is _ so we see, she was here today, she comes about once a month, if she can make it more than that she does but its basically once a month, and shell spend some time going over things explaining things showing us methods of teaching different concepts and what not.

I: So what do you think their influence is in the school mostly?

T: well I’m sure that they would love to pull us up from being a priority school but um we’re working on it we are trying to do what they want us to do um like I said I’m not sure what all of that is because we don’t always see the reports or hear what’s in them but I know that Ms. Principal is trying to kind of focus on one thing, one area at a time, because you cant do everything at one time, but I’m hoping its more of a positive thing and not a negative thing its hard to tell at this point. We could be headed for who knows what we could be headed to be a charter school at some point who knows.

I: Do you think a lot of the teachers are afraid that that’s what where your headed from public to…

T: Sure. How could you not honestly, it’s a trend, it’s a trend, my daughter teaches in NY there’s hardly anything but charter schools in new york anymore, and California same thing so you
know some of the major states are headed that are already in that direction and its very possible
that we could be as well

I: Can you describe one, uh, particular dealing or interaction you had with the RAC team that
stood out for you

T: Well basically when Dr. C. is here we all have our conversations with her and ask her
questions and you know she is very frank with us and she is candid with us, I would say our
interactions are positive, I can’t say one particular one stands out, at one point um she was vey
pleased with what I was doing in the classroom um she was very complimentary when you are
doing something correctly she’s not critical she’s there to help

I: Can you describe that time in your classroom when she was..

T: Well it was in the classroom when we were first learning to count around the room and there
was a definite method to doing that and some teachers were intimidated by that if they, I had a
little more training with that because I had gone to some of her trainings at the end of last year
where some people didn’t make that so if you had less training you didn’t feel as comfortable
and I felt ok with it I was trying to do it quite a bit because I really did fell that the kids liked it
(announcement interrupts over the loudspeaker…inaudible,..call the office) kids really like doing
it and I did try to carry it into what I was doing in class to so it helped them to use their you
know different operation by counting through them it was a positive thing and she sat in my class
one day and she saw me doing that and she was really complimentary afterwards and told me
that I was on the right track and it was looking pretty good and keep it up that sort of a thing so

I: and can you describe how you felt at that time receiving the positive feedback?

T: Well whenever you get positive feedback you feel good so I felt like hey I’m glad I’m doing
the right thing, because you never really know if you are and knowing I’m doing the right thing
made me confident to keep going keep doing it and I honestly do like a lot of her methods her concepts so I try to use them
I: and the interventions you see now from the RAC team are they, how are they any different from interventions you may have seen in the past?
T:I don’t think we’ve ever had interventions in math from anyone usually the people who come in from RAC are not math people and if they are they don’t even come here they stay in other schools, or they just don’t come here for whatever reasons, I have never felt the interventions before, I feel this is probably the strongest year for that, at least in math.
I: Does that make you feel any type of way?
T: Well it's scary because its different math then we are used to, I’m personally retiring in another year so I personally feel like wow I’m putting all this effort into doing this for one more year, and then I’m out of here, so.
I: Hmmm…
T: So its you know, I don’t mind doing it but it is a lot of work, its a lot of extra work, the materials, one thing that does bother me is that we have a lot of materials at our fingertips and this type of math doesn’t match any of them so its wasted you feel like what am I supposed to use to teach this, none of the materials really match
I: and the materials you have are they new, are they old
T: No they are all current, we have things online we have PMI the textbook changes every year, they update it, it’s a consumable so you know we get the new ones every year their workbooks and engage new york we use
I: That’s a lot of resources
T: yeah it’s a lot but unfortunately the way she’s having us teach and the order that you put things in don’t always match up so now its ok now you gotta there’s so much preparation that has to go into it
I: Are there assessments coming down from the RAC?
T: Yes she’s writing her own assessments for us she’s taking the benchmark tests and she kind of gears them towards the way we are teaching in this district where the benchmarks for the other subject areas are standard benchmarks the um I guess you know if certain schools aren’t using her methods then they would use the standard benchmarks but…
I: and how often do you have to give those
T: every five weeks, the end of each unit
I: and how much time does that take out of your instruction
T: to give the test itself? It’s a two-day ordeal, because part of the test is on the computer, that’s a full day, sometimes it goes over to a second day because of the student population and then we have the written it’s a one or two question written test that takes about half a period
I: are there ever any issues with the assessment being given on the computer?
T: There have been in the past, we’re getting better at it, and some of the troubles that we are or have been having have been you know taken care of.
I: Um, how do you think the RAC interventions have influenced teachers? Teacher practices in your building?
T: oh I think in math I think a lot. Ha ha ha, like I said we are doing something totally different something out of our comfort zone so some people are struggling with it some people really hate it some people are not receptive of it some people are more receptive of it its an individual thing, it is. I’ve spoken to teachers that are al l for it that work very hard for it and then I’ve spoken to
teachers that are ready to leave and go to another district because they can’t stand it so it’s a shame because we are not all on board so then its hard to judge how well its doing if everybody is not on board

I: Besides the, what you had mentioned, counting around the room and that stuff, have there been any other aspects of your classroom practice that have changed based on the RAC coming in
T: (Laughing out loud) Yeah, sure just everything, I mean the way that we are teaching math is not by memorization anymore it’s all about teaching them why we do this and why we do that this is the reason and teaching them the language of math everything is through teaching them the same terminology so that it all kind of blends together I guess her objective seems to be to get the to the higher level maths by starting early and using the same terminology that they will be using as they get to the higher level maths so its not foreign to them and you’re not changing the terminology to the age of the child.
I: what do you think you’d be doing differently if the RAC interventions weren’t in place?
T: well I’d be using all my materials, I’d be enjoying my last tow years relaxing, laughing you know doing what I thought I was doing decently and continuing to do, I didn’t see a whole lot wrong with (laughing) what we were doing before.
I: Have their interventions influenced how you feel about how you influence your classroom or how your doing as a teacher
T: could you repeat that?
I: Have the RAC team, has their presence influenced how you feel about your ability as a teacher?
T: sometimes I feel that I’m not performing as well as I would like, sometimes I feel like oh cool I did that well and oh some of the kids really aced that test they are moving up I’m feeling better
now then I did I guess at the beginning of the year, the beginning of the year the first benchmark test was a flop everybody did so poorly on it, but she said she expected the to just because of just al this trying to learn the process and then getting good at it confident
I: Mm hmm…
T: Now we’ve been doing it for a while and I think we’re getting more of the swing of it so when you feel more confident about something you feel a little bit better about yourself so my kids did much better on this benchmark and as a sixth grade most of the kids did do better on it this time then the first so it does make you feel make me think I am doing something right.
I: How do you think that the RAC has influenced the way you feel about your school, the way you view your school?
T: The way I view my school. Oh (laughing while she talks) we have so many other problems right now that uh like I said I’m sure their intentions are good I’m sure they want us to be a safe school first and foremost so that’s what they’ve been working on, but because of the fact that we don’t have any disciplinarians and very few consequences for behavior in this school now this hasn’t been an easy year its very difficult the kids know that they have no consequences the security doesn’t know what to do with them because they only end up back in their classrooms again there’s no where to put them there’s no ISS there’s no time out
I: Do you think the RAC has any say in that or anything that they can do to make that better?
T: I wish they did I would like to think they would, I wish the recommendation would be to get some disciplinarians in here or set up an ISS or
T: I think they’re trying I think they’ve set up I think Mr. G. the VP in charge of discipline so I think he’s set up an after school detention, today they did a hall sweep, that’s the first hall sweep
I remember this year and it’s December almost January so I don’t know maybe they are lighting afire under him to get things done, somebody must be.

I: Do you think the RAC team has influenced the school in any way

T: Definitely because of the lunches we now have four I mean things are getting done that they want done, I mean Mrs. Principal is trying to conform to whatever they ask her to do and there have been changes, they’re slow but you can’t do everything.

I: How do you feel that interventions have influenced student achievement? (kids are audibly counting in the hallway in unison one two three four five six seven)

T: Well again I can only speak for math because of what we are doing like I said before the 6th grade has improved, they see improvement from the first benchmark to the second benchmark

I: Do you usually see improvement on the second benchmark from the …

T: no, no

I: First?

T: No. So we must be doing something right.

I: And how about climate and culture? Do you see an influence on overall climate and culture of the building? Teachers and students and administrators?

T: Um, I don’t see a lot of change there. Pretty status quo. I know SLC has been trying to….

I: What’s SLC?

T: Um the student leadership committee or council.. I mean not student….I forget what it stands for…you probably know what it stands for better then I do (Laughing out loud)

I: Well they have it in a lot of the schools, the School Leadership Council.
T: The school leadership council! Laughs) They are trying to improve morale they now have teacher of the month, support teacher and security of the month that’s something that they are doing now

I: Do they have anything to do with the RAC team?

T: I don’t know, I don’t know if they have anything to do with the RAC team or not I’m not is its something they came up with or not. And we did have a holiday luncheon but that was also SLC that put that together

I: And earlier you had mentioned you have no real contact with the RAC team except for at uh meetings, do you think if they had ore of a presence they may have more of a um, impact?

I: Maybe if you were able to contact them more or get results from them? Do you think they might make more of a difference?

T: Uh it depends what they were going to say. If it was positive and not all critical and negative. Sometimes I think the RAC team can be very negative and critical in the way that they respond to things and report things so it depends, it depends on the attitude and the way it’s delivered.

I: Do you ever have walkthroughs with them do they ever do walkthroughs with the leadership team?

T: Um not with the leadership team, no they walkthrough with the VP and the Principal…

I: oh that’s what I meant by leadership

T: oh ok um not often though here I think maybe they’ve been here twice this year

I: And do you know when they are coming or is it a pop up

T: No we’re informed of when they are coming we are pretty much told and we actually know who they are coming to see, it’s planned

I: do you know who chooses who they are coming to see
T: probably the principal

I: And does it make you feel any way when they come in your room

T: no its frustrating sometimes though because you want them to see something in particular and they always come either before it or after it (laughs out loud) they don’t see what you want them to see so your thinking oh now they are going to criticize me because I was doing this or I wasn’t doing that

I: And do they criticize? Do you ever receive feedback?

T: Never, no, you never know its always general its always anonymous they’ll always say we saw this but they’ll never say where or who they don’t crack a smile you know you cant tell whether they like you or hate you.

I: is it always the same people?

T: No. no, sometimes because we have the math lady sometimes we have dr. C that comes around to the math classes but then there’ll be different people that come too

I: and do you have a math leader in the building

T: yes we do

I: did you have a math leader in the building before the RAC team entered a couple years ago?

T: no last year we had (name) that was during RAC, no I cant, in fact I think other schools had them we didn’t we shared them occasionally with other schools but they were basically in whatever other school not here

I: ok so that’s it for my questions or now is there anything else about the interventions or the threat of takeover?

T: I just hope if it’s going to happen let them wait til I retire (Laughing) let it all happen if it’s going to happen
I: well you only have a couple years left…you put in your time

T: there have been so many changes and they come so fast, I never would have thought in my wildest dreams that we would have been doing what we are doing this year I thought I’ll skate through my last two years. Nope!

I: What is it just that they get new people that have new ideas or

T: I don’t know where she came from I mean I know where she came from but I don’t know how she got involved or why she got involved

I: Was she a teacher before?

T: She has been a teacher before she teaches college she used to teach middle school before in Philly and shell pat herself on the back and tell you how good she was and she was the only teacher doing this and the only teacher doing that and her kids you know she pulled her kids out of priority and ok awesome can I have your materials because I don’t know what to use

I: Yeah that must be frustrating not having anything with an all-new curriculum

T: Its frustrating it is I don’t even have all my books this year books are missing we got it’s a volume one volume 2 I got fifteen volume twos that’s it

I: Yeah there’s obviously a lot of volume twos missing so what are you supposed to do when you get to unit two?

T: Not a damn thing laughing unless I Xerox them. I don’t even have a one class set.

I: And then you’re chastised if you make too many copies?

T: Well not yet. Everything we do is copies. Because if its engage ny its copies if its SMI its copies. The only thing that isn’t copies is this book and I’ve got two units in volume two in a row and I cant even use cuz that’s ridiculous to make that many copies

I: It’s costly too
T: and time consuming and paper, if I run out of paper I’m screwed, you spend enough money without trying to buy more paper! (laughing trickles off)

I: True…I’m sure…ok well thank you!

I: Today is Friday Dec 11 at 1:00 p.m, and this is the first interview with teacher Z. So um, I’m here to as you about your experience with the RAC team, the Regional Achievement Centers and their interventions in the Priority School that you are working in. How often have you had contact with the RAC team?

Teacher: Like a number, or…?

I: Like how often, do you see them once a month, once a week, every day?

T: Ummm, probably about once a month now…our math RAC person was coming a couple times a week in the beginning of the year but she’s kind of teetered out a little bit…so maybe like once a month.

I: So you have one specific RAC person who comes for math?

T: Yes

I: What interventions have there been in your school as a result of the..uh…Regional Achievement Center?

T: Well, it’s a weird day that you ask that…because in the beginning of the school year we were told we were using the RAC teams, um, new style of teaching math, an she revised the whole model curriculum and rearranged all the units and order that we were teaching them and we had to use that counting and measuring research based method that supposedly worked but nobody was really trained in it so the first whole quarter, I mean unit, was a mess. We just got an
initiative today saying that we’re not using her revised curriculum anymore, so we’re a little bit confused right now with exactly what we are supposed to be doing.

I: Ok, so just so I make sure I clarify, so she, your RA person, rearranged the units and revised the model curriculum, is that from the state, the model curriculum? The New Jersey Model Curriculum?

T: Yes.

I: And now you just got a memo that it’s going back to the way it was?

T: Yes, because we started with, we’ve already done unit three, which is ratios and proportions, but if we go back to teaching it in the correct order, ratios and proportions is supposed to start in January, so now nobody knows what we’re doing because we are not gonna teach the same unit again, but we’re, our directive was to back to the model curriculum, so…the math people are just a little confused right now.

I: So do these directives come right from the RAC team or do they come from somebody else?

T: From the math person from the RAC team who gives the directive to the math leader who gives them to us.

I: Ok, what mandates have been handed down from the RAC team in your school?

T: Um well, basically, well, you know with what I just said that the revising of the order of the curriculum, the way were supposed to teach it, we’re not teaching rules and procedures anymore, we’re supposed to be counting, measuring, and teaching number conceptual understanding which has not worked one bit, soooo…..ummm…(pause), I’m not really sure where we are going from here but right now we were told to teach her teaching method.

I: Ok, so basically it’s just the curriculum and the order of the lessons?

T: And the way it’s being taught.
I: Um, how would you describe the role of RAC interventions in a priority school?
T: Well, there supposed to be here to help and support us but really what they do is just tell us the way that they think it should be done so…their role is to help us but it’s not happening.
I: Um, what do you think their influence is in a priority school?
T: Their influence is everything. I mean, they got permission from downtown to change all the stuff and now we’re told to change it back and the administrators are backing them 100 percent, whatever the RAC says, so….I don’t know…. (long pause) The whole school year is based on the RAC and the whole school year is a mess.
I: So I guess that’s gonna lead to your next question, what has your experience been like with the RAC interventions for you?
T: Horrible. I hate every minute of this year and I can speak for some of the other math teachers that they hate it too. And it’s frustrating. We’re being told over and over and over again that we’re ineffective teachers, that we stink at our job, we’re the worst math teachers, department in our district, it’s very deflating.
I: So how does that make you feel?
T: Miserable. Hate my job.
I: (Pause) So, one of the things that they have found that help combat the effects of um poverty in an urban district, dealing with urban districts like this is teacher efficacy, that’s how well teachers think they are doing. Do you think the RAC team has had an influence on how well you think you are doing?
T: A negative influence.
I: Can you describe a time when you witnessed the RAC having a negative influence on the school? Like is there one particular thing or instance that sticks out that you can think of?
T: Well, we were supposed to have thirty percent or more of our students pass the first benchmark. The RAC math person wrote her own benchmark for unit one that we were told we were allowed to give. We didn’t have to give the state benchmark. She…the…she outlined exactly what we were supposed to teach. She gave us lesson plans exactly what we were supposed to teach, we followed that…..a week before the benchmark we got to see the benchmark and there was not one thing on the benchmark that we had covered so far….so we have a three percent passing rate on the unit one benchmark.

I: Now who, who said that you have to have a thirty percent or more passing rate?

T: That’s in our School Improvement Plan.

I: And is that man..is that a RAC mandate?

T: It’s what the school, you know, the SLC decides upon and submits to the RAC for approval, so I guess they approved that rate but we didn’t come anywhere near it.

I: So the teachers had no involvement

T: (interrupting) well whatever teachers are on the school leadership committee.

I: Is there a time that you had specific interactions with the RAC, like anyone specifically in your classroom, any instance you can remember?

T: Well the math RAC teacher, I mean the math RAC person came in and did a model lesson for me once in the beginning of the year

I: and how did that go?

T: Horrible. She came in to my worst behaved class, I told her I want to see how she teaches a lesson and deals with they behavior so that I can see how I’m supposed to combat some of the behavior issues in the class while I’m teaching her curriculum. She…she…didn’t discipline at all….the kids were crazy. We had five adults in the room that day. We had myself, my inclusion
teacher, a substitute, our math leader, the RAC person. She divided them into seven groups. If an adult was sitting with the group, it was fine. The two groups that didn’t have an adult with them at any given moment were shooting baskets, were choking each other, were running around, were doing whatever they felt like. At the end of the block the RAC lady said to me, “I didn’t deal with the discipline problem because I saw actual learning going on in the classroom.” I didn’t see any actual learning going on in the classroom…..sooooo…(pause)

I: Can you describe how you felt at that time she was there to…

T: (interrupting) My head wanted to explode…

I: So how are the interventions that are coming down from the RAC different from any other interventions that you have seen in the past in your career here?

T: Well we’ve never been told specifically (cough) that we all have to teach in the same exact way and that we can’t teach rules and procedures. I mean, I can show you how they want us to teach subtraction and your head will spin. It’s just crazy…

I: And they expect every teacher to teach it in the same exact way?


I: How do you feel that the RAC interventions have influenced teacher practices or teachers in the building?

T: Negatively. Um, Everybody is frustrated. Nobody wants to be here. Um, there’s not genuine learning going on….(cough, cough)…Everybody’s all over the place and nobody really got trained on how to do this new way of teaching, so everybody is kind of adopting, adapting it to their own abilities. I mean…I can’t….the only word to describe this year is absolute chaos.

I: And have you asked for help?

T: Yes!
I: Who can go to for help? Can you go to the RAC math lady for help?

T: Um, she hasn’t been in the building a long time and since we got the directive to do back to the old way, there seems to be a little bit of doubt about whether or not the state is happy with what she’s done here so I don’t know if she’s going to be a person in our building anymore…that remains to be seen….The math leader is the one who continuously tells us how horrible we’re doing so I don’t really feel comfortable coming to him, and the new administration is ineffectual to say the least.

I: The new administration in the building?

T: Yes.

I: So there’s a new administration, a new math leader, and a new Math RAC person?

T: Yes. Well the RAC person was here at the end of last year and she gave us minimal training but nobody know that over the summer she was coming back until we walked back in the doors at the end of August.

I: Can you tell me about one particular aspect of your classroom practice that has changed due to the RAC interventions? Like anything you do differently in the classroom on a day-to-day basis based on what they’ve…

T: Everything is different. We’re counting supposedly counting daily around the room. We have a whole new multiplication subtraction model that they are supposed to use, um, we are not teaching you know, divisions of fractions by you change the division sign to multiplication sign and flip the fraction, we’re not doing that, we’re counting our way through it, like how many fourths are there in thirty three and a fourth so they gotta count by fours all the way around the room until we get thirty three and a fourth so I mean every aspect of teaching is supposed to be done this new bizarre method. It’s time consuming and the kids don’t like it.
I: So what would you be doing differently if it wasn’t for the RAC interventions?
T: I would be teaching them rules and procedures which doesn’t work for everyone granted, but when you have differentiation and modifications for certain kids at least they get some of it. I don’t think these kids are getting anything out of this way. And then also you have the parental involvement…you’re sending home homework asking them to do it a new way and they’re coming back with it the old way saying they don’t understand the new way to do math so I can’t help them they are teaching them subtraction by borrowing we’re supposed to be teaching subtract from the greatest value to the lowest value. It’s bizarre! And the teachers aren’t fluent in it. If I’m not fluent in it and I got to do everything that way, it takes so much more time…..(long pause) so it’s very time consuming. (Long pause….teacher is looking out the window, as if she is looking for the right words)
T: And frustrating.
I: So we kind of touched on this before and I think you’re getting to it a little now, too, so the way they have influenced your own feelings of your won effectiveness?
T: Well, I’m told on a daily basis that we stink as a math team. But I personally know that I’m a pretty good math teacher, I’ve been teaching for years, so I’m not letting it get to me so much, but I don’t know that I’m staying in the district after this year…..
I: So as a teacher that’s been here a while you have your…you already have your confidence. What do you think for some teachers who are just in the district?
T: Lost. Totally lost. They have no idea. My class is chaos. I can only imagine what their class is like!
I: And your feelings of leaving, is that due to…influenced by their interventions?
T: Absolutely. And our new administration. And our new math leader. (teacher is visibly upset)
I: That must be upsetting.

T: I hate this year (teacher looks out, glossy eyed, as if she were about to cry/is tearing up)

I: After being here such a long time…

T: I hate it more than anything. It’s a struggle everyday.

I: Can you think of a time that you have had any positive interaction with them?

T: With RAC?

I: Um hmm…

T: Um, I never had an issue with RAC until this year. Until this one particular person came in and changed everything around, you know…. I mean in the past they’ve come into my classroom and found things wrong here and there…. they always find things wrong, no one is going to get a perfect score, but it was never like it is the way it is now…I mean, I never minded RAC when they came into my room but now I don’t even want them in my room.

I: Do they give you feedback or does the feedback go to your leader?

T: It goes to the administration.

I: It goes to your administration? So, you never see their actual feedback?

T: Really it goes to the math leader. I have like hardly any interaction with any administrators this year. Half the time they’re not in the building and the other half of the time they’re not to be found because they are doing the discipline because there are no disciplinarians this year.

I: And does the RAC provide you training or professional development?

T: On what?

I: On anything, on math, or how they want you to instruct or is it just coming from your leader?

T: Our leader, I mean in the beginning of the year It was literally each week he was teaching us the new way to teach the math the following week in like a 45 minute PLC he was like this is
what you have to do and I’m pretty good at math but honestly, other teachers, I’m not saying they are not good at math because they are, but it takes them a little while. You can’t change somebody’s way of thinking about something they have been doing for forty years in forty-five minutes and have them be fluent in it. It’s just not possible.

I: SO the next part of the questioning has to do with the teachers’ perceptions about the RAC and their influence on school life. Has the RAC interventions influenced your perceptions of your school, like changed the way you think about your school?

T: Not really….ummmm…I mean it’s basically known that when RAC comes here they are out to look for things that are not right. Because if they find that everybody is doing everything right then they don’t have a job and there’s no reason for them to be here so, they will find the minutest little thing….So I don’t put a whole lot of value to what they say. And, I remember about the RA visit last year with (inaudible) in his twenties maybe, they asked a question and I answered it and he told me I was wrong. Five minutes later he told me the answer and it was exactly what I said just in another way…and I just sat there like, ok….So I don’t think they are like meant to say anything positive, that’s my opinion.

I: Can you describe a time when what they have done has influenced the school as a whole?

T: This whole year is influenced, I mean, I don’t know if you’re aware we have a fourth lunch due to safety issues. The whole schedule was revamped because they said there was too many people in the cafeteria at once.

I: And that was a RAC thing?

T: Yeah. Their first visit they didn’t even deal with instruction, their firs…they basically they gave us feedback on the safety issues, safety in the cafeteria, in the hallway, I mean, the kids are
out of control this year and they are saying that it is not a safe environment but if its not safe then give us back our disciplinarians.

I: So they said it was not a safe environment?

T: Um hmm.

I: So they added a fourth lunch?

T: Um hmm…

I: And does it seem to be safer environment because of that?

T: I don’t know I don’t go in the cafeteria (laughing) I try to avoid it (chuckling)

I: Would you say a lot of teachers try to avoid it?

T: The cafeteria? Yeah!

I: Is that because they feel unsafe?

T: Well the noise and the chaos. I’m not saying teachers feel like they are going to get hurt but who wants to listen to all that. It’s my quiet time.

I: Um, how do you think they have influenced student achievement in a priority school?

T: They have lowered it.

I: And do you see that in your test scores?

T: Absolutely.

I: Can you give me an example?

T: Well like I said the first benchmark we followed the RA persons advice the whole first unit and we got three percent passed.

I: What would you normally have?

T: I’m not sure.

I: More than three percent?
T: Three percent was school wide, so that means 30 out of 1000. It wasn’t three percent but I don’t know how much though. But this is the second year in a row with all inclusion classes so I have the low of the low.

I: Um, we’ve talked about how they have influenced instruction, how they have influenced achievement, but do you see any influences on climate and culture either positive or negative?

T: No, I mean the disciplinarians being taken away was downtown so the climate and culture is bad because of incentives downtown, so I’m not sure if the RAC could do anything about it.

I: So the way teachers feel about their school and the achievement, their ability to affect it has to do with climate and culture, do you think the RAC has…

T: (interrupting) oh yeah, I mean it’s not a big secret there really aren’t that many happy people in the building anymore, that’s for sure…it’s pretty miserable!

End of interview