

Theses and Dissertations

2011

Analysis of two urban middle schools: factors affecting student achievement

V. Douglas Neufeld

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Neufeld, V. Douglas, "Analysis of two urban middle schools: factors affecting student achievement" (2011). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1108.
<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/1108>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact Katrina.Gallardo@pepperdine.edu, anna.speth@pepperdine.edu, linhgavin.do@pepperdine.edu.

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ANALYSIS OF TWO URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS:
FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy (ELAP)

by

V. Douglas Neufeld

November, 2011

Diana B. Hiatt-Michael, Ed.D.—Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

V. Douglas Neufeld

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Diana Hiatt-Michael, Ed.D., Chairperson

Linda Purrington, Ed.D.

Beverly Rohrer, Ed.D.

© Copyright by V. Douglas Neufeld (2011)

All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF TABLES..... | vii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | ix |
| DEDICATION..... | xii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | xiii |
| VITA..... | xv |
| ABSTRACT..... | xvi |
| Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose | 1 |
| Background..... | 1 |
| Statement of Problem | 4 |
| Statement of Purpose | 5 |
| Research Questions..... | 6 |
| Significance of Study..... | 6 |
| Definition of Terms | 9 |
| Assumptions | 16 |
| Delimitations..... | 17 |
| Timeline for Study..... | 18 |
| Chapter 2: Review of Literature | 19 |
| Introduction..... | 19 |
| Middle Schools Across the United States..... | 19 |
| Concerns of Middle Schools in California | 23 |
| School Improvement Self-Study..... | 24 |
| Areas of Focus for Middle Schools | 25 |
| Classroom Instructional Practices..... | 25 |
| Teaming and Interdisciplinary Instruction..... | 35 |
| School and Classroom Climate..... | 43 |
| Professional Development | 53 |
| School Safety | 58 |
| Parental Involvement | 59 |
| Leadership and Decision-Making Practices | 66 |
| Areas of Focus that Work | 85 |
| Stories of Success | 86 |
| Process of Change..... | 95 |
| Summary | 98 |

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Chapter 3: Methods..... | 101 |
| Overview of the Study’s Design..... | 101 |
| Description of the Population | 101 |
| Design of the Study | 102 |
| Instrumentation | 108 |
| Validity | 111 |
| Human Subject Considerations..... | 112 |
| Summary..... | 113 |
| Chapter 4: Analysis of Data and Findings | 115 |
| Introduction..... | 115 |
| Analysis of Quantitative Data..... | 115 |
| Summary of Demographic Data | 142 |
| Analysis of Quantitative Data..... | 143 |
| Summary of Components and Factors..... | 253 |
| Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations..... | 263 |
| Summary | 263 |
| Conclusions..... | 274 |
| Summary | 322 |
| Recommendations..... | 325 |
| REFERENCES | 346 |
| APPENDIX A: Letter of Acceptance of Program from Principal of Adler Middle School | 364 |
| APPENDIX B: Letter of Acceptance of Program from Principal of Baker Middle School | 365 |
| APPENDIX C: Schedule for the Interview Process | 366 |
| APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol Form | 367 |
| APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form | 369 |
| APPENDIX F: Preliminary Survey Questions | 371 |
| APPENDIX G: Team Interview Packet | 373 |

| | Page |
|---|------|
| APPENDIX H: Web Site for Interview Survey Questions | 379 |
| APPENDIX I: Directions for Coders | 390 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Table 1. Academic Progress of Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 2006-2010 | 5 |
| Table 2. Academic Progress and Ranking and Projections of Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 2006-2010 | 102 |
| Table 3. Linkage Between Interview Questions, Research Questions, Factors and Literature | 117 |
| Table 4. Academic Progress and Ranking of Baker Middle School, 2002-2006 | 122 |
| Table 5. Adler Middle School Organizational Structure | 146 |
| Table 6. Baker Middle School Organizational Structure..... | 148 |
| Table 7. Overall Summary of Component #1: School Safety and Management..... | 278 |
| Table 8. Overall Summary of Component #2: Parental Involvement | 283 |
| Table 9. Overall Summary of Component #3: Teaming and Interdisciplinary Teaching | 288 |
| Table 10. Overall Summary of Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices | 291 |
| Table 11. Overall Summary of Component #5: School and Classroom Environment.... | 294 |
| Table 12. Overall Summary of Component #6: Professional Development | 296 |
| Table 13. Overall Summary of the Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success | 297 |
| Table 14. Overall Summary of Differences with Component 3: Teaming and Interdisciplinary Teaching | 299 |
| Table 15. Overall Summary of Differences with Component 4: Classroom Instructional Practices..... | 303 |

Table 16. Overall Summary of Differences with Component 7: Leadership and
Decision-Making307

Table 17. API Scores and Growth/Decline Points of Adler and Baker Middle
Middle Schools, 2001-2010321

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 1. Neufeld model of the 7 components of school life | 8 |
| Figure 2. Ethnic distribution of the population of the City of Ingle Beach (Census 2000)..... | 119 |
| Figure 3. Student enrollment at Adler and Baker middle schools, 2005-2011..... | 121 |
| Figure 4. API Scores at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2010 | 124 |
| Figure 5. Ranking of Adler and Baker schools from 2005-2009 when compared with all schools in the state | 125 |
| Figure 6. Ranking of Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2009 when compared with schools of similar characteristics that includes socioeconomic status and ethnicity | 127 |
| Figure 7. Distribution of gender at Adler and Baker middle schools in the 2009-2010 school year | 128 |
| Figure 8. Distribution of ethnicity of students at Adler and Baker middle schools during the 2009-2010 school year | 128 |
| Figure 9. Distribution of ethnicity of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools during the 2008-2009 school year | 130 |
| Figure 10. Percentage of ESL students at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2010 | 131 |
| Figure 11. Percentage of students at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2010 who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch | 132 |
| Figure 12. Percentage of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools that are fully credentialed or on an emergency credential for the 2008-2009 school year | 133 |
| Figure 13. The ratio of students per credentialed teacher at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009 | 134 |
| Figure 14. The ratio of students per counselor at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009 | 135 |

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 15. The ratio of students per administrator at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2011 | 136 |
| Figure 16. The ratio of students per computer at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009 | 137 |
| Figure 17. The five different layers of education of parents at Adler and Baker middle schools as marked on the 2010 state exam information sheet by the student | 138 |
| Figure 18. The education level of the parents at Adler and Baker middle schools as marked by the student on state exam information sheets from 2004-2010 | 139 |
| Figure 19. The number of years in education that the teachers of Adler and Baker middle schools have worked as of 2010 | 141 |
| Figure 20. The percentage of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools and different levels of education in 2010 | 142 |
| Figure 21. Factors of "Component 1: School Safety & Management" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 161 |
| Figure 22. Factors of "Component 1: School safety and Management" discussed by administrators at both school sites | 162 |
| Figure 23. Factors of "Component 2: Parental Involvement" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 173 |
| Figure 24. Factors of "Component 2: Parental Involvement" discussed by administrators at both school sites | 174 |
| Figure 25. Factors of "Component 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching" discussed by teachers at both school sites..... | 188 |
| Figure 26. Factors of "Component 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching" discussed by administrators at both school sites | 189 |
| Figure 27. Factors of "Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 207 |
| Figure 28. Factors of "Component 4: Classroom Instructional Practices" discussed by administrators at both school sites..... | 208 |

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 29. Factors of “Component #5: School & Classroom Environment” discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 223 |
| Figure 30. Factors of “Component #5: School & Classroom Environment” discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked | 224 |
| Figure 31. Factors of "Component 6: Professional Development" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 232 |
| Figure 32. Factors of "Component 6: Professional Development" discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked | 232 |
| Figure 33. Factors of "Component 7: Leadership and Decision-Making" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked | 243 |
| Figure 34. Factors of "Component 7: Leadership and Decision-Making" discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked | 244 |
| Figure 35. Areas listed are the topics named by teachers at both sites regarding “Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success” | 252 |
| Figure 36. Areas listed are the topics named by administrators at both sites regarding “Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success” | 253 |
| Figure 37. Aligning "EdSource 7 Domains", "Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools | 317 |
| Figure 38. Aligning "Bryk's 5 Organizational Features", "Neufeld's 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools | 318 |
| Figure 39. Aligning the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> article on Markham Middle School, "Neufeld's 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools..... | 320 |
| Figure 40. Teachers and years in education from Adler and Baker Middle Schools in 2006 and 2010..... | 342 |
| Figure 41. Modified graphic of "Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life" | 345 |

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Juanita Neufeld-Sven, who has always encouraged me in whatever endeavor I take in my life. With the loss of our father at a young age, my brother, Mike, and I could always rely on our mom to give us continued support as we took on our future. Because of her, I am so proud to be part of the Neufeld and Ramirez families.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey to complete this dissertation was one of the most challenging and demanding journeys I have experienced. I was able to complete this passage with the guidance of several professional colleagues.

First, thank you to all my professors at Pepperdine University who made this doctoral journey worthwhile and gratifying. To my cohort members, thank you for years of support as we went through this program together. It is with our group that a second family was formed! To all my doctoral colleagues who helped with coding, thank you.

This dissertation journey began with the assistance of Dr. Paul Foster. He guided me in setting a foundation that would be important for me to begin this journey.

Thank you to the district superintendent for allowing me to conduct this study. Thanks to the administrators at both schools allowing me to conduct this research at their sites. Thanks to all of the teachers taking their valuable time to participate in the team interviews and wanting to learn about possible steps to continue the academic growth of their students. A special thanks to the classified staff at both schools for helping me organize the team interviews.

Thank you to Mary Nies, Sheila LaCour, and Susan Coulbourne for your assistance and dedication on an important step in my research process.

Thank you to Dr. Robin Potchka for helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel when challenges would mount.

Thank you to Ardell Broadbent and Rebekka Helford for your tremendous assistance in helping me fine-tune my scholarly research paper.

I am deeply grateful to my three committee members for their unfailing support and encouragement. First, I would like to thank Dr. Linda Purrington who helped me open doors of thought for this journey as both an academic professor in the classroom and as an advisor on this committee. It is with your guidance that I have been able to guide my research to such high levels.

A special and a very long-time thank you to Dr. Beverly Rohrer who began to inspire me to grow as an educator during my time as a high school student. Your inspiration continued throughout my career. You have always served as a leader among leaders that for me established high standards for all. Thank you for your many years of guidance through my life, including this dissertation.

A final thank you to Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael, my dissertation chair, for your guidance and complete support along this journey. You shared your wealth of knowledge and expertise that lead to my conviction that my dissertation would be of the utmost quality. Your continued inspiration challenged me to generate my finest work. You were always available for questions and discussions. I will always remember your dedication to me as a student and a colleague. I will always remember you with admiration and respect.

VITA

V. Douglas Neufeld

EDUCATION

Pepperdine University

Ed.D. Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy (ELAP); 2005-present
(completion 2011)

Loyola Marymount University

Master of Arts, Multicultural Education/TESL, 1999

University of California, Los Angeles

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, 1994

CREDENTIALS

- Administrative Credential, Tier II: in progress
- Administrative Credential, Preliminary: 2003
- Single Subject CLAD Secondary Credential, Social Studies: 1996

HONORS

- Sparks Award for Best Paper on Technology from the Society of Educators & Scholars, 2008
- Dana Middle School Teacher of the Year Award, 2003
- recipient, LERN International Award for SBAS ESL Resource Book, 2000
- nomination, Redondo Beach Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year Award, 1999

CONFERENCE & SEMINARS

- Paris International Conference of Education, Economy & Society - July, 2008 (Paris, France) - presentation of my paper on technology in the classroom
- 31st Annual Conference of Society of Educators & Scholars - March, 2008
- International Conference of Education - January, 2008 (Hawaii, USA) - presentation of my paper on technology for students with disabilities

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2006-present *Addams Middle School*
Social Studies Teacher, 7th Grade

2003-2006 *Rogers Middle School*
Dean of Students

1998-2003 *Dana Middle School*
Social Studies Teacher, 7th Grade

1996-2007 *South Bay Adult School*
ESL Project Coordinator/Teacher

1997-1998 *Hermosa Valley School*
Social Studies Teacher, 8th Grade

ABSTRACT

Because of increasing student enrollment, a new school was formed in a small low-income Southern California school district. Teachers could choose to transfer to the new school or remain at the existing school. Over five years, quantitative analyses of demographic data showed little differences between the two schools across the years except for a difference in student academic achievement. This mixed-method study examined the demographics and perceptions of academic life at these two middle schools to ascertain an explanation for differences in academic achievement as measured by the same standardized test. Team interviews combined the focus group approach within teams, followed by a teacher survey to seven components of school life and ideas for school reform. Qualitative analyses of in-depth team interviews with 90% of the faculty and individual interviews of four administrators at both schools revealed more similarities than differences within the seven components. They perceived both sites as safe, applying shared discipline plans, functioning well with teachers organized into instructional teams, applying a variety of instructional methods, supporting at-risk students, and expressed concerns regarding parent involvement and the quality of professional development. Differences were noted in teachers' interest or use of the instructional practices of block scheduling and looping at both schools. Teachers desired more input into professional development and a plan that connected such activities to student academic achievement. Teachers and administrators expressed a desire to utilize more strategies to improve parent involvement at each site. The major difference between the two schools was faculty attitude toward administrators' behavior. Almost all teachers shared that they were part of decision-making; but, at the original site, the teachers

indicated that administration did not follow-through on their decisions. Nine teachers left this school. At the new school, faculty perceived that administrators were supportive and empowered teachers. Two teachers left this school. Administrators and teachers suggested next steps for their site to be: (a) leadership support and follow-through for teacher decision-making at the original school, (b) shared decision-making for professional development at both schools, (c) utilize more strategies for parent involvement, and (d) implement extra-curricular activities or student intervention program.

Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose

Background

Since the change from junior high school to middle school as an organizational structure of school reform by public school districts in the 1950s and again in the 1980s, little other nationwide substantial change has apparently occurred at the middle school level. Although reports calling for many middle school reforms first appeared in the mid-1950s, reform has been slow to occur (Roney, Brown, & Anfara, 2004). This lack of change in middle schools has particularly affected the poor and minority children as their learning needs have not been addressed (Cuban, 1998, 2004). Teachers, principals, and superintendents working in low-income schools and districts face different challenges from those of their peers working in middle-class and affluent areas (Cuban, 2004). In *Turning Points 2000*, Jackson, Davis, Abeel, Dordonaro & Carnegie Council on Adolescent (2000) noted that “changes in middle grades practices have least often occurred where they are needed: in high-poverty urban and rural communities where unacceptably poor student achievement is rampant” (p. 5). There is a moral purpose to provide for an education system that is equal for all. “I will claim that the only measure that counts at the end of the day is whether the gap between high and low performers is explicitly reduced” (Fullan, 2001, p. 12).

Reform in the middle school began in the 1950s when junior high schools changed their titles to middle schools. Since then, there have been two eras of school reform—one extending from the late 1950s into the late 1960s and the other from 1983 into the 1990s (Goodlad, 1996). But little permanent reform has taken place during either time frame. In the 1980s, those that did make great changes in the education process

became known as effective schools (Sizer & Sizer, 1999). These few schools established and practiced the middle school beliefs of team teaching of core subjects, teachers acting as advisors, developing a pedagogy grounded in active learning and small-group instruction, and establishing large time blocks set aside for instruction. But there were neoprogressive beliefs that anchored the skepticism and even hostility towards these effective schools, so reforms did not continue (Cuban, 1998). Although frequently encouraged, there are few of the proposed actions that began in the 1980s that are still practiced in schools today in the 21st century.

Some of the core reform cries from the 1980s are repeated in the 21st century as an antithesis to the pressure of the current emphasis on testing and standards. However, scholars note that policymakers, administrators, and classroom teachers do not seem to be listening. Cuban (2007) has argued that during the past 25 years, testing has increasingly been used as the measure of school accountability. As the measure of accountability, testing is changing instructional goals and teacher classroom practices. The current goal is to train students to score well on tests. Federal, state, and local budget allocations are made based on test scores. Schools are commended or reprimanded because of the test scores that the students attain. Thus, the dialogue of education reform is just that, simply empty rhetoric that pushes school reform to the sidelines (Goodlad, 1999). Goodlad (2002) notes, “the most dismayingly scary characteristic of the current school reform era is the preoccupation with simplistic prescription devoid of diagnosis and purpose” (p. 21).

Scholars argue that there are two types of school reform movements currently operating in the United States (Goodlad, 1992, 2002). One is the politically driven

rhetoric tied to the national interest, international economic competitiveness, and corporate health. This is the rhetoric that has led to the standards, testing, and stringent accountability—elements that can be recorded in quick numbers. The second school reform movement is scarcely observed in practice. The focus of this second reform effort is to shift greater authority and responsibility to individual school sites. Goodlad has been supporting this second reform movement for decades. His premise is that schools should be responsive to their own needs and develop programs to respond to their particular situation. His work is built upon the classic studies of Tyler whose work undergirds any progressive reform movement in education (Tyler, 1949).

The second school reform movement is captured in *Turning Points 2000*. In this book are seven recommendations for reform for the 21st century. These recommendations differ from the first reform in that they focus on external standards, namely the content standards adopted by state or federal policymakers. The reform movements will not happen on their own, even with all staff members being involved in the decision-making process. Fullan (2002) refers to the *school capacity* and what makes schools especially effective.

Whereas the Bush administration adhered to the Turning Points 2000, the new administration in the White House supports the first reform type. In March of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education launched “A Blueprint for Reform: The Realization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.” This blueprint builds on the four significant reform efforts already in progress. As shared by President Obama:

My administration’s blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is not only a plan to renovate a flawed law, but also an

outline for a re-envisioned federal role in education. This is a framework to guide our deliberations and shared work—with parents, students, educators, business and community leaders, elected officials, and other partners—to strengthen America’s public education system. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 2)

However, questions regarding the implementation and effectiveness of these reform components at the middle school level have not been answered. This study was undertaken in order to determine some promising practices that may have occurred in low-income middle schools.

Statement of Problem

In a low-income neighborhood of the same school district, there are two middle schools that have the same demographics in such areas as ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and second-language learners. One of these two schools is demonstrating apparent academic success as state test scores have been rising on a regular basis, particularly up to 2009. It is not clear what are the reason(s) for this rise of test scores. There may be unknown reform methods occurring within this school. At the other neighboring school up to 2009, test scores have been rising at a much slower pace. Why are students in one middle school achieving higher test scores than students in the other middle school with similar demographics as provided by the school profiles?

This multiple-case study focuses on two middle schools. These schools are in a small, low-income school district in Los Angeles County. As Table 1 describes, one middle school (Baker Middle School) has been as a middle school for over 12 years. This school has API scores for 2006-2010 that range from 675 to 776. A new school (Adler Middle School) that neighbors in the same small, urban district and is located only

0.6 miles away has API scores for 2006-2010 that range from 715 to 800 points. Yet, the difference regarding the demographics between these two schools in such areas of ethnicity and free or reduced lunch range between 1% and 10%. Both schools are in communities that are ethnically diverse and both schools are in a low SES bracket. Yet, of these two schools in the same small, urban district, one has been more academically successful than the other in that it has produced higher API scores than the other. So, what, if any, are the differences between these two very similar middle schools that lead to different student test scores? The problem addressed in this study is that in order to raise the scores of the lower-scoring school, we must understand what factors contribute to the higher scores of the other school.

Table 1

Academic Progress of Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 2006-2010

| State Test Scores | Adler M.S. | Adler Growth | Baker M.S. | Baker Growth |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 2006-2007 | 715 | | 675 | |
| 2007-2008 | 750 | 35 pts. | 706 | 31 pts. |
| 2008-2009 | 776 | 26 pts. | 730 | 24 pts. |
| 2009-2010 | 800 | 24 pts. | 776 | 46 pts. |
| Total Growth | | 85 pts. | | 101 pts. |

Note: Data acquired from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%252Fprofile%252Easp%253Flevel%253D06%2526reportNumber%253D16>

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the teachers and administrators at these two middle schools—Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School in the Ingle Beach Elementary School District—regarding seven selected components of their school. The names of the district and the middle schools have been changed so that the identity of the participants may remain confidential. The intent was

to ascertain whether there were any differences between the two schools in seven components (refer to these seven components in Figure 1 under Theoretical Framework).

Research Questions

The research questions suggested by the problem and purpose will be as follows:

1. What are the demographic similarities and differences of these two middle schools as provided by data from the state Department of Education?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers who work at each middle school regarding the following: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, as well as leadership and the decision-making process?
3. What do the teachers at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?
4. What are the perceptions of the site administrators who work at each middle school regarding the following at their school: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, as well as leadership and the decision-making process?
5. What do the site administrators at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?

Significance of Study

Practical framework. The ultimate purpose of this study was to share this knowledge with other middle schools of similar demographics so that they too may

examine their school. School districts may want information regarding the identification and analysis of critical factors that affect the performance of minority students who are also of low SES, and this information can be perceived as a significant result of this study. School districts and superintendents will also value information regarding teachers' perceptions in regards to obtaining an academically sound school. The evaluation of schools is also a time-consuming process with paths and directions to the goal of academic success for all children. This study provides more guided avenues of evaluation for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). This study reveals the impacting role of teachers who participate in academically sound schools, helps define ways to recruit and hire teachers, and adds to the existing body of literature in this critical area. As shared in *Turning Points 2000* by Jackson et al. (2000), "we are only halfway up the mountain, with the most important and perhaps most difficult part of the climb remaining" (p. 5). This research deciphers reasons for academic success that other middle schools throughout the state and country can apply to continue *their* academic success.

Theoretical framework. The review of literature for this study has resulted in the researcher identifying seven components of middle school life and creating The Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life. As studies and statements by scholars were placed in a matrix, these emerged. Figure 1 is the result of this matrix and analysis of the literature on school reform. Each of these seven components affects academic success. To further explain the figure, every middle school has a defined geographic border. The identified seven components exist within that border. The initial six include classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary instruction and teams of

faculty, school and classroom climate, professional development, school safety, and parental involvement. All of these six components are affected by the seventh component, which is the central component of leadership and decision-making.

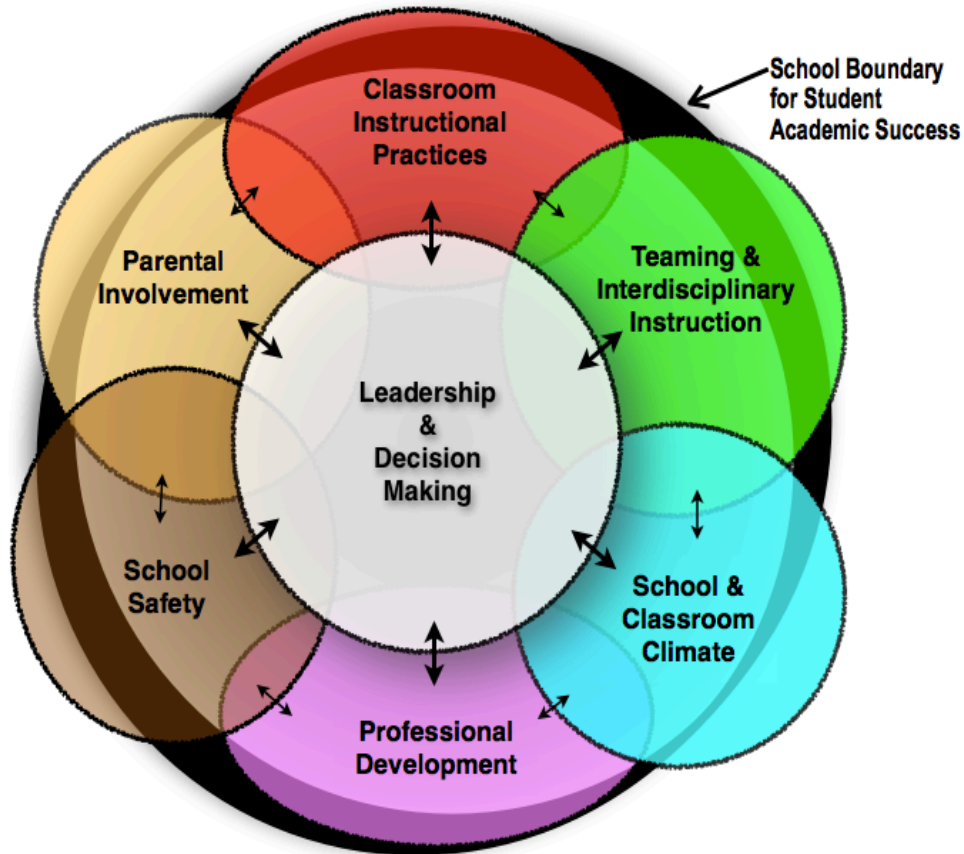


Figure 1. Neufeld model of the seven components of school life

These six components overlap with one another both inside the school boundary and also with the community outside the school boundary. The seventh component of leadership is placed at the center of the model to serve as a direct link with each of the six other components. It is the job of the principal, the administrative leader, to enhance the skills and knowledge of people in the organization to create a school culture. This leader also holds the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other and holds individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective

school culture (Fullan, 2001). The entire school culture, inside and outside the school boundary, is involved in the seven components. For all of these seven components to work together, communication is of the utmost importance. The seventh component of decision-making, which involves communication with all who are involved, is paramount in keeping all of the components working together for the ultimate goal of academic success of their students.

Methodological framework. This research utilizes a new research design to effectively examine school site reform issues using teams of teachers. The unit of organization of faculty at these middle schools is a team of four or more teachers. At both schools, teams include teachers for each core subject (history, language arts, mathematics, and science) that together work with a group of approximately 150 students. All teacher teams were invited to participate in the team interviews. The team interview for this study is a combination of a focus group behavior during the interview followed by the respondents writing comments to the seven components of this study. Further elaboration on the method is provided in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

There are key terms used in the field of education in California and throughout the United States. One term used throughout this research is *academic success*. The definition of academic success for this report is students' scores on standardized achievement tests (Murphy, 1992 as cited in Cuban, 1998; Ogawa, 1994 as cited in Cuban, 1998; Shipps, 1987 as cited in Cuban, 1998). These "student achievement scores will officially serve as the defining measure of success and failure for schools" (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 1). The Academic Performance Index (API) is the score calculated

each year for each school. The score is based on the state testing results of each student. The API is a single number on a scale of 200 to 1,000 with a score of at least 800 as the goal. In this report, the term *academic success* will refer to the score that the school receives each based. Schools whose score matches or exceeds the state Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for that year or achieves the score of 800 or larger will be considered academically successful.

Terms to be used in this research include the following:

- *Administrator*: One who works as a manager in a school, business, or government agency; a person who manages or has a talent for managing (administrator, n.d., para. 1).
- *American College Test (ACT)*. An assessment taken by students as a precursor to college or university admission (American College Test, n.d., para. 4).
- *Academic Performance Index (API)*: The API measures the performance and growth of schools and districts based on the test scores of students in Grades 2 through 12. The California Department of Education (CDE) calculates the API and disseminates the results directly to schools and districts. The API is a single number on a scale of 200 to 1,000 with a score of at least 800 as the goal. The score that indicates how well students in a school or district performed on the previous spring's tests. An API is calculated for the entire school plus its numerically significant subgroups, including socioeconomically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities (California Department of Education, 2010a).

- *Accountability Progress Report (APR)*: California's integrated accountability system that reports both the state Academic Performance Index (API) and the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Program Improvement (PI) (California Department of Education, 2011a).
- *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: This federally required report is based on test scores for schools, districts, counties, and the state. It is part of the APR released in August. The state sets annual target scores for each school. The scores are points that stipulate what each school should achieve each year based on several criteria to add to the APR of the previous year for each school (California Department of Education, 2011b).
- *CAT/6*: California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition.
- *CDE*: California Department of Education.
- *Classroom climate*: A quality of instructional environment that includes whether each individual feels personal worth, dignity, and importance while simultaneously feeling a sense of belonging to a larger group (Freiberg, 2003).
- *Classroom instructional practices*: A variety of means of teaching methods and strategies that guide structure, focus, and interaction in the classroom. Examples of teaching practices include cooperative learning, discussion, lecture, projects, and question-answer. Practices are the vehicles used by teachers to efficiently move students forward in their learning (Jackson et al., 2000).
- *Component* (n.d.): An individual integral piece, of which a composite entity is made up; especially a part that can be separated from or attached to a system (para. 1).

- *CST*: California Standards Test. This measures the achievement of California content standards in English-language arts, mathematics, science, and history/social science for Grades 2 through 11. Certain CSTs are subject-level-based or grade-level-based (California Department of Education, 2011c).
- *Culture*: The quality in a person or society that arises from a concern from what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc.; a particular form or stage of civilization, as that of a certain nation or period.
- *Decision-making*: Decision-making means identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision maker(s). Making a decision implies that there are alternative choices to be considered (Jackson et al., 2000).
- *Depth* (n.d.): “intensity; a high degree of such knowledge, insight, etc.; the part of greatest intensity” (para. 1).
- *ELL*: English language learner. A student who is not sufficiently proficient in the English language to succeed in the school’s regular instructional programs. The former designation was Limited English Proficient (LEP). Students’ English proficiency is assessed annually. Two other commonly used acronyms are English Language Learner as ELL and ESL for learners for whom English is a Second Language (California Department of Education, 1999).
- *Ethnicity*: Relating to or characteristic of a human group having racial, religious, linguistic, and certain other traits in common; denoting or deriving from the cultural traditions of a group of people.
- *IEP*: Individual Educational Plan. A program mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This program requires public schools to

develop an IEP for every student with a disability who is found to meet the federal and state requirements for special education. The IEP should describe how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning, and what teachers and service providers will do to help the student learn more effectively. The IEP development includes parents in decision-making process (California Department of Education, 2011d).

- *Interdisciplinary teaching*: A way to support goals such as transfer of learning, teaching students to think and reason, and providing a curriculum more relevant to students (Marzano, 1991); a method, or set of methods, used to teach a unit across different curricular disciplines (i.e., Grade 7 language arts, science and social studies).
- *Leadership*: Capacity or ability to lead, an act or instance of leading, guidance, direction, mobilizing people to tackle tough problems (Fullan, 2001).
- *Looping*: remaining with a core group of students and a single teacher for multiple years (Nichols, 2002).
- *Parental involvement*: Parents becoming involved in the learning process and academic advancement of their children; includes involvement at school activities, improved communication with teachers, and administrators opening the door to involve more parents in the teaching and learning process (Epstein, 1995).
- *PI*: Program improvement. A plan with a series of steps to improve the performance of students in a school that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for 2 years in a row. Only schools that receive federal Title I funds are placed in Program

Improvement. According to NCLB, a school receiving Title I funds is placed in PI if the school or any of its numerically significant subgroups fails to make AYP for 2 consecutive years based on the same factor (e.g., the English/language arts exam, the math exam, or the participation rate). Additionally, the school is placed into the PI category if it does not meet the API indicator for 2 consecutive years or, if it is a high school, fails to meet the graduation rate indicator for 2 consecutive years. A school egresses from PI if it makes AYP for 2 years in a row (California Department of Education, 2011a).

- *Professional development*: Refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personnel skill development and career advancement. Professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities; generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel through their schools and districts (Jackson et al., 2000).
- *School climate*: The social atmosphere of a setting or “learning environment” (Moos, 1979) in a school. A school’s climate can define the quality of a school that creates healthy learning places, nurtures children’s dreams and aspirations, and stimulates teachers’ creativity and enthusiasm (Freiberg, 1999).
- *School safety*: A state in which education is able to continue without disruption, without harm, without danger, which is essential for an effective learning environment.
- *SES*: Socioeconomic status (n.d.). SES is defined as an individual’s or group’s position within a hierarchical social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables, including occupation, education, income, wealth, and

place of residence. Sociologists often use socioeconomic status as a means of predicting behavior.

- *Site administrator*: Supervisors at a school site with a California Administrative Services Credential; most common site administrators include the principal, vice principal, and dean of students. The California Administrative Services Credential is administered by the California Teaching Commission (CTC; ctc.ca.gov/credentials).
- *STAR*: Standardized Testing and Report. STAR testing is a battery of California Standardized Tests that measures student achievement of state academic content standards.
- *Student*: For the purpose of this study, the term refers mainly to a youth enrolled in one of the two middle schools, formally engaged in learning.
- *Teacher*: An instructor who holds a teaching credential administered by the California Teaching Commission (CTC). Teachers of students in Grades K-6 hold a Primary Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, which authorizes the holder to teach multiple subjects in a self-contained classroom or in a core or team teaching setting. Teachers of students in Grades 7 and above hold a Secondary Single Subject Teaching Credential which authorizes the holder to teach the specific subject(s) named on the credential in departmentalized classes such as those in most middle schools and high schools. However, primary and secondary teachers may be assigned to teach any subject in their authorized fields at any grade level, including preschool, Grades K–12, or in classes organized primarily for adults (ctc.ca.gov/credentials).

- *Team:* A group of four credentialed teachers who work together with a common group of students and participate in team meetings throughout the school year.

The four credentialed teachers cover the core subjects of history, literature, math, and science. The team may include subject matter teachers at one grade level, a subject area teacher across middle school, and a teacher-credentialed counselor.

Assumptions

The accuracy and validity of this study and hence the conclusions made by the analysis of the data from the interviews depends on the honesty and accuracy of faculty and administrators who are interviewed. Based on the literature review, the assumption of this study is that there will be noticeable differences from the teachers at the two schools regarding their perception of factors of the seven components that seem to be important for academic success at middle schools. These perceptions will involve the six components of classroom instructional practices, teaming and interdisciplinary instruction, parental involvement, school and classroom climate, school safety and professional development held together by the central component of leadership and its involvement with cooperative decision-making. It is assumed that the school that is more academically successful will have a greater variety and more in-depth application of these academic agencies of development than the school that is less academically successful.

The accuracy of the responses cannot be validated, hence the conclusions from this study cannot be considered unquestionably correct. However, the conclusions from this study may lead to theories, methods, and practices that can be implemented by school administrators, faculty, and staff members in their quest for the academic success of their middle school students.

Delimitations

This research is based only on the professional opinions of the teachers and the site administrators at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School who will elect to participate in this interview process. Team interview questions were based on literature of previous studies and their reasons for the academic success or the academic deficiencies at their school. This is not a representative sampling of all academically successful middle schools of high percentages of low SES and ethnic minority students; therefore, there may be inherent bias in the interview data. Caution is used in generalizing the results to other middle schools outside of the school district under study. This study does not take into account any other interviews of the faculty of either school. This study focused on the academic conditions of two middle schools only, not on the successful academic improvements of other middle schools in the metropolitan area in which these schools exist. These interview questions included the opinions of the Grade 6 teachers who did not have the opportunity to have taught at Baker Middle School when it was a school of Grades 7 through 8 only.

Because the researcher has been an administrator (Dean of Students) at Baker Middle School from 2003-2006 when it was teaching Grades 7 through 8 and a teacher at Adler Middle School from 2006 to the present, bias may be present. However, to help circumvent this possibility, the team interviews with names removed from their responses were assigned code numbers. Seven trained coders who did not have knowledge of the individuals within these teams analyzed these completed interviews.

Timeline for Study

The desired timeline of this study began with the interview of the teachers and site administrators at Adler and Baker middle schools. The projected date of the submission of the interview questions to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval was February, 2010. The dates for conducting the interview of Adler and Baker faculty and administrators were in late March and early April of 2010, after which time the interview was analyzed. Projected submission of the dissertation to the dissertation committee was April, 2011.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

Reforms for public schools have been taking place since the early 1900s (Jackson et al., 2000), yet little change other than that of the names of sites has in actuality been taking place throughout the decades. While on paper there are great proponents for change during the end of the 20th century, most of the change has been replaced by rhetoric (Goodlad, 1999). But some schools have made great changes and do indeed succeed. It is important to understand why.

Some say that this success is due to schools finding out what they need for their children to succeed. Every school is unique. Though federal and state institutions provide a cacophony touting methods and techniques to implement in the quest for academic success, each school must know their children in order to learn what programs are best suited for their students (Sizer, 1999). This chapter will give a brief history of the middle school education system in the United States and California before delving into a review of literature about the various techniques and programs that academically successful middle schools use for their children to succeed.

Middle Schools Across the United States

There have been reforms for middle schools since the early 20th century. It was during the early 1900s that a typical school system was comprised of a K-8 school and a school with Grades 9 through 12. These two schools were called a grammar school and a high school. But as the country moved from a predominantly rural to an urban population, reforms took place.

The first major reform was to separate the grammar and high school and add a separate learning environment between these two schools for children in their pre-teen years. Such schools ranged from Grades 6 to Grade 9 (Midgley, Maehr, National Center for, S.L., & Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor School of Education, 1992). There was growing dissatisfaction with the success of junior high schools. The name *junior high* was changed in circa 1910 to *middle school* or *intermediate school* (Hough, University of California, Riverside & California Educational Research Cooperative, 1989). The age structure of the children was the same at middle schools ranging from Grades 6 to 9. There was also a list of other elements for reforms for middle schools students in the 1960s, but little happened other than the change of the name of schools for adolescents (Bolman & Deal, 2002).

In the 1980s, another wave of reform took place due to little change in middle schools since the 1960s (Hough et al., 1989). The difference in education moved beyond simply the grades within a particular school and began to impact what happens in the classroom (Epstein, as cited in Midgley et al., 1992). Additional reforms included such elements as creating a small learning environment with small student/teacher teams. Reforms also called for an array of new techniques for teachers in middle schools to implement so students could begin to succeed and grow (Jackson et al., 2000).

This second school reform movement is captured in *Turning Points 2000*. In this book are seven recommendations for reform for the 21st century. These recommendations differ from the first reform in that they focus on external standards, namely the content standards adopted by state or federal policymakers. One recommendation is to teach the curriculum grounded in standards. To do so involves the

second recommendation, which is to use instructional methods designed to prepare all students. Preparing teachers for middle grades is the third recommendation. Teaching students who are at the ages of middle school can require different skills than teaching students who are 5 or 6 years old and different from teaching high school students who are 17 or 18 years of age. The fourth recommendation is for educators to organize relationships for learning. This involves establishing teams of teachers who work cohesively together so their work together for their core group of students will not allow any student to be overlooked. The fifth recommendation involves the role of administration and the concepts of teacher decision-making and teacher empowerment. It is for principals to govern democratically by involving the decisions of all staff members. Teachers will know what is needed for all students on their team to succeed. The next recommendation is that the students be able to learn in a safe and healthy school environment. Teachers and classified staff along with parents and the community create this safe environment. The final recommendation is to involve parent and communities in supporting learning.

The reform movements will not happen on their own, even with all staff members being involved in the decision-making process. Fullan (2002) refers to the *school capacity* and what makes schools especially effective. This capacity consists of five components. The first element is the knowledge of the teachers. This involves teachers continually growing their knowledge about both content and teaching techniques. The second component is professional community, while the third factor is program coherence. These components involve teachers working together as units in sync so that the program runs smoothly. The focus of the program is a group of professional

educators working so that each and every child on their team will learn. The fourth component is the use of technical resources. This can involve teachers using technology as their own educational resources for them to learn more about teaching techniques to run their program at the optimal level. It also involves teachers using technology as a teaching tool for the students to use to learn. The fifth component is leadership by a principal who leads and supports the teachers in the first four components.

The latest reform effort of 2010 now concentrates on redefining the federal role in education: shifting from a focus merely on compliance to allowing state and local innovation to flourish, rewarding success, and fostering supportive and collaborative relationships with states, districts, and nonprofit partners. There are several cross-cutting changes that have been implemented in order to allow local innovations to lead the way and to support the development, identification, and scaling-up of strategies that are working. The first step of this change process is to increase flexibility in return for improved outcomes. Increasing flexibility leads to the next step, which is expanding programs, projects, and strategies that show results. When positive results are shown, professionals can now advance to the third step, which is focusing on key priorities across programs.

Whereas the Bush administration adhered to the Turning Points 2000, the new administration in the White House is supported by the first reform. In March of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education launched “A Blueprint for Reform: The Realization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.” As shared by President Obama, “My administration’s blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” is not only a plan to renovate a flawed law, but also an outline for a re-envisioned

federal role in education. This is a framework to guide our deliberations and shared work—with parents, students, educators, business and community leaders, elected officials, and other partners—to strengthen America’s public education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This blueprint builds on the four significant reform efforts already in progress.

The first step that is already in progress is improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has great teachers and every school has a great leader. The second step provides information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children’s schools. Information is also shared with educators to help them improve their children’s learning. Implementing college-ready and career-ready standards with the students is the third mark of this process. Implementation of standards also involves assessment. Thus, this step is not complete unless it is assured that improved assessments align with those standards. The fourth step involves improving student learning and achievement in low-performing schools. To achieve this step, educational professionals provide intensive support and effective interventions for their students.

Concerns of Middle Schools in California

Despite these reforms across the United States and across California, many middle schools around the state were and are faltering in their quest to achieve state mandates for academic progress (Cuban, 1998; Fullan, 2003). The middle schools that face the highest percentage of schools that do not succeed are those that are comprised of families with low SES and minority children. However, not all of the middle schools in low SES areas have students that achieve low test scores. There are middle schools that

meet these criteria yet do succeed (Mintrop, Trujillo, & University of California, Los Angeles, Center for the Study & Evaluation, 2007).

School Improvement Self-Study

There are studies regarding the academic success and failure of middle schools around the country that refer to the Center for Prevention, Research, and Development (CPRD) of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. This organization is based at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This institution has developed their School Improvement Self-Study survey that is a set of reliable and valid interviews for middle school students, parents, teachers, and principals. The areas of focus devised by the institution will be used as a foundation for interviews that are part of the present study.

The self-survey was developed in 1990 by CPRD at the University of Illinois. It is affiliated with the Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools (AIMS). This self-survey is based on the foundation of theory, research, and practice. Over 1,000 schools in 25 states have participated in this self-survey. These self-survey surveys have been designed to assist middle schools in planning and monitoring their school improvement activities. The institution provides data from the results of the survey to assess the levels of instructional practices, team practices, parent involvement, professional development topics, and so forth, so that school personnel can set goals and implement an action plan. Reliability and validation studies are regularly conducted to ensure that their survey measures are both reliable and accurate. As part of their years of analysis, the center has established categories to group focus areas for the survey. The next section of the literature review will reflect on these areas of focus that the institution has established.

Areas of Focus for Middle Schools

The remainder of this chapter is a review of literature based on the techniques and procedures that research has shown are factors of academically successful middle schools. All of these factors have been categorized into one of the seven components found in the *Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life*. The components presented in the following order are: classroom instructional practices, teaming and interdisciplinary instruction, school and classroom climate, professional development, school safety, parental involvement, and leadership/decision-making. As we delve into these seven factors important for middle school academic success—as presented by CPRD and confirmed with the review of literature and research—we learn how these important elements are integrated amongst each other.

Classroom Instructional Practices

How a teacher teaches is an important component for academic success. In fact, other factors of academic success are second only to that of teachers in predicting student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). There are a wide variety of techniques that range from the schedule of the day to instruction and assessment techniques (Cuban, 2008; Hough et al., 1989; Montgomery, 2008; Ozgun-Koca, 2008; Peterson, 2001b). While the state standards as to what is taught is also crucial, other factors that affect the students—such as their learning strategies, their motivation, and their culture—are also important for success (Anderman, Midgley, & Education Resources Information Center, 1998; Bardach, 2008; Boller, 2008; Strahan, 2003). This common curriculum grows from the needs and interests of students and their teacher who is guided by the standards, not strangled by them (George, 2010). A strong support for arrangements that encourage

strong student-teacher relationships deal with tasks named in several components: interdisciplinary teaming, flexible scheduling, active teaching and learning environment (George, 2010).

Block schedule. An important arm of the development of changes for middle schools involves scheduling, a system that is quite different from the traditional 50-minute period where all classes are attended each day. One particular type of schedule that has proven to be important for middle schools is block scheduling (Hough et al., 1989). While such scheduling started in the 1960s to promote instructional innovations, various modified schedules have spread slowly (Cuban, 2008). Block scheduling is having periods last twice as long; customarily that would be 1½ to 2 hours of instruction. However, with block scheduling, classes usually meet every other day. Schools can develop their own schedules to fit their academic needs. At a middle school in Louisville, Kentucky, teams are free to create their own schedules based on their judgment of academic needs (Ames & Miller, 1994; Maehr & Midgley, 1996). One team developed a schedule with short instructional time for math. Teachers believed at this school that such topics as mathematics are best learned in short periods of instruction, but are taught each day. Classes such as language arts, science, and social studies could alter from shorter to longer periods of time depending on the activity that they had planned for these classes. But, if block scheduling is the type of scheduling used, changes in instruction and assessment must also take place to work with this longer period of time. “It’s not just how long you make it, but how you make it long” (Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997, p. 16).

As Peterson (2001b) and others share from their study of the success of block scheduling and middle school faculty, it can be challenging to begin a complete new way of instruction. Time for this new form of instruction is doubled and hence new and diverse methods of instruction and assessment are imperative. In the 1st-year survey of the faculty of a middle school in Minnesota where they began the block scheduling method, only a small percentage of the instructors stated that they were satisfied with this new method of the workday. However, 1 year later, 78% of the teachers indicated in the survey that they are satisfied with block scheduling.

Students also showed that three periods in the day as opposed to the eight periods that had been present at this middle school was beneficial to their well being. In the 1st year of the survey, 38% of the students said they liked block scheduling. However, 1 year later, 66% of the students said they enjoyed this new way of their time in the classroom. An added bonus of block scheduling was also noticed in this study survey. In the 1st year of this new scheduling, 68% of the students said they feel they were stressed at school. But, on the 2nd year of block scheduling, only 35% of the students at this school with the new daily schedule stated that they felt stressed.

Peterson also discovered innovations for block scheduling on his visit to schools around the country. One New York middle school used a hybrid system of blocking. They established a 6-day cycle. At this school, each student met with each class four times a week. Of these four meetings, two would be in 40-minute blocks while the other two times to meet would be in 80-minute blocks. Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that using flexible scheduling and extended school day activities was a core reason for their success (Whitehouse, 2009).

Looping. Another different form of scheduling for the school day is called looping. There are two different forms of looping. The first form involves a teacher teaching the same group of students over a longer period time, from 2 to 3 years. In middle schools that are comprised of students in Grades 6, 7, and 8, looping involves teachers staying with their students for the 3 years. On their 4th year, teachers take on the incoming students in Grade 6 and will begin their 3-year cycle once again. Schools with looping have reported an increase in the sense of community. “Schools using looping have reported positive results in building a sense of community among teachers, students, and parents” (Peterson, 2001b, p. 7). In these cases the school had the key ingredients that Pyle (2001) found to be essential for success, those being “the unwavering support of the teachers involved, the passionate enthusiasm of the principal for this system, and support from the parent community” (Peterson, 2001b, p. 7).

A second form of looping, also called rotation, involves revolving the length of time, and the time of day, that classes are offered. The traditional schedule offers the day beginning with Period 1 class that will be followed by Period 2, then Period 3, and so forth. In this type of looping, the first day will be Periods 1 through 6 in a row, but the next day will begin with Period 2 and continue through Period 6, then end the day with Period 1. The next day in school, the day will begin with Period 3 and progress through Period 6 that will be followed by Period 1, then Period 2. With looping, all classes will be taught at different times of the day. For example, if Period 1 class is math, this subject will be taught at different times throughout the day, sometimes in the morning, sometimes before lunch, sometimes after lunch, and sometimes at the end of the day.

This looping form of scheduling was noticed at 15% of the 50 high-performing schools visited by Peterson.

These new forms of scheduling are more prevalent around the world; however, these have been very slow in development in the United States. Peterson (2001b) went on the road in search of reasons for academic excellence in middle schools. He visited 50 schools around the country that were highly academically successful. This was shown in the naming and ranking of most of these schools. Of the 50 schools he visited, nine were National Blue Ribbon schools. As of 1997, it is estimated that only 200 schools in the United States had looping for their academic schedule (Peterson, 2001b). However, in his study, Peterson discovered that 15% of the 50 high academic schools he visited had different forms of looping. Diverse forms of scheduling of classes for middle school students have been shown throughout the United States.

Links to real-world experience. Also important, besides scheduling, is what is done in class. Studies have shown that an important instructional practice for today's students in modern society is to make explicit connections between the lessons being taught and the real world experiences of the students (Mills & Pollack, 1993; Strahan & Layell, 2006). This is particularly helpful for children who have low academic momentum (Strahan, 2008) that is an important concern for children at the middle school age. Working on lessons in a team environment that involves their possible real goals and achievements has shown to be particularly helpful for those children who are reluctant to complete their schoolwork. Working on math, language arts, science, or history projects that are related to their present and future life makes learning more exciting and successful. This important concept of student relevance to each topic is to

retain the student's interest and hence their academic knowledge of diverse topics (Copeland, Davis, Foley, Morley, & Nyman, 2001).

Service learning. Another fragment of instruction that can both link across the curriculum and integrate the content with the real life of the student is service learning (Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon, 2002). Service learning involves students doing work to help in the community. While it does help those in need, service learning also appears to have an additional advantage in that it promotes the development of positive values in students, as well as for bringing staff and students together in cooperative ventures. There are times when these service activities had a connection to an academic subject, while in others it was the advisor-advisee homeroom that organized the service project. "Service learning has the potential to achieve the traditional goals of an advisory program without being viewed as 'fluff' by staff, students, and parents if it is implemented properly" (Dietz, as cited in Peterson, 2001b, p. 26). The venture of utility to the community has shown to be one of the elements evident in academically successful schools. In the 50 successful schools that Peterson visited on his trip around the nation visiting exemplary schools, he noted that 30% of these schools have formal programs of service learning.

Cooperative learning. Another instructional technique that has been shown by studies to be a component of academic success is cooperative learning (Copeland et al., 2001; Hough et al., 1989; Turner & Meyer, 1995). Cooperative learning is a learning technique in which students work with partners or in small groups of students to learn a topic rather than simply by reading to learn about a topic before taking a test. As cooperative learning is a factor of academic success for students, it can also be an

important concept for teachers to learn so that they can make it part of the instructional process.

Cooperative group work can be very engaging in the classroom. For middle school students, the importance of peer group influence can be a motivating factor in this learning technique. Using cooperating learning has been described as a positive influence for students in helping to take away the fear of failure. Cooperative group work helps students build self esteem and hence their academic performance (Willis, 2007). Students in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms can especially benefit from a variety of instructional strategies and cooperative approaches to learning. (Student language and culture is a topic covered in depth in a later section.)

Assessment. Also an important part of instruction is assessment. As diverse forms of instruction in the classroom of middle schools today have proven to be important for academic success, so have diverse forms of assessment shown to be decisive (Hough et al., 1989). A new form of assessment of knowledge that is growing in society today is called portfolios. There are different types of portfolio forms of assessment. This method of revealing if what was taught by the teachers was learned by the students is also called self-assessment. This form shows growth over time. A typical portfolio is a collection of journals, essays, worksheets, videotapes, and posters (Ames & Miller, 1994; Montgomery, 2008). Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that integrating the curriculum and using various forms of assessment such as portfolios was a core reason for their success (Whitehouse, 2009). Portfolios are also a way to join the content of different academic departments so that what is taught in actuality can be interdisciplinary (Ozgun-Koca, 2008). In future

literature, we will see how important the interdisciplinary instruction is for academically successful schools.

Second chance. Another benefit to the portfolio form of assessment is to allow students to redo their work (Anderman et al., 1998). Failure with no chance for success through additional work can be a difficult hurdle for students at the middle school level. Giving students repeated attempts to show their successful understanding of knowledge gives students more of an opportunity to want to learn.

Teaching students strategies for learning and organization. Learning the core subject is not the only important element for classroom teachers. Teaching students about specific learning strategies is critical at the middle school level (Hough et al., 1989). Teaching about learning strategies involves teaching organizational skills and time management. At the middle school level, often teachers assume that such skills have been taught by the elementary teachers and have already been mastered by the students. But studies have shown that a constant review and monitoring of such skills for students that now may change classes every 50-minutes and can now have as many as six different teachers is important for the child to maintain these important skills as they prepare for high school. “Middle school students are assumed to be old enough to remember to bring books home, finish a project without nagging, and write assignments down” (Boller, 2008, p. 169). “If organizational skills are such an important component of academic success, should they not receive the same attention given to subject areas?” (Boller, 2008, p. 170). This author continues, explaining that

An underlying assumption in middle schools is that students are old enough to juggle multiple assignments, plan and organize projects, and regulate their time

and behavior. Looking at organization skills as part of our developmental learning process helps teachers understand that many students may need support and instruction before they can assume responsibility for their learning. (Boller, 2008, p. 170)

Similarly, other authors state the following:

Strategies to improve school functioning have been widely implemented in middle schools across the United States. Although these efforts have met success, there appears to be considerable variation in the extent to which schools are willing to fully integrate specific strategies. (as cited in Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009, p. 712)

For example, such strategies that should be continually instructed and monitored for the progress and success of each student are taking Cornell notes¹ and teaching the think-and-search reading comprehension strategies (Strahan & Layell, 2006). Even basic tasks like organizing the binder notebook and backpacks are skills that can be continually taught and reviewed at middle school (McCoy, 2000).

Another skill that studies have shown to be a component of academic success is teaching the students about the use of assignment notebooks (Laase, 1996). This is a task that helps the children gain experience with time management and structuring their day, week, and month with assignments. These skills gained at the middle school level by the children can make learning at the high school and college level much easier. In the 50 academically successful schools that David Peterson visited in his quest to find a

¹ The Cornell note-taking system is a widely-used note taking system devised in the 1950s by Pauk (2001), an education professor at Cornell University. In this system, the student divides the paper into two columns with the note-taking column on the right 6 inches of the paper and the key word column on the left 2 inches of the paper.

commonality among the reasons for success, he noted that 52% of these schools did have a program regarding learning strategies that were not direct parts of the state curriculum. At 26% of these schools teaching management strategies, teachers worked from 15 to 33 minutes each day and took on an agreed-upon curriculum to review three-ring binders of students. An equal 26% of these 50 successful schools had no period of time set aside and had no curriculum specifically for organization and learning skills, but they reviewed three-ring binders during the first 3 to 5 minutes of the class period, normally the first period of the day. All of this is to help middle school students embrace a skill that is often overlooked by teachers of this age group. “Our middle school students may not be fully equipped to be in the driver’s seat, but with the right support, they can certainly begin to take the wheel” (Boller, 2008, p. 171).

Being sure that middle school students have attained knowledge about skills for academic success appears at the high school and college level (Cuban, 2009).

ACT data show that fewer than 2 out of 10 students in Grade 8 are on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school. And, not surprisingly, our research shows that students who are not prepared for high school are less likely than others to be prepared for college and career by the time they graduate from high school. (The Forgotten Middle, 2009, p. 14)

Teaching and re-teaching basic skills at the middle school level can be an important component for the academic success of low SES and minority students at the middle school.

Technology. The use of technology in the classroom is expanding in the 21st century. Establishing more central and comprehensive roles for the use of technology is

pivotal for schools to become academically successful (Reigeluth, as cited in Doblar, 2010).

The use of technology has two elements today: use by the student to learn; use by the instructor to teach and to continually use data acquired from teaching. Used effectively, technology can improve how schools are run, how teachers teach, and how students learn, particularly when an emphasis is given to processing and analyzing data from instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Though the use of technology alone does not guarantee academic success at middle schools, it is an important factor for those that do succeed. One example is Rogers Middle School in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California area. In their 5 years of reformation, their state ranking among middle schools jumped from a 2 to an 8. Their API scores went from 639 to 717. Teachers at Rogers attribute an important part of their reformation to the use of technology. The instructors report using technology as a teaching tool and as the device to continually acquire and analyze data about how their students are growing (Becker & Bebout, 2007).

Teaming and Interdisciplinary Instruction

As these two concepts are discussed, it will be apparent why they are included under one heading. When closely integrated, these concepts support and complement each other.

Teaming. Teaming is a powerful practice to consider for successful middle schools. “One of the key recommendations for having effective middle schools is to create small personalized communities for learning” (Southern Regional Board of Education of Atlanta, GA, 1997). This system of community learning today is often

times referred to as *teams* (Ames & Miller, 1994; Hough et al., 1989; Mills & Pollack, 1993). While there are different types of teams, the focus involves keeping students and teachers grouped together. This is particularly helpful in large middle schools (schools with more than 600 students). A typical type of team involves having one teacher in each core subject (math, science, language arts, history) on each team with one group of students typically ranging from 120 to 150 children per team (Wallace, 2007). For a school comprised of 900 students, that would be 300 students in each Grade 6, 7, and 8. As such, there would be two teams per grade. With teams, all children who have the same language arts teacher would also have the same social studies, math, and science teachers.

For a team to work, it involves more than students having the same teachers. These four teachers per team now also have the same 150 students. Four teachers focusing on 150 students is more manageable than eight teachers working so that 300 students will succeed academically. In the team method, these four teachers are given the same preparation period. This enables the teachers to meet and discuss their 150 students. During this discussion time, topics of grading, reviewing student work, discipline, analyzing student academic data, counseling, cooperating learning, planning, and crossing content from one core to another can all be discussed (Midgley et al., 1992; Mills & Pollack 1993).

There are other instructional and assessment skills that are important for use in the classroom. Such elements that will be mentioned in other segments of this research for success that are important for middle school academic achievement include setting high expectations and priorities for all children, teams, and school leadership (EdSource, 2010;

Trimble & Peterson, 2000). Trimble and Peterson's (2000) study analyzed the team structure in the state of Georgia in the late 1990s. In this study, professionals looked at schools where both student achievement and percentage of low SES were high. At such schools, there were several teams with interactions by all of these organizational leadership components. Such teams included an executive team, a leadership team, grade level teams, a cross-content team, subject teams, and so forth. In this research, the sample school was of Grades 6 through 8 and was comprised of 893 students. At this academically successful school, the interdisciplinary team would meet five times per week. They also rotated leadership. In this analysis, all students improved academically at a rate higher than the state average, but the students in the 25th percentile made much improvement. Beneficial and unexpected side effects of teams at this school were increased attendance and a clear decline in the dropout rate of students.

Teaming has been around for over 30 years (Reiser & Butzin, 2000). If asked if they team, there are schools that reply with a simple yes or no, but Mertens and Flowers' (2003) study of what middle school practices improve student achievement in high poverty schools look more in depth at this feature. This study examined the degree of teamwork incorporated in the teaming practices. In their study of 121 schools, the scholars noticed quite a range of degree of teams. For some schools, a team means simply assigning a group of students with a group of teachers. Other schools have their team of teachers meet weekly. At other schools, team teachers meet daily to discuss their students. This research determined that schools with a higher degree of integration with teams would, for the most part, have higher test results.

Starting a new technique such as teaming can be challenging for teachers to develop. “Teaming resembles married life in several ways: when it is working well, it is beautiful, and when it is not, it can be horrific” (George & Alexander, as cited in Wilson, 2007, p. 2). But once formed, it can be an exciting new endeavor to cultivate. Once formed, all must work hard to maintain the work of this collaboration (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999). This research also finds that teaming has benefits other than higher academic outcome.

CPRD’s prior research with Michigan Middle State Schools has shown that when teachers in schools fully engaged in teaming are provided with high levels of common planning time, student self-reported outcomes improve, including less depression, fewer behavior problems, higher self-esteem, and greater academic efficacy. (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 41)

In addition, student achievement scores improve dramatically, particularly for those schools with high percentages (60% or more) of free and reduced price lunch students (Mertens & Flowers, 2003), but as more studies are finding, teaming is not the only factor for academic success. The degree of teaming is not a factor of higher academic achievement if a team is the *only* reform in middle school development. Teaming is important, but only if it is one of several reform factors being implemented (Mertens & Flowers, 2003).

Too often in schools today that are not succeeding, changes are implemented, but when there is little progress after only 1 year, drastic changes are once again made. Mertens and Flowers’ (2003) study reminds educators that it takes time for change to work. The study shows that schools that have established team teaching and has had the

degree of teams grow over 3 years has the highest achievement scores when compared with other schools that have lower levels of teaming, or drop the teaming program after the 1st or 2nd year. The study learns that time and perseverance of several reforms are important for achievement scores to grow high and maintain this stance.

It is reasonable to conclude that the combined impact of more frequent teaming, common planning time, and higher levels of practices will take more than 3 years to dramatically affect student achievement scores, particularly in schools with large populations of low income students. (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 41)

Mertens and Flowers (2003) learned that higher degrees of teaming effort result in higher achievement scores. Part of these degrees of effort discuss amount of common planning time the team teachers spend together. This importance of common planning time was discovered in the studies of 155 middle schools in Michigan conducted by the CPRD (Flowers et al., 1999). The study clearly indicated that teaming combined with high degrees (meeting four times a week for a minimum of 30 minutes) of common planning time is more effective in producing positive outcomes. As mentioned before, one type of improvement alone will not lead to greater academic success. There exist factors of the 10 elements that lead to academic success often times cross from one area to another. This study also learned that schools that team well together (101 of the 155) also have a more positive work climate. Teachers at schools that are teaming view their school as a more positive, rewarding, and satisfying place to work than teachers that are not teaming (at 34 schools) or have implemented only pilot teaming methods (15 schools).

Other strengths of reform implementation also developed with teaming at the Michigan schools. “In our findings, teachers at school that are teaming (101 schools) report more frequent contact with parents about not only student performance and problems, but also about homework, activities, et cetera” (Flowers et al., 1999, p. 58). Mertens and Flowers (2003) also learned that teaming is important. Teams with more common planning time result in higher test scores. But what do teachers do in this planning time? One important element that Mertens and Flowers learned is that this common planning time is involved with planning interdisciplinary instruction and assessment methods.

In a 2010 study titled “Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better,” the results developed 7 domains that outlined areas that were common for academically successful middle schools. One important domain is “an intensive, school-wide focus on improving academic outcomes.” This explains how teaming is just a beginning step to integrating common forms of instruction and assessment school-wide.

Interdisciplinary instruction. Crossing over the boundaries of the seven areas for consideration for middle school academic success is common when reviewing literature concerning the academic success of middle school students in today’s society. There are examples that involve classroom instruction and scheduling as well as involve content areas. This crossing over and teaching two core content areas at the same time and how these two relate is called *interdisciplinary practices*. Studies have shown that interdisciplinary means of instruction can also be academically successful, particularly for students in schools that are of high percentages of low SES and multi-ethnic societies at their sites (Strahan, 2008). “With interdisciplinary instruction, students can become

more involved in their learning and teachers can work toward eliminating discipline lines. Students can become independent, confident individuals who ‘learn how to learn’ and develop lifelong learning skills” (Manning & Bucher, as cited in Duerr, 2008, p. 177).

Traditional forms of teaming involve one core subject teacher per team. But there are different forms of team teaching. One is where the focus involves teaming one or two subjects by the same teacher for the same group of students. A second form is joining two classes of students (approx. 70 children) with two different content teachers into one class. One example of this teaming is one class of 70 students having one language arts teacher and one social studies teacher. One adult can teach all 70 children at one time, but since it is two classes, this teacher will have two periods of time with which to teach. Of course, the teachers can separate the students into different groups and can still teach at one time. The big benefit is covering two topics, but having double the time to use to teach the content. The difficult aspect of this form of team teaching is that 70 students must fit in one space. Schools that use such forms of teaming have classrooms with movable walls where the teachers can turn two classrooms into one.

Just joining two different content teachers together in the same time period does not guarantee interdisciplinary instruction. Teaching content comprised of both language arts and history is a skill the two teachers must work together to maintain. One example of interdisciplinary instruction could be reading a certain style of writing that is part of the language arts curriculum. The social studies curriculum could involve a particular time or event in history. A second example of interdisciplinary instruction could link studying the history of learning about parts of the human body with the social studies study of time of the Renaissance and Leonardo daVinci's dissection of the human body.

Another form of team teaching could involve one person teaching both language arts and history. This teacher would have 35 children, but for two periods in the day, one for language arts and one for history. This is the example where one teacher joins these two core topics using the example shown above while having very flexible time to teach these different contents.

Cuban (1999) studied a middle school in Georgia that adopted the team structure of organization. It was a school with a high percentage of ethnic minority students and a high percentage of those that are in a low SES bracket. At this school, a major focus of this team approach was interdisciplinary instructional methods. As part of their schedule, there would be interdisciplinary team meetings 5 days a week. All of these team meetings lead to great improvements in the academic success of the students at their school, particularly with reading and mathematics. The school improvement scores were higher than the average state scores.

Studies have shown that these diverse forms of teaming can also have beneficial side effects other than improvement in state test scores. One of the key recommendations for developing effective middle schools with teaming is because the forming of these small, personalized communities for learning is where both students and teachers can develop closer and more supportive relationships (Edna McConell Clark Foundation, as cited by the Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997).

The scholars of this research address the use of cooperative learning across the core content areas. This also results in the use of the portfolio as diverse means of assessment. These results suggest that teachers in schools today leave behind the old departmental approach to instruction and instead delve into the teaming approach. This

will include the thematic approach to instruction that again involves interdisciplinary practices (Anderman et al., 1998). In addition to core content areas, interdisciplinary teaching allows for the re-insertion of instructional topics that are sometimes missing in today's test-driven curriculums. Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that implementing enrichment and skill development programs that promote personal growth was a core reason for their success. This includes an array of elective classes such as art, music, technical training, and so forth (Whitehouse, 2009).

Integration of interdisciplinary team methods. The second component involves integration of the subject across the curriculum. Doing so involves the teaming with core teachers so that a group of four to six teachers can focus on a group of 150 students. This is one example of the importance of intertwining content across the curriculum (Fullan, 2002; Strahan & Layell, 2006). This integration also involves linking what is being learned in the classroom with the real life of each student (Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon, 2002).

School and Classroom Climate

Research shows the importance of establishing a safe and warm learning environment is important for the middle school student to grow. At the age of middle school students, research shows that it is important that students be taught in a warm environment with cooperation among all of their peers (Peterson, 2001a). In this environment with peers, the task of continuous motivation of the children (Anderman et al., 1998) is also crucial for their success.

Student motivation. Student motivation is another important factor in setting the climate in schools that are academically successful. Student motivation is an important

influence on learning (Anderman et al., 1998). Anderman et al. (1998) summarized the goal theory that focuses on the reasons that students perceive to achieve and how this affects higher academic scores. Research shows a decline in motivation and performance in children as they move from the elementary school to the middle school level. It is at middle schools where academic success wallows the most. Professional educators find it a challenge to motivate middle school students. The attribution theory says that the student's perception of their educational experience influences their motivation. A history of success in a given subject area is generally assumed to lead one to continue to persist in that area. But at the middle school level, when failure repeats with the students, it is very difficult to ignite and sustain motivation in future assignments. Tying the content to the interests of the children and using such forms of assessment as portfolios gives children more of a reason to stay involved in learning. This means of instruction and assessment can involve allowing children to redo their work when they fail. Always giving children another chance to succeed is a powerful motivational factor. If children believe their reasons for failure are out of their control, they do not have reasons to believe that they can succeed (Anderman et al., 1998).

A second pattern to use to enhance student motivation for a positive school and classroom climate is the goal theory. There are important links in student motivation with other elements discussed thus far, including classroom instructional practices, team practices, and the integration of instruction and the curriculum. The goal theory focuses on student perceptions for achievement. Education scholars (Anderman et al., 1998) encourage teachers to continually motivate and encourage students by having them work in cooperative groups and use forms of assessment such as portfolios. At the middle

school, this can involve allowing and encouraging students to redo work where they did not succeed. This continuously changing process can establish an encouraging climate in the classroom.

In the studies of school reform, schools that are “beating the odds” can always be found. Another component of the academic success of middle schools involves the belief by the teachers that students can achieve. This belief sets the environment in the classroom. There is a study that looked at four school districts and the academic success of their schools (Strahan, 2003). As one study discovers, to enhance student achievement involves the form of *collective efficacy*. Collective efficacy is when teachers share the belief that they can work together to produce positive effects for their students. Collective efficacy can enhance the quality of teaching.

A study of 42 students in Grade 8 who were at academic risk found that 24 of the 42 students improved greatly in their studies when teachers helped students set their own goals. The instruction involved helping the students to plan how they were going to achieve this goal. This teaching technique is called the *encourage momentum approach* (Strahan, 2008).

Caring environment. In Peterson’s (2001b) visit to over 50 middle schools that were all considered academically successful, 9 were named national Blue Ribbon Middle Schools and 12 of these middle schools were feeders to high schools that were named in Newsweek’s Top 100 High Schools in 2000. The remaining schools that were located in districts that were considered distinguished in their state or local community.

The percentage of successful middle schools that use the concept of teaming to organize the students and teachers together is very high, at 92%, among other reform measures.²

The importance of teaming is shown in the studies reported by Strahan and Layell (2006) in “Connecting Caring and Action Through Responsive Teaching: How One Team Accomplished Success in a Struggling Middle School.” This study shows how even just one team—not necessarily an entire school—can improve academically with the concept of teaming. This study was about Washington Middle School in 2001-2002, a school with 645 students. Eighty percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, a figure that grew by 13% during the year of the study. Statewide statistics regarding academic success at Washington Middle School showed that 48.5% of the students at this school were proficient in reading and math. However, the scores for the district where Washington Middle School was located had 73% proficient for reading and math while the state percentage for proficiency was 75%. At this school, a team of teachers started a learner-centered environment to create a warm, supportive relationship with their students. To do so, the team started the STAR System (Strive to Attain Respect) that was only for this particular team of teachers and their classes at the school. This system involved the assessment of learning strengths and areas of need two to three times a month. Students were given options on the projects they wanted to complete. At the time for state testing, the STAR students at this school made more progress in reading and math than those children who were not on the team of teachers that used the STAR

² An important point that Peterson (2001) noticed is that among these excellent middle schools, even those that had a more traditional schedule, rather than block schedules or looping, were diverse in the length of the day, number of periods in the day, and the time school would start and end. In addition, 26% of the successful schools had the teaching and monitoring of such skills important for their academic success.

system. One student recognized and shared the work of the team teachers as part of their own well being: “My teachers taught me how to be more responsible and to be confident in myself. Before I came to this team, I wasn’t responsible or respectful. But now they have helped me and they give us something that every student needs—love” (Strahan & Layell, 2006, p. 150).

Multicultural understanding. Part of establishing a caring environment is the degree of awareness, acceptance, and participation that is fostered for ethnically diverse students. The degree of awareness, acceptance, and participation of various cultures is part of the progress into change. In the article “Connecting Caring and Action Through Responsive Teaching: How One Team Accomplished Success in a Struggling Middle School” (Strahan & Layell, 2006), the authors reported that respect for students’ language and cultures as one of several key factors for academically successful middle schools. Common characteristics of middle schools that are not academically successful include those with a high population of low SES students and with a high percentage of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. At the same time, as stated previously, there are schools in this category that are academically successful. According to a study by Sonia Nieto, one of the most important characteristics of successful schools is the respect for students’ language and cultures (Bardach, 2008). At the middle school level, this is a concept that must still be pursued. That concept is teaching the students about acknowledging and respecting ethnic diversity. This lesson can be continuously taught and reviewed in all classes and can be related with all content. It is important that children accept and are proud of their culture. Children can then learn and accept other children with different ways of living. In a school that is multi-ethnic, the acceptance and

respect for all that is in this school community establishes a warm climate in the classroom and in the school that results in greater academic success.

In *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*, Lindsey, Robbins, and Terrell (2005) present the six points in the cultural proficiency continuum. Their first point is titled Cultural Destructiveness. Individuals at this level of cultural proficiency are those with poor attitudes, policies, and practices that lead to cultural genocide. People with these traits ignore the presence of all cultures, including those based on ethnicity, and education level.

The second level of Lindsay, Robbins and Terrell cultural proficiency continuum is titled Cultural Incapacity. Those at this level acknowledge other cultures, but included in this recognition of another culture is an exhibit of extreme bias and the belief in superiority of the dominant culture. To hide this bias is the possible exhibition of so-called window dressing that can hide the beliefs.

Cultural blindness is the third level of the cultural proficiency continuum. This level is the belief that though there are other cultures, all people are the same. As a result, the differences in culture as seen by such means of language, dress, and practices are seen as being disobedient or in noncompliance of the dominant culture.

The fourth of six layers in the continuum is cultural precompetence. The skill possessed at this level is an awareness of one's own limitations in intercultural interactions and involves engagement with other cultures. However, it does involve acceptance of the fact that one does not have adequate knowledge about other cultures.

The fifth level of the continuum is cultural competence. At this level, the school and its community as a whole accept and respect differences. Those at the school and community are continuously expanding their knowledge about other cultures.

Cultural proficiency is the title of the sixth level in the continuum. This level involves operating successfully in several different cultural contexts. It involves advancing to the ethnic cultural range where one accepts the practices and beliefs of other cultures. It also involves such cultural contexts as methods of teaching, learning, and showing understanding. Cultural proficiency also acknowledges economic cultural contexts, and academic backgrounds. Teachers at this level of proficiency become aware of the study and organizational skills of the middle school students of these cultures.

A goal for all schools, including those working to achieve higher levels of academic success, is to reach the degree of being culturally proficient, and this concept links to the need for effective professional development, which is often needed in this area. The primary barriers to cultural proficiency are the presumption of entitlement and unawareness of the need to adapt. Adaptation can help move a school from low educational achievement to academic success.

The academic success of middle schools that are of lower socioeconomic status and high minority ethnicity is particularly important because an education is the key for these students to get out of poverty and stay out (Payne, 2005). Being in poverty is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability. Individuals remain in poverty because they do not know where there is a choice. Presenting this choice is the role of the educators. People in poverty also have their own culture. It is culture that educators need to learn. Children of this poverty culture may also not know all of the hidden rules of the school and

classroom culture. Schools are virtually the only place where students can learn the choices and rules of the middle class. Teachers can learn with their partners in professional development about the culture of poverty, what techniques to teach, and how to teach these techniques.

Classroom support and structure. Common factors for schools that do not succeed academically include low SES, which typically also is comprised primarily of ethnic minorities. But there are schools comprised of children in a low SES bracket that do succeed. During the 2001-2002 school year, a study was conducted at an academically successful middle school where 80% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. One small part of the school was organized in teams while the rest was not. Analysis of state test results showed that students on one team achieved higher academic scores than students in the remainder of the school. Interviews of teachers on the STAR (Strive to Attain Respect) team were conducted to learn what might be factors for this difference in academic success. The results of the teacher interviews emphasized two major themes: classroom support and school structure. These teachers indicated four principal ways that their team “beat the odds” in promoting academic achievement. The first thing the teachers did was create a classroom learning community. Within their community, the teachers shared responsibility, team building, and positive discipline. Next, the teachers then created a learner-centered environment that featured warm, supportive relationships with students. A centered form of assessment on students’ learning strengths as well as areas of need was the third step that teams did to beat the odds. The fourth step involved teachers creating a knowledge-centered environment by connecting inquiry, collaboration, and real-world experiences (Strahan & Layell, 2006).

These themes are what established a warm classroom and work climate. They also align with other areas presented thus far such as teaming, collaboration, including students' interests, and integration of instruction and the curriculum with the real world.

Setting goals. Outlined by CPRD, this category that is important for middle schools to be academically successful is one that integrates continually with the other categories. One study determined how teachers were able to work so that students could be academically successful. In this inquiry, the teachers took part in the academic momentum program (Strahan, 2008). This study looked at 42 students in Grade 8 who are at academic risk. In this research, 24 students improved greatly in their studies. The teachers accomplished this goal by working with the students and encouraging them to set their own goals. A prime factor was the students integrating their academic goals at school with their own, personal long-term goals in life. This was importantly linked with other factors at school such as creating a warm classroom environment, teaching content that was related to the interests of the students, and engaging in cooperative learning activities.

It is important for the students to perceive this relationship of school content and learning activities with the final well being of the students, even if students may not see this well being in the immediate timeframe. Often students do not understand why teachers may be strict in setting high goals for the children and teaching a skill that the students may not see as important for the moment. Within a warm, learning environment in which trust has been established, students will recognize the work of the faculty and staff at a school as being important for their own well being.

In a study of how one team of teachers in a large school accomplished success in their middle school that was struggling for academic achievement, the determining factor was setting high expectations for all of their students (EdSource, 2010; Strahan & Layell, 2006). After setting high personal and academic goals with each student, this work of this STAR team of teachers and students resulted in their academically outperforming the other students at this school. Setting high expectations is common in the team approach where a set of core teachers works with the same group of 130 to 150 students (as cited in Strahan & Layell, 2006).

No tracking. Tracking is the practice of sorting and labeling of children by their academic levels, with the idea that students on a similar level will learn best when taught together at that level. The authors of *Turning Point 2000* delivered with passion their admonition to eliminate the practice of tracking students in middle schools (Jackson et al., 2000). They say that the appropriate organizational structure of education involves working with children with different abilities. However, the interpretation of this structure has taken various forms in public schools. Schools track to different degrees students that share similar learning characteristics or achievement levels. This was discovered in the research of 50 academically successful schools across the country (Peterson, 2001b). While the 50 schools do track, the percentage of the student population varies from 5% to 20%. Of the 50 schools, 30% tracked with only one subject, mathematics, while 60% of the 50 schools tracked for two subjects. A common second class that was tracked was language arts. There is a great variety of percentage of schools that track and the percentage of students at each site that are tracked. While

tracking is greatly discouraged for schools to employ, it does seem to be used in schools that are academically successful.

Yet there are compelling reasons to avoid this practice. This sorting by different levels limits the access of the children to further opportunities. Students who are accommodated through lower expectations are given a license to avoid more challenging work. This lack of challenges and expectations of the students leads to challenges of academic success. Academically successful schools focus on students and learning rather than on sorting and labeling (Edna McConell Clark Foundation, as cited by the Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997).

The goal theory mentioned earlier refers to diverse means of instruction and assessment. This theory also refers to how teachers should move away from tracking. This theory focuses on the reasons students perceive for achieving. Labeling and tracking students pulls them away from their motivation to work and succeed, which in turn diverts their academic success (Anderman et al., 1998).

Professional Development

When leaders of high-achieving schools in Rhode Island presented core elements that they consider important in the academic success of their schools, professional development was among these. But as other research studies have suggested, there are different degrees of implementation with each of these reform efforts. Professional development has been around for over 30 years (Reiser & Butzin, 2000). There are different degrees of the implementation of professional development (Nieto, 2000, 2009). Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that providing quality professional development for the teachers was a core reason for their

success (Whitehouse, 2009). The degrees of implementation in this case also involve leadership.

Content and delivery. Too often, professional development is a program chosen by a principal to implement an instructional strategy that they feel is important. The voice of the teachers may not be heard. Everyone has to participate in professional development, but “too often teachers find their professional development is both inadequate and irrelevant” (Nieto, 2009, p. 10). Too frequently, it is only the administrators who choose the form of professional development. This can lead to “frustration and resent on the part of teachers, dissatisfaction on the part of administrators, and a fruitless allocation of scarce resources” (Nieto, 2009, p. 10).

Probably the most significant action school districts can take in changing the nature of professional development is to provide meaningful and engaging programs that respect the intelligence and good will of teachers and help them grow in terms of knowledge, awareness, and practice. Such professional development is characterized by teachers’ ability to select the topics they want to learn more about and the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues. (Nieto, 2009, p. 10)

Teachers continuing to grow so their students can grow is an important component for academic success (Bardach, 2008). “Teacher quality is essential to promote engagement and achievement,” (Strahan, 2003, p. 38) says 20 years of study. In a report conducted by Sanders and Horn, results show that race, socioeconomic level, and class size are “poor indicators of student academic growth” and that the major

determinant of academic growth is the quality of the teacher.³ In an additional study of schools that are “beating the odds,” the teachers at Woodsedge Middle School created a network of study groups that allowed them to enrich and extend their own learning of content and pedagogy with other teachers. This study also documented that administrators nurtured this emergent approach to teacher development through personal support and release time. This is another linking of two factors that join together to lead to academic success.

Bardach’s (2008) dissertation was an important study of middle schools and school success. His research was based on the qualities of principals at successful middle schools. One important element he determined is that “middle school principals must demonstrate extreme flexibility and an ability to adapt to rapidly changing environments” (p. 1). A common factor of principals with high educational intelligence (EI) is that they lead in creating a shared vision for their school’s growth. This leadership includes input from teachers, parents, and community members. As an example of input, for teachers to grow, they must also inform their professional leaders what elements of growth they need for development to continue (Nieto, 2000, 2009). These are factors directly linked with other factors of successful middle schools discussed above. These other factors include the decision-making process, parent and community involvement, and classroom and school climate (as cited in Heck & Marcoulides, 1990). It was also discovered in a study of 332 teachers and 56 school principals that a principal’s ability to establish

³ Thus it would appear that schools with low SES tend to have low test scores on account of not being able to attract the highest-quality teachers due to lower pay and a more challenging classroom environment.

educationally enriching and supporting learning climates predicts significantly higher student levels of success.

Bardach (2008) reports that literature supports his three hypotheses. His first hypothesis is that principals with higher levels of EI will have more successful schools. His thought is that the more educated and open a leader can be, the more this intelligence will spread. This leads to the second hypothesis that states principals with higher levels of EI will be more supportive to staff. This will translate to higher test scores. Bardach's third hypothesis is that students of all types will succeed. From principals with higher levels of EI will come better service to students with a wide variety of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. All of this leads to higher education for all.

Professional development is also the time for principals to grow as leaders so they can grow with their colleagues from the classroom. For a principal, "on-going professional development reduces isolation and builds skills, is time to focus on instruction, gives authority to allocate resources to meet the needs of their schools and the right data to help them accurately guide their teachers and students" (DeVita, 2007 as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 8).

A study of students of Asian background new to a school district also discusses the academic advancement of these children (Kester, 1989). The study involved six junior high schools in an urban district in Los Angeles County, California. In this 3-year study of children from China, Japan, and Korea, the result was a rapid academic development of these children, but the development was different at each school. At schools with the highest development of these students, several factors were determined to be part of their success. One of the factors determined important was staff

development. Teachers at these schools continually learned new methods on how to teach content in diverse ways for these students learning the English language. This second factor directly relates to one mentioned earlier as an important element of academic success, that is, a strong principal as a leader who supported the teachers. A third factor of success for these students from Asia was also an important element presented in an upcoming section: parental involvement. All of these factors helped lead to the rapid academic success of students learning both the content and the English language, which was new to them.

Credentialing. The difference in child development between middle school and high school students has already been discussed. A topic discussed in education today is how teaching and assessing children in middle schools is different than teaching and assessing children at the high school age. Yet “Teacher quality is essential to promote engagement and achievement” (Strahan, 2003, p. 298). The way the professional education system is established today in California, there is the primary credential that permits the teacher to teach children in Kindergarten through Grade 6. A secondary credential permits an individual to teach students in Grades 7 through 12. Middle school is considered secondary, so teachers have been prepared to teach high school students or those children in the middle to late teen years. There is no specific class on working with children who are at the age of 11, 12, or 13. But this is the time for tremendous physical and hormonal growth (Ames & Miller, 1994). “Many middle school teachers have been trained simply as secondary teachers, and significant numbers of them neither understood the particular needs of young adolescents nor relished the idea of working with them” (Ames & Miller, 1994, p. 25). With these differences in what is required to appropriately

teach and assess children at the middle school level, there is discussion of establishing a middle school credential to teacher children in Grades 7 through 9. Credentials in California are either primary for Grades K-6 or secondary for Grades 7-12. Mertens and Flowers (2003) assert, “it is realistic to expect that middle grades teachers require professional development that focuses on middle grades instruction, learning and assessment to do their jobs with utmost skill” (p. 38). A thought about credentials that started in the 1980s and is still present in today’s educational society is the discussion for reorganizing the current K-6 and 7-12 credentials and creating a teaching credential to teach middle school students (Hough et al., 1989).

School Safety

“One of the essential principles of improving middle grade education is to establish a safe and healthy school environment” (Waxman, Garcia, & Read, 2008, p. 1). There are two parameters for school safety: inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

Inside the classroom. Safety inside the classroom involves classroom management. “Studies conducted at the middle school level have found that ineffective or dysfunctional classroom and instructional learning environments exist in many middle schools” (Waxman, et al., 2008, p. 4). “One explanation for this problem is that the middle school environment is often more structured, formal, and less personal than elementary schools” (p. 2). This agrees with the argument of making middle schools a warmer environment. Part of this warm environment involves the creation of teams where children have fewer teachers and share a set of core instructors. A warm school

environment is where there is at least one adult who cares deeply for every child and that every single child in the school is part of this warm, loving feeling.

Outside the classroom. Outside the classroom is also an important part of school safety. An important link with safety outside the classroom is after-school activities (Kleiner, Nolin, Chapman, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The more children know one another, risks of bullying, stealing, and fighting diminish. Children get to know one another through out-of-school activities, also informally called after-school activities. There is an after-school program funded by the federal government called Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). This procedure involves academic reinforcement instruction. Program leaders are in contact with teachers to learn what is being covered in the classroom. The after-school program can reinforce and support what is being done in the classroom by offering time for homework and tutoring of any topic in the after school program. The after-school program can also open the door to such activities involving sports, health, art, and music. This makes the school site a fun and safe environment for the children. But the final win of this program involves academic advancement for the children of the school. A study of this program reveals “modest, but statistically significant improvements, in math achievement after 1 year compared with students in a regular after-school program” (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 42).

Parental Involvement

Researchers have found that typically, mainstream parents with high socioeconomic status and education are more involved in their children’s education than poverty level and minority parents. However, research demonstrates that when teachers

take clear, deliberate action to involve parents, the socioeconomic status and education level of parents disappear as a factor in the willingness of parents to be involved (Benson & Martin, 2003). This research and findings of parental involvement has continued over the past 30 years. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (1998, as cited in Benson & Martin, 2003) reports that in 72% of schools with low concentration of poverty, “most or all” parents attend school open house. The number is dramatically different for school with a high concentration of high poverty where only 28% of parents attend open houses (Benson & Martin, 2003). Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that collaborating with parents, community organizations, and education stakeholders was a core reason for their success (Whitehouse, 2009).

Studies have shown that not only is parental involvement linked with academic success, it is also the depth and layer of involvement that affects the degree of academic success. the quality of the relationships between the child’s family and the school personnel powerfully influences education. A recent study of 100 successful and problematic elementary schools revealed that strong home-school ties was one of the five essential supports to quality education (Byrk, 2010). For several decades, “educational researchers have been promoting the benefits of partnerships between schools, family, and communities as a way of increasing student achievement” (Hiatt-Michael & Hands, 2010, pp. 1-2).

The form of communication may be more powerful than the content (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 26). Educators should first decide on the direction parental involvement. “One-way to define and categorize a parent program is to consider whether

it is primarily related to schooling or is a general parenting program that is only incidentally or indirectly school related” (Redding & Kelecher, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 128).

A program of types and techniques to establish parental involvement at school has been shown to be a working model for schools (Benson & Martin, 2003). There are some examples of parent involvement programs. One program focuses on student success and achievement. In this program, teachers and administrators embellish activities with student work displays, receptions, programs, and ceremonies that will draw parents to the gathering.

Another activity is personalizing communication with the parents. This could involve sending personalized invitations to events. More direct contact with parents to invite them to events could be completed by making direct phone calls. Another way to personalize contacts with parents is to use the extended family to support the student. Invitations to the special events that are scheduled could also be sent to siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other significant adults.

Broadening parent involve can take place with more than their attending new events. Involving families in planning activities would augment the expansion of parent involvement in the education of their children. Such activities in which to engage the assistance of parents could be to create and plan new activities, create award certificates, and organize events. Broadening the school community to increase the academic performance of the students of the community would require the skills of the school faculty, staff and parent volunteers.

There is also a wide range of activities that appeal to all of the above programs. Possible activities include: school orientation; parental volunteers (in the library, to make copies, for field trips, etc.); family special events (fashion show, International Day, mother-daughter day, talent show, etc.); awards assemblies (for both students and parents); parent education workshops (computer classes, English classes, etc.); coffee with the principal to share ideas; and grandparents day (Benson & Martin, 2003). All of the above means of communication are excellent, but educators are also reminded that communication is a two-way street, that ideas need to flow from school to home, and from home to school. "Two-way communication involves the importance of listening as well as informing" (Rogers & Farson, Zaretsky as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010).

In his review of 50 academically successful schools across the country, Peterson (2001b) learned that over 50% of the schools in the study implemented off-campus retreat and field trips. Trips were academic-oriented (i.e., trips to Washington, D.C., or a trip to an environmental learning center). These trips were part of the journey for school personnel to build long-term relationships with the students. Communication between school and parents was important for such trips and retreats. Parents also attended such trips, which helped establish school and home communication.

Research around the nation, particularly at schools in Buffalo, New York, shows how parental involvement and academic success are linked (Benson & Martin, 2003). Typically, mainstream parents with higher socioeconomic status and with higher parental education are more involved in their children's education when compared with parents of schools that are considered at a low socioeconomic level, which are typically multiethnic schools comprised primarily of minorities. Yet when teachers take a clear, deliberate

action to involve parents, this socioeconomic status and ethnicity of parents disappears as a factor in the willingness of parents to be involved.

In a school with a high percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, the average figure of parents who attend Back-to-School Night or Open House is 28%. Research was conducted over a 7-year study of 45 schools in Buffalo Public Schools. At six very successful schools in Buffalo, New York, this percentage of parental participation in activities was over 33%. This was at schools where 85% of the children qualify for free or reduced lunch. Teachers at these schools had followed a 7-step process to get parents involved in the education of their children. The teachers had made deliberate actions to involve parents throughout the school year in the education of their children. This was a key factor in increasing the academic success at these schools.

Building a foundation for parental involvement can take time. One principal at a school with a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch started a foundation for parental involvement by having a monthly parent breakfast. In 2002, when he started this monthly activity, only four parents attended the breakfast. By 2006, he had 40 parents who attended each month (Montgomery, 2008).

The importance of parental involvement in the school community was also confirmed in another study of academically successful middle schools (Strahan & Layell, 2006). Nieto (2000) found parental involvement is one of the important characteristics of academically successful schools.

As reported earlier (Flowers et al., 1999), implementing more than one of the seven reform components can lead to academic success. In Michigan, the teachers starting the teaming process to a high degree lead to more parental involvement.

Teachers on a strong team reported more frequent contact with parents to discuss student performance, homework, and activities. More contact with parents leads to their feeling more a part of the learning process of their children at school. Parents felt more comfortable getting involved with school activities.

With parents helping out more at school, they are also having the opportunity to better understand how middle schools operate (Clark & Clark, 2003). In this process, parents are learning more about young adolescents, teachers and teaching, and about classroom learning environments. In this study, 200 community members were given the opportunity to shadow students to learn more about classroom activities and assignments. This was a means to engage parents more in the middle school environment. Such an activity helped to broaden parental involvement in the education of their child.

A study of 45 Buffalo Public Schools in New York reported the power of the transition of schools with a high percentage of families that are in the low SES bracket from low parental involvement to high parental involvement. Over a 7-year period, six successful middle schools all drew high percentages of parental involvement in activities and programs. This 7-year process involved team teachers being more active with parents with activities.

One activity involved one-to-one communication between teachers and parents. This involved teachers making phone calls to parents to keep them informed of the status of their children. Also planned were parental activities that appeal to the individual need and interests of the parents. Teachers and school staff encouraged parents to get involved in the new events that were planned. Parents were recognized for their accomplishments and were encouraged to maintain their involvement. Such activities lead to the

development of a pervasive school culture that created a positive, warm environment where parents felt welcomed. To maintain parent involvement, activities were planned for at least one time a month. Such activities could also provide parents with information designed to promote learning at home. The more events that were planned, the more opportunities parents had to get involved with the growth of their children.

A checklist for teachers was created to help scholars know the different degrees of parental involvement at their school (Grossnickle, 1981). Beside including the items listed above, Grossnickle included on his list such elements of organization skills that should be addressed in the middle school. This includes having students keep a daily log of homework assignments that parents can review each night. Also important for teachers is to give clear progress reports of the children so that parents know the status of their child as the school year continues. Though Grossnickle published this list in 1981, new means to attain the same goal is taking place in today's schools. More teachers communicate with parents through email. Also, more teachers are posting their homework assignments, tools for assistance, and links to other sites that deal with the topic on their own websites. There are other tactics that are on checklist of ideas to help teachers encourage an open cooperative relationship between their school and community.

Having knowledge of ethnicity, culture and parental involvement is an important link for teachers to have when developing their relationship with parents. Another important element to foster home-to-school communication is to avoid jargon that can intimidate or confuse parents. Professional educators are reminded to be careful and use terms that parents can understand.

A study released in February, 2010, confirms the importance of parental involvement for academic success. Titled “Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better,” the study reviewed 30 years of middle grades reports that involved 303 schools and involved teachers, principals and superintendents. For schools that are successful, seven domains were developed. The domain with the greatest predictive strength across most of the cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses was an intense, school-wide focus on improving academic outcomes.” One of the policies and practices for this domain involved parents. An important practice is “the school has requirements or contracts for parent participation” (The Forgotten Middle, p. 4).

Leadership and Decision-Making Practices

In his journey around the country looking at academically successful middle schools, Peterson (2001b) found no entity in particular to guarantee academic success. While he did find commonalities among these successful schools, he also found diversity in that commonality. So this diversity from the norm applies to decision-making practices. The commonality among these schools was that they all had a strong principal, but a principal who built trust with his staff in a variety of ways (Peterson, 2001b). But through the first decade of the 21st century as research has delved into the study of leaders, the importance of school leaders has become more apparent. “Our efforts to improve public education in this country will not succeed until we get serious about strengthening school leadership” (DeVita, 2007, as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 4). “Indeed, the quality of school-level leaders is second only to that of teachers in predicting student achievement” (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 17).

Traits of leaders. One component of leadership and decision-making practices involves the emotional intelligence (EI) of the principals and how this affects school academic success. “EI is defined as a person’s skill and ability to access intrapersonal understandings, interpersonal skills, adapt to complex situations, deal with stress, as well as a measure of overall general mood” (Goleman, as cited in Bardach, 2008, pp. 1-2). Middle school principals must demonstrate extreme flexibility and an ability to adapt to rapidly changing environments. The main focus of a principal must be to work for student achievement. Successful leaders are able to recognize cultural diversity within their school and community and utilize such understandings to create more effective staff, student, and community relationship in their environment. Bardach’s study of EI and leadership shows that principals with high emotional intelligence have more successful schools. Such leaders are also more supportive to staff, which translates to higher state test scores. These leaders with high emotional intelligence can better serve the students that are in a variety of SES brackets and cultural ethnicities at the school (Bardach, 2008).

Cuban’s (1998) study of schools in Georgia also learned about the traits of leadership and the decision-making process. This study determined that good leaders are those that focus attention on what needs to be done to improve student achievement, and then make sure that it happens. Good leaders find a way to provide help to the teachers. As part of this concept, the study resolved that principals who are instructional leaders make sure there is uninterrupted learning time in the classroom!

As another example, one Texas junior high school principal made important changes in scheduling, class interruption, and so forth. Test scores began to rise.

Teachers set high expectations, and students began to meet them. Teachers for the first time believed they were good teachers; students believed they could succeed. But other important elements developed as the changes at the Texas school were being made. Attendance went up and the climate for learning improved throughout the school (Southern Regional Educational Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997).

Another example of diversity with leadership and decision-making is from West Middle School in Michigan. Over time, a culture had developed in which principals were the only ones who made decisions at this middle school. This school was successful after they reversed this idea and established a leadership team. The School Improvement Team was comprised of the principal, vice principal, and other members of the school and parental community. This team dealt with all issues: grading, homework, grade retention, counseling, use of computers, student interaction and cooperating, and team teaching (Midgley et al., 1992). This new decision-making process was one of several new reforms that turned this middle school in Michigan to academic success.

“Teacher quality is essential to promote engagement and achievement” (Strahan, 2003, p. 298) is a statement summarizing 20 years of study. In a report conducted by Sanders and Horn, results show that leadership is a factor to promote professional development (Sanders, 2006). At academically successful schools, good leaders are administrators who nurture teacher development through personal support and release time. This is another example of a link between two concepts, in this case the concepts of decision-making practices and professional development as outlined in CPRD’s factors for their school improvement self-study.

Literature presented thus far cites the importance of school leaders (principals) who collaborate with teachers in making decisions. Literature also has repeated the premise that there is not one reform effort that is required for a low-performing school to succeed academically. Instead, academic success results from the use of several of the techniques described by CPRD all being implemented at the same time. Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools in Rhode Island were interviewed to learn what they believe are the elements for their success (Whitehouse, 2009). They noted that one of the core reasons for the success of their middle schools relate directly to creating a safe and nurturing environment. The principals discussed how every kid had at least one adult at the school that cares for them.

In February, 2010, a study of 30 years of review of middle grades through 303 schools that presented factors of academic success was released by EdSource. In this study, one of the seven domains or important factors of success was principal leadership. It reports that the role of the principal is changing. Today, the focus of the leader is “driving student outcome gains, orchestrating improvement efforts, and serving as the linchpin between district and teaching staff members . . . in multiple ways” (“Gaining Ground,” 2010). Out of the 303 schools studied over 30 years, it is reported that the higher-performing middle grades schools have compiled a list of qualities that compile their principals. One quality is that principals take a lead role in the academic interventions of students with need to improve their academic level. Monitoring and assisting these students also results in improving student performance on district and state benchmarks and tests.

It has also been assured by the 303 schools that a principal of a high performing school ensures a clean, safe, and disciplined school environment. Students can learn only when they feel comfortable and safe. An atmosphere of comfort and safety in a large environment can only be maintained where discipline is an option.

As a former teacher, an exceptional principal does not forget the past. Principals of excellent middle schools monitor the evaluation of instruction for EL students at their site. All EL students must also have the opportunity in which to grow.

Good principals also stay up to date with the use of technology in monitoring the data regarding the progress of their students over time, at school, district, and state levels. Principals apply extensive importance to the use of student assessment data. The leaders are sure that all teachers are involved in the process to monitor student data. The same applies to student assessment at the school level. Student assessment school wide is conducted and monitored in multiple ways to improve student learning and teacher practice.

Teachers at high-performing middle schools also report that their principal meets with teachers individually, by grade, and by subject to review CST and benchmark test results. Exceptional principals are those who continually support the teachers and always know what the teachers are doing.

A final quality of leaders of academically successful middle schools is that these individuals ensure that common planning time is available for subject area teachers to meet with intervention teachers to coordinate instruction. Common planning time allows teachers to share their knowledge about the progress of the children they share on their team.

Collins & Ingrim Digital (2001) presented criteria for business leaders to become better in his book titled *Good to Great*. After studying top administrators of successful corporations, Collins conceptualized in 2006 that these top administrators possessed certain leadership skills that also applied to social leaders. In applying the book to school leaders, Stage 1: disciplined people in the form being a good leader to a great leader involves what Collins calls *first who, then what*. This step involves taking disciplined action that involves choosing *people* who will be important individuals making changes before deciding *what* are the changes that need to be made. Stage 2, titled disciplined thought, involves confronting the brutal facts of why little if any academic advancement has been taking place at this school. Stage 3 involves the leader taking disciplined action. Titled culture of discipline, this stage is the leader putting into place what can be difficult because it involves change and working as a leader to shepherd a group of professionals to make changes that could be challenging if the result is to be students succeeding academically. It involves the flywheel effect or a circular motion of people energized by the results that leads to building momentum, which leads to the accumulation of visible academic results that leads to more educators and people in the community joining in the process and becoming energized by the results. Stage 4 is building greatness to last that involves the leader setting a clock for these progressive steps. Progress takes progressive steps. One cannot make change if one becomes unhappy with little progress being made in a year and as a result drops the program to start a new one. This is a continuous dilemma in education. But, academic progressive programs take time to work (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). Building greatness also is an important step to preserve the core values and stimulate progress at a time when it is easy to fall off of the main road and

take a side track. Following these steps says Collins results in a performance that is defined by the positive results that grow in an efficient manner. All of the above steps result in such a strong result that if it were to disappear, it would be a hole that could not easily be filled by any other institution. The new school culture can be so successful as to bounce back even stronger than before when it is hit with setbacks.

The above can be extremely challenging for one person to lead. It can take time to one to build the skills to lead at such a level. Collins has established five levels of leadership with five being the highest level of being a social leader. The first stage is titled highly capable individual. In this level, a leader makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits. The second stage is called contributing team member. At this level, a principal contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting. Competent manager is the name for the Collins' third level of social leaders. At this stage, a principal organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives. Collins' fourth stage is titled effective leader. An effective leader organizes commitment to create a clear and compelling vision that stimulates higher standards of performance. The top level of leadership, stage 5, is titled executive. These top quality school leaders build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

Trust. There are aspects of leadership that are not taught at the university. One such aspect is trust. Trust is a core that can affect continuous school improvement (George, 2010) and academic success (Vodicka & Hancock, 2008). In a study presented by GetCivic.org, it has been found that schools with high levels of trust were three times

more likely to improve in reading and mathematics than schools with low trust. Schools with consistently lower levels of trust showed little or no improvement in student achievement. In one study, teachers with high levels of trust in their principal also had higher rates of student achievement, even after controlling for poverty and race (Bryk & Schneider, as cited in Vodicka & Hancock, 2008). The level of teacher trust for the principal is “wholly dependent on behaviors of the principal” (Gimbel, as cited in Vodicka & Hancock, 2008, p. 3).

Leadership-collaboration with teachers. It is imperative to remember that a successful leader in today’s schools is a leader of collaboration among professionals (Cuban, 1998, 2001, 2007; Fullan, 2003). Principals are not those who merely give orders. Unfortunately, school administrators in many instances do not include teachers in decision-making. Sometimes, administrators have even advocated changes in ways that have undermined teachers’ sense of autonomy over how they teach in the classroom (as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009). Teacher collaboration involves teacher participation, which energizes these professionals to critically analyze the process that can give them ownership among the various colleagues and result in an investment from key stakeholders (as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009).

Teachers who experience support from their principals also report a greater willingness to participate in the decision-making process at their schools (Smylie, as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009). The enthusiasm for such participation is nurtured when teachers view their input as having an effect (Pankake & Moller, 2007). Supportive, collaborative, and mutually respectful principal-teacher relationships are affects student academic results (Friedkin & Slater, as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009).

Continued findings also reinforce research that articulates the importance of principal-teacher relationships in building an appropriate school climate and teacher satisfaction. These findings also advise that principals can improve teachers' perceptions and behaviors by constructing a more trusting, stronger network (Rhodes et al., 2009). This author further suggests that rather than rule from top-down leadership, administrators should instead forge collaboration among the teachers and remove obstacles which will then provide the necessary support and resources to achieve high goals (Rhodes et al., 2009).

The importance of creating a school climate for participatory management and teacher involvement in decision-making is not a new concept developed to improve student academic success. It has been a concept in existence at least since the 1980s (Hartzell & Winger, 1989). In an article titled "Manage to Keep Teachers Happy!" there are four notes principals were suggested to consider 30 years ago that apply today in academically successful schools. The first note that principals are suggested to do was structure work opportunities that can fulfill the higher-order needs of the teachers.

A second suggestion for principals that came from academically successful schools was the creation of a school climate for collaboration and teacher involvement. Successful schools had learned that success for their students involved teachers sharing information and working together rather than work individually so the student could succeed.

Nurturing teacher autonomy, empowerment, and professional involvement was a third point that applies to successful schools. These features are parts that join together to

form a whole in the educational process where decisions are made by all of the professionals involved, not just by one leader.

A fourth note suggested for principals was to demonstrate concern for employees as well as for the tasks that need to be done. These are four points of successful schools that have been in place for over thirty years and should be considered by principals who want to build a foundation for successful schools today.

Often times, principals new to a school, particularly low-performing schools, step in and make many drastic changes trying to increase academic success. But sometimes, “principals might do more by doing less” (Good & McCaslin, 2008). In low-performing schools, the time of many principals is spread over too many activities. For program improvement (P.I.) schools, principals are placed in a position because CSR (Comprehensive School Reform) guidelines require principals to coordinate so much at the same time. Principals are spread thin. Leaders should be able to focus on fewer, but more important, tasks when leading a change to increase academic advancement (Good & McCaslin, 2008).

One of the important tasks that principals of low-performing schools should follow is acquiring in depth knowledge regarding teaching techniques and theory to create their own firsthand knowledge of what teachers and students should be doing in the classrooms. But today, with being overloaded with so many tasks to complete at low-performing schools, principals spend little time in the classroom (Good & McCaslin, 2008).

For the U.S. Department of Education Blueprint of Reform, Linda Darling-Hammond (2007) continued to describe the qualities that make a good leader. The top

priority is to have high performing teachers accompanied with high quality school-level leaders to be able to predict appropriate means to acquire student achievement. These principals link their role as the leader of a school by empowering teachers to be effective in forming a high-functioning organization that results in student success. But it is the leader who both recruits and retains an exemplary staff. The number one reason for teachers' decisions about whether to stay in a school is the level of support that is provided by the principal (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Some scholars put principal involvement with teachers and instruction at the highest point. For principals of low-performing schools, the improvement of instruction is the "glue" or common task. It is the job of administrative leaders to enhance the skills and knowledge of people by holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other. But for continuity to work, there must be a coherent set of goals that give direction and meaning to learning and collegiality. After this foundation is set, collegial support and professional development can be effective (Elmore, 2000).

Richard F. Elmore in "Building a New Structure for School Leadership" created the tasks and functions for leaders of schools focusing on improvement. But he stresses that the following is the tasks of principals and those that work with a leader to achieve the common goals. There are several tasks for principals and supporters. One is to design school improvement strategies. This would involve empowering teachers to take place in this process. One means to invite teachers to get involved in the decision-making process is to implement incentive structures for teachers and support personnel.

An important task to improve student academic achievement is for teachers to continue to grow. To continue teacher enhancement, principals are suggested to broker professional development for the teachers that is consistent with improvement strategies that teachers will use in the classroom. Part of this growth of resources that teachers can use toward instruction in the classroom can be allocated from school resources.

A final task that principals need to consider to be a leader of academically successful schools is to support teachers by buffering non-instructional issues from teachers. Supporting teachers is the task of a leader among leaders.

George (2010) in “Renewing the Middle School: The Lesson of Hansel and Gretel for Middle Schools” stressed that an important leader in a school must work with the staff to infuse important values into the operation of every middle school program. There is a wide range of these values. Some include freedom, democracy, empowerment, and equity. Others include optimism, teamwork, shared decision-making, and parental involvement. Final tools to use to infuse into every middle school program include tolerance, local control, the celebration of diversity, the management of complexity and ambiguity, and humane and reasonable assessment strategies.

In “Bouncing Back! How Your School Can Succeed in the Face of Adversity,” Patterson, Patterson, and Collins (2010) also focused on strategies that are important for a leader of academic success. They presented the strategies tantamount for a leader to instigate with the staff to work for repeated student success: One task suggested for leaders to undertake is to create a school wide belief that all students and staff can succeed. Once this belief has been established, the next task is to maintain these high

expectations for students and staff, particularly during tough times. Then, principals need to align instructional and supervisory practices with beliefs about school success.

Part of this process requires the frequent assessment of student and staff performance relative to benchmarks. After assessment is complete, it is important to follow-up with appropriate actions.

A final strategy a leader of successful middle schools needs to do is provide rewards and recognition for success in moving toward the high expectations.

A leader's role in establishing school culture. The presence of different cultures in the school society has already been presented as an important element of academic success. Getting the school culture right and paying attention to how parents, teachers, and students define and experience meaning are two important components of a successful school (Sergiovanni, 2000). Recognizing and building a school culture involves the role of a leader building a foundation for a school based on several strong elements (Sergiovanni, 2000). These elements include individual cultures built on individual needs and competences that join with a school culture that is built on beliefs and norms. These two cultures develop the school character that is a connection between students, their families, credentialed and classified school employees, and the community. School character is guided by authentic leaders who display character. Character is a defining characteristic of authentic leadership. Authentic leaders are individuals of character who recognize the need for change and advocate a set of purpose that challenges the status quo. They also demonstrate a willingness to take personal risks in advocating change. Another part of being an important leader is one who perceives the

importance of progress and operates in unconventional ways to implement changes while at the same time being sensitive to the values, beliefs, and needs of the followers.

Leaders can develop three distinct school cultures. The first is called “the pyramid” (Sergiovanni, 2000), which works with the top down theory with the principal at the top. The second step is called the “railroad” theory that involves the development of instructional delivery systems that align the curriculum, specify teaching methods, and measure outcomes. Both of these systems, however, focus too much on what schools will do, and how they will do it, but do not cover the actual doing. The third method, called “high-performance,” works for academic success. In this method, there are site-based management, local school councils, and shared responsibility. With this technique, players in this puzzle—that is the teachers, classified staff, parents, students, and members of the community—are those who set their own standards and do not merely follow the standards of the state. Good schools improve on their own terms. They set high goals. Such schools are unique because they reflect the values of the communities that they serve. For this high-performance theory to be successful, the leader needs to place a great emphasis on bonding with the parents, teachers, and students.

Bolman and Deal (2002) also discuss leadership and the importance of school culture in *Reframing the Path to School Leadership*. They give lessons and hints for administrators new to a site and to teachers experiencing a new leader. In discussing school culture, Bolman and Deal recommend that principals continually consult with people about the past activities before making changes. Too often, leaders make changes without knowing about the past. Of course, for schools that are not academically successful, changes need to take place, but there can still be areas where tradition can be

maintained. This relates to the importance of principals communicating and listening to the school community. Relationship is a two-way street. A school may have long-practiced traditions for starting the school year, graduation, holidays, and so forth. By making himself or herself aware of such values of the past and maintaining these values, the leader is showing that he or she is listening while leading change. While a principal is working with the school community to lead change, this same leader is also, in a sense, a spiritual leader who must also lead the community to have faith in the progress of the children of their school.

The concept of developing a leadership team verses that of a one-person ruler is rationalized in *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*. In this book, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) discuss the 21 behavior skills that exist and how no one person is strong with all 21 skills. The authors call these 21 skills the “responsibilities” of school leaders whose job is to lead the change for academic success of the children of a school. In developing a leadership team, a principal can be surrounded by people who as a group possess these 21 categories of behavior. These 21 responsibilities are as follows:

1. Affirmation: Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments.
2. Change agent: Challenges the status quo when necessary.
3. Contingent rewards: Recognizes and rewards those who accomplish.
4. Communication: Communicates with adults and students.
5. Culture: Shares beliefs and a sense of school community.
6. Discipline: Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus.

7. Flexibility: Adapts leadership to the needs of the situation and is comfortable with dissent.
8. Focus: Establishes clear goals and keeps goals in the forefront.
9. Ideals/beliefs: Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs.
10. Input: Involves teachers in the design and implementation of decisions and policies.
11. Intellectual stimulation: Ensures the faculty and staff are aware of the latest theories and practices and promotes the discussion of such.
12. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment: Becomes involved directly in the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
13. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: Maintains knowledge of these fields.
14. Monitoring/evaluating: Continually monitors all of the above.
15. Optimizer: Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
16. Order: Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.
17. Outreach: Is an advocate and spokesman for the school to all stakeholders.
18. Relationships: Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.
19. Resources: Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.

20. Situational awareness: Maintains awareness of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.

21. Visibility: Contacts teachers, students, and staff regularly rather than remaining behind closed doors.

A five-step plan can be used by a principal to help lead to academic success. Step 1 is the development of a strong leadership team that is comprised of volunteers who participate in leading change and have a variety of behavior skills. Step 2 is the distribution of responsibilities throughout this new leadership team. This gives the members of the team a sense of ownership in the development of progress. Step 3 is selecting the appropriate work for the right person while step 4 is identifying the color of magnitude implied by the selected work. These steps involve looking at the elements that have proven successful in other schools that have advanced in their academic development. These steps also ensure looking at the existing school through the eyes of the students, teachers, parents, and community through different lenses. These lenses can be both personal and professional and keep in mind the cultures that are present at the school. Step 5 is matching the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative. This step is based on what elements needs to be implemented for change at this site, and how best to implement these changes when looking at the individuals involved in the school community. For all of these five steps to work, the 21 steps of the leadership responsibilities must be aligned. These 21 leadership abilities can be spread among the principals and members of the leadership team. “A vision without a plan is

just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world” (Marzano et al., 2005).

Leaders today have insurmountable roles to play in public schools. The job is not easy. In entering the 21st century, the U.S. Department of Education’s Blueprint for Reform published what are the most important roles for education leaders. One important role that the government agency published is that leaders who succeed with poor and minority students focus on the things they can change, not on the things that they can’t. Such leaders look at reality, not at illusion.

The roles listed in the Blueprint for Reform are for educators of high performing schools. Often times the task of a leader in a high performing schools and districts involves one who rarely talks or acts like the ones you hear at big conferences. Good principals concentrate on supporting teachers and the students that are succeeding.

Another role for leaders of reform is that they don’t leave much of anything about teaching and learning to chance. Principals leading reform use data and work with the teachers to continually monitor the students to learn what should be the next steps of instruction and assessment.

A final task of good leaders is they don’t just mouth the mantra that teachers are the most important thing and that they matter the most. These leaders actually ACT like teachers matter. This is shown in how they support the teachers and empower them educators in the making of decisions.

Patterson et al. (2010) in “Bouncing Back!: How Your School Can Succeed in the Face of Adversity” gave a list of strategies for school leaders to lead to success. But a school that succeeds also wants to repeat, or be resilient, with their success. For a school

to be resilient, the leader must be resilient. Patterson et al. gave a list of strategies that a resilient school leader should use to continue the steps of success. One strategy a leader should employ to be resilient is to provide caring and personal support for adults. This is a facet of support that is above and beyond one who looks only at the academics of the student. For a student to be supported by the teachers, the teachers must first be supported by the principal.

Another strategy in which a resilient school leader must engage is showing care and personal support for students. Good leaders find time to spend with their students, not only with the teachers.

Creating a safe environment for teaching and learning to occur is another task that a resilient leader must complete. Teaching and learning does not take place unless all feel safe at their site.

Another project a leader must take to be resilient includes providing instructional guidance, both by themselves and by leading teachers. This is where leaders listen to teachers to find out what the teachers need to work. Once this information is known, then professional development for the staff can be planned. The same concept applies to a leader providing what materials teachers need in the classroom. Once again, a leader listens to find out what the teachers need.

Valuable professional development time for teachers can be giving teachers time in their classrooms on Staff Development Days. Exemplary teachers can learn from one another. Teachers spending time with teachers on staff development days gives them time to develop what is best for their students and plan how to use their new methods in the classroom.

To support teachers, a good resilient leader is also one who can find the money to fund the priorities. Being aware of what teachers desire, then looking for ways to fund what they need, is the support that good leaders provide.

A good, resilient leader now continues everything mentioned thus far. Such a leader repeatedly collects formal and informal feedback about his/her leadership to create a climate of caring and support.

Vice principals. Thus far, in discussing leadership, the position of leadership has been referred to as the principal's role. In the development of leadership teams, it has been discussed how teachers can be an important part of this leadership team. But most schools, particularly middle and high schools, have one or more other administrators referred to as assistant principals or vice principals. What is the role of these individuals?

Beginning vice principals have often times thought of their role in the school as one who helps the principal with their leadership role dealing with the curriculum, supporting the teachers, attending community meetings, and so forth. But often times the role of vice principal is one not admired. Often times for a vice principal, "discipline is just a black hole when it comes to time" (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995, p. 13).

Vice principals traditionally handle whatever comes through the door, then they do their duties that are on paper. Vice principals also watch the principal for guidance and suggestions as they plan what they will do when they become a principal at a school. This is where the integration of other school administrators into the team leadership process is important. This will give the administrators a real role in being a leader while also learning how to be a leader themselves. In the position of vice principal, these future

leaders will learn how in a well-run school, good administrators make sure that teachers can do their job with very limited distractions and after-thoughts as possible.

Areas of Focus that Work

In April, 2010, Kappan Magazine published the research of Anthony S. Bryk about two elementary schools in the Chicago School District. The schools were two miles apart were similar demographically. In the 1990s, both schools began many interventions to increase student achievement. One school moved ahead impressively while the second school made few improvements. Bryk's study was to learn what were the differences in the interventions.

In his research, Bryk identified five organizational features of the school that made significant academic advancement. These features interact with life inside and outside the classroom. One organizational feature provides a coherent instructional guidance system. This system articulates the "what and how" of instruction so that all working in small teams or groups can work consistently together. The same applies to the concepts that an entire school of teachers works together to attain.

Bryk's second organizational feature is professional capacity. This concept focuses on continued professional development that will enable the teachers to set and reach a capacity to work together to improve instruction.

The third organizational feature is a strong alliance with the parents and the community. Such times are imperative for schools to be academically successful. The presence of families and the community are links to success and serve as a multifaceted resource for academic improvement.

Creating a student-centered learning climate is Bryk's fourth feature. This climate is ambitious academic work coupled with support for each student that allows students to believe in themselves, persist and ultimately achieve. To be a student-centered environment, the educational staff must teach in the manner where students would be excited to learn.

A final organizational feature involves a leader who drives change. School leaders are principals who empower teachers in making decisions on what is needed for their school. Being a leader in today's modern schools means being an active member of the school community, which is both inside and outside the borders of the school.

Bryk's five steps are all elements previously discussed in the literature. These steps are also represented in the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life in Figure 1. The model demonstrates how these factors of success overlap, both inside and outside the boundaries of the school.

Stories of Success

Research has shown that there is no one step that a school can take to move from that of not meeting state and federal academic standards to being an academically successful middle school. It takes the use of several elements that are applied in depth. Schools that have done so have shown success. Here are five examples of academic success for middle schools that found out what was important for their children to succeed and followed their own path to success.

Las Vegas, Nevada. Cashman Middle School in Las Vegas, Nevada (Rourke & Hartzman, 2008a) is a school that had not been academically successful. This school fit the usual mold for academic failure as a school comprised primarily of ethnic minority

students where 100% qualified for free or reduced lunch. They were in their third year as a program improvement (PI) school and were about to be taken over by the state. A new administration team was sent to the school.

The principal decided that it would be an important first step to make a cultural change in the school and start the concept of positive beliefs in the students. The principal also began to serve as a leader among colleagues. In the first year, she created committees to examine core data regarding state exams of the latest students. With the backing and support of the staff, the principal in the second year lead the creation of teams and modified schedules. The modified schedule included school starting later on Mondays to allow time for teams to meet and plan for the week. Committees were established at grade levels, team levels, and departments. As a PI school, the school received additional funds to use as desired for reforms. One of the means for which the money was spent was hiring additional counselors to help give each student additional attention. Parents were also involved in committees to work together with teachers and staff to help the students work to succeed.

A new after-school program was started to support students in the academic aspect of their life and in the fun part of living. No students were to fall through the cracks. All of these elements that were supported by administration, teachers, classified staff, and parents did lead to success. Of the 57 middle schools in Clark County, Nevada, Cashman Middle School was one of only nine schools in 2009 that made their AYP points for the year. As one of the teachers at Cashman said, “Cashman’s success is due to the value of shared leadership that is designed to simplify, focus, and direct instruction” (Rourke & Hartzman, 2008b, p. 11).

Florida. Another example of the success of leader working with a team of colleagues and parents to implement academic change for their students happened in Florida (LaRocque, 2007). The middle school in the study was a school in an urban area that was multiethnic (45% African American, 20% Hispanic, 35% White). In Florida, schools are given a report card each year based on their academic success. This school had been receiving a *D* each year for their grade. Then a new principal inaugurated leadership that was comprised of all members of the community that worked to empower their school. One of the first steps with the organizational structure was to analyze academic data. The principal also lead the creation of teams integrated with the four core subjects of language arts, math, science and history. Another major focus at this school was to celebrate the cultures of this school and their ethnic diversity. Parents were a vital part of this team. The principal had an open door policy with teachers and staff. Everyone was made to feel important. This was done by the school calendar celebrating the birthday of each student and staff member at the school. The school had a grand multicultural fair each year. Each month, the “Marvelous Movie Night” was held with the movie highlighting an ethnic group’s experience. Discussion after the film was conducted each month. The event was made fun with refreshments for all and with childcare provided so that parents could attend.

The leadership team also considered the level of education of the parents in the community. The academic data from the state each year was explained in a manner that was easy for adults in the community to understand. All of this lead to the academic grade of this middle school in Florida changing in 1 year from a *D* to a *B* based on their attainment of state requirements.

Midwest. A study of middle-grade schools in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi involved their participation in the self-study of the CPRD of the University of Illinois. This was part of their involvement in the Mid-South Middle Start Initiative that is a middle-grades school reform initiative that seeks to improve student achievement. The initiative targets schools that have significant numbers of disadvantaged students. Teachers, students, and administrators in 121 schools serving middle-grade students in the Mid South region completed the self-study during the 1998-1999 and the 2000-2001 school years. There were amazing results.

First, this study confirmed that fact that income level of student families is still the predominant factor of student achievement. However, an important finding of this study was that schools can ameliorate this situation through several combined factors. First, the implementation and a higher degree of interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time are crucial to improve levels of academic success. “With interdisciplinary instruction, students can become more involved in their learning and teachers can work toward eliminating discipline lines.” Students can become more independent, confident individuals who ‘learn how to learn’ and develop lifelong learning skills” (Manning & Bucher, as cited in Duerr, 2008, p. 177). More frequent teaming and use of research-proven classroom practices are associated with higher achievement. The sustaining of teaming is a second important factor. The study shows that when teachers are engaged in teaming for several years, and have the necessary time to plan, they report high levels of teaming and effective classroom practices. Therefore, the sustained impact of teaming and effective classroom practices can produce higher student achievement. Hence, this process of improvement is not a short-term process, particularly for high poverty schools.

This research provides evidence that reforming programs and practices for middle grades schools can positively affect student achievement (Mertens & Flowers, 2003).

Fair Oaks, California. Presented at a Los Angeles, California educational conference for administrators in 2007 was a another example of success that intrigued the researcher and initiated his study on the topic of the reasons for middle school success. It was the teachers of Will Rogers Middle School from Fair Oaks, California who presented information as to their steps for success (Becker & Bebout, 2007). The demographics of this middle school were very similar to the demographics of the two middle schools used in this study.

Rogers was a school comprised of 735 students of Grade 7 and 8. It was a Title I school where 64% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. It was also a school where 41% of the students were considered minorities. Also, 37% of the student body consisted of English language learners. This number had grown dramatically over the years. In 1991, only 43 students were categorized as ELL. By 2007, this number of ELL students had increased to 281. They were a PI school not having met the minimum state requirements of standardized assessment. Presenters from Baker at the conferences described their school at this time as having test score apathy, low expectations, [low] parental involvement, and growing gang population (Becker & Bebout, 2007).

A new principal, with additional administrators, brought in a series of programs. Interdisciplinary teaming was started along with a modified schedule for team teachers to meet together during the same time period and to have extended time on Thursdays to meet and plan for their team. They also established a uniform policy to fight gang involvement. Other programs such as Character Education, Advancement Via Individual

Determination (AVID), 90/90/90 Schools Study, Technology Training, and the Accelerated Reader were all instituted within 3 years. Teachers continually analyzed data to discover what areas of instruction they needed to review and revamp. They also involved more positive affirmation for their students, particularly for recognized improvements in the areas of reading, English, and math. These multi-faceted and in-depth pursuits for improvement began to show positive results.

Los Angeles, California. There is another success of middle schools that uses a variety of methods mentioned thus far. Edwin Markham Middle School in the Watts areas of Los Angeles, California made great academic progress when the new principal tried using the following techniques: leadership and decision-making, classroom instructional practices, teaching and interdisciplinary instruction, parental involvement, school safety, school and classroom climate, professional development. In the *Los Angeles Times* article titled “School Reforms Often Overlook the Instructors,” Jason Felch, Jason Song and Sandra Poindexter reported that the factor that increased student achievement is effective teachers.

Markham Middle School was one of the worst middle schools in California. It was also ranked as 28 out of Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) 100 worst schools. As such, there was always placement of a new principal who tried to start academic improvements, but little time was given for such process. Two veteran teachers at the school reported the rotation of nine different principals over 20 years. In the last 7 years, principals tried changes in many areas: changing the curriculum, reducing class size, increasing school safety, opening after-school programs. “The one thing they didn’t do was improve the teaching—at least, not until this last year when layoffs swept out

many of the school's worst performers and test scores jumped, a *Times* analysis found" (Felch, Song, & Poindexter, 2010, p. 14).

The use of effective teachers is a factor that has not been in place at Markham Middle School. Since 2003, Markham has had dozens of the district's least effective instructors, as measured by the analysis of their students' progress on standardized tests. Seventy percent of the school's English and math teachers have ranked well below the Los Angeles Unified School District's average in effectiveness. Fewer than 10 Markham teachers have been in the district's top 20%, and most left the school within 3 years. The Los Angeles Times reports this lack of effective teachers as a common cause for the lack of academic advancements across the country. There are thousands of Markhams across the country, schools whose low test scores have triggered wave after wave of reform efforts over decades, mostly without producing better test results

Many attempts at change were made over the last 15 years, but little time was given to analyze the results of this change before this process is dropped, and a new one started. In 1997, a new program to develop an 11-point research-based plan to include teacher training, parent and community involvement and other programs was started, but after school several years, the effort was scrapped because there was little change. In 1999, a new program was started that now started double the number of reforms, but it too was judged ineffective. With changes in programs also come changes in school leadership. "Everyone comes here with good ideas and good concepts, but no one has stayed long enough to see any results," said Sheila Woodley, a Markham teacher since 1986 (Felch et al., 2010,).

Changes at Markham Middle School will begin after officials at LAUSD studied the success of Maryville Middle School in Knoxville, Tennessee. It was at Maryville that Principal Joe Giffin began using value-added data in the early 1990s. Value-added data gives principals, educators, and parents a potent tool to assess both student achievement and teacher impact. The data tracks growth in student learning and how this growth is aligned with teacher effectiveness. Aligning students who need assistance with excellent teachers can improve decisions about course placements, individual interventions, and professional development designed to hone teachers' skills. In Maryville, teachers with a successful track record in raising the scores of remedial readers were assigned a classroom full of such students, rather than to students with a wide assortment of abilities. "Instead of randomly assigning kids, we'll place them where they have a better opportunity to be successful," said Giffin. Teachers liked it too, he said, because were teaching to their strengths. For a decade straight, Maryville had the greatest gains of any middle school in the state, with improvement far exceeding the national norm.

LAUSD began much of the process successful at Maryville Middle School with one exception—none of their new efforts would be guided by value-added analysis. What took place first was teachers getting tired of many changes. In 2007, Tim Sullivan started as the new principal at Markham Middle School. At the same time, many teachers were tired of the rotating door of the office of the principal. Not wanting another time for great change, many teachers left Markham. The transfer teachers were replaced with teachers highly effective in instruction. To bring stability to Markham, he also promised to stay at Markham for a minimum of five years. Sullivan spent his first restoring order at this school. Test scores actually fell during his first year. Because of

the continued decline in academic records, Sullivan was able to lay-off more than half of the teachers from his site. The lay-offs were based on low-seniority, but he was able to hire teachers from around the district with more experience.

During his second year, Sullivan and his new team of teachers tried many of the reform efforts that had been attempted throughout the years at Markham. These included such components of parental involvement, teaming, and intensive teacher professional development. Now, the results were different—Markham Middle School now had the fastest rate of student progress among the district middle schools for the 2009-2010 school year.

Not all of the teachers who were low-performing teachers were laid off in 2009. Some remained with their position at Markham Middle School. Many who were hired for the positions were in the close-to-average teacher effectiveness, not high performing teachers. How would Markham advance to the fastest rate of student progress?

Professional development at Markham Middle School involved highly effective instructors working with less-effective teachers to increase their teaching skills and their academic relationship with the students. Many of the low-performing teachers who survived the layoffs got significantly better, jumping to near average effectiveness compared to their peers district-wide, by getting continued support from effective teachers through professional development.

Markham Middle School has been turned around. Students are now with more highly effective teachers. Students are still significantly behind their peers statewide, but if they continue their academic advancements and repeat last year's gains for several years running, they have a chance to catch-up and meet state standards. The most

effective part of this academic advancement is effective teachers who are supported by the other important components. These components include a leader who includes teachers in making decision with such elements as classroom instructional practices, teaming, parent involvement and support of peers with professional development.

Process of Change

Change will only take place if educators fight for what is right for the students, one cannot be merely optimistic for change to take place. “Some readers may question whether ours is a very optimistic view of leadership. In reply, we offer the words of Vaclav Havel, the former leader of the Czech Republic. He argues that there is a difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will turn out as you would like. Hope is the belief in yourself that you will fight for what is right and just, irrespective of the outcomes” (Patterson et al., 2010, p. xiii).

Resilience with motions of change are also integral for change to take place. Effective schools are characterized by being surrounded by high expectations, high performance and a supportive context. But the research on effective schools points to another set of variables that on the surface make it appear that effective schools and resilient schools are synonymous. There is a fundamental difference. “Resilient schools are effective performers that operate within a context of high expectations, strong support, and an empowering environment *even in the face of adverse conditions*” (Patterson et al., 2010, p. 3).

To be resilient also means to not accept excuses for not succeeding. Throughout their research on resilient schools, Patterson, Patterson and Collins found the phrase “no excuse” as the motto that separate highly resilient schools from those that are not

resilient. “No excuses!” This theme bounced off the walls and echoed throughout the conversations we had with each of the school leaders in resilient schools. In the words of one school leader, reflecting the sentiment of many of her colleagues across the United States, “There are absolutely no excuses for failing to product achieving students. None. Zero. Zilch. I mean no excuses” (Patterson et al., 2010, p. 33).

Fullan (2001) explains that change have both positive and negative aspects. The negative aspects include feelings of fear, anxiety, loss, and panic. The positive aspects include feelings of exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvements, and energizing. The synthesizing of any or all of the changes needed for academic improvement and success mentioned thus far will not happen without the presence of a committed leader. Even the implementation of team leadership begins with one leader. There are times when finding a leader can be a difficulty because of the negative presence of academic failure. As Fullan (2001) states, “Leadership is for problems that don’t have easy answers” (p. 2).

Understanding change can be a difficult process for both leaders and members of the community. Change can be understood and perhaps lead, but it cannot be controlled. “The best way to ‘manage’ change is to allow for it to happen” (Fullan, 2001, p. 33). When change begins its process, people may feel overwhelmed by the pacesetter’s demands for excellence. Guidelines may be clear in the leader’s head, but oftentimes he or she expects people to know what do even when expectations are not stated clearly. Leaders must remember the importance of clear and continued communication between all of those involved in the change process.

There are a small number of key dimensions that can help the average person become a good leader (Fullan, 2001). These dimensions are: working by a moral purpose, understanding the change, building relationships, creating and sharing knowledge, and being coherent.

Leaders cannot operate without these five components. Though these components can help an average leader become a good leader, all leaders must include three characteristics in their endeavors: energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness. If all of the above is done, the rewards and benefits will be enormous (Fullan, 2001).

George explains how educators must set high and equal goals for all students. Educators of young adolescents in the U.S. and throughout the world have never aimed low.

Our aim has always been to provide authentic educational success with *every* child. Every child, not just some children. Every child, not just those with influential parents. Every child, not just those with powerful advocates. Every child, not just those with the right clothes, right skin color, right last name, or the right language. Every child, including those whose clothes are torn and smelly. Every child, including those who move three or four times a year. Every child, including those who are silent and those who shout. Every child, even when we are criticized for what we do and blamed for all the shortcoming of schools.

(George, 2010, pp. 50-51)

Summary

Few effective, widespread, and long-standing reforms have occurred over the decades since *Turning Points 2000*. “Currently, few middle grades schools have

implemented many of the practices recommended for the education of early adolescents, and even fewer have implemented them well” (MacIver & Epstein, as cited in Roney et al., 2004, p. 153). As a result of their studies over the years, the CPRD has included instructional practices and activities in the classroom as an important component for the academic success of middle school students. As the literature shows, there is no one clear practice or activity that guarantees success. At the same time, studies show that the old, traditional form of instruction and assessment is not working. “School improvement is an intricate business. Whether a school succeeds in improving is dependent on a host of factors” (Mintrop et al., 2007, p. 2). There is no one practice that will guarantee the academic success of middle schools. Fortunately, research has shown what factors seem to be common in schools that are succeeding (Peterson, 2001b). These factors, including those outlined in the School Improvement Self-Study Survey questions from the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

One factor common for academically successful middle schools is that instructional practices and activities are based on research. Teachers repeatedly assess their students and review the data so they will know what needs to be the focus for instruction.

Another common factor for successful middle schools is where teacher integrate interdisciplinary instruction with team methods. This integration involves teachers of the core subjects—language arts, math, science and history—continually interact so that what is being taught in English class can relate to what is being taught in history. This lets students in a middle school know that even though they may have four different classes

for four different topics, the subjects are not completely different. In life, these subjects relate to one another.

Another characteristic of academically successful middle schools is a leader with decision-making practices that empower the teachers. From their teamwork and continued assessment and review of data, teachers know what they need. A good leader empowers the teachers to help make decisions.

Parental involvement is common trait for successful middle schools. It is at the middle school level that parents let go their children and let them become more independent. Yet, it is in actuality the time when as much parental involvement as elementary school is needed, but in different ways. Keeping parents involved in the learning process of their child is what makes middle schools academically successful. Parental involvement helps with the next factor for successful middle schools...setting a safe school and classroom climate and setting high expectations. Safety for students is felt outside on the playground as well as inside the classroom in the learning process. A student who feels safe learning will take more chances in their educational process.

For teachers to take all of the steps above, they must be open for continual professional development. This is the case at academically successful middle schools. The topics of development sessions range from learning different teaching techniques that apply to their students to learning about teaching styles for teamwork and to learning different ways to keep the parents involved in learning.

It is the above factors that appear to be important components of academically successful middle schools. The purpose of this study is to use components of these

elements to analyze the reasons for academic differences between two middle schools in a small, urban school district.

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview of the Study's Design

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was employed to design and gather data to answer the research questions. This chapter addresses the population under study, the research design, data gathering, and protection of human subjects for the study.

This research was a mixed-method quantitative and a qualitative study. One school had not been meeting state or federal academic standards. Its sister school, a new middle school that opened 5 years ago, had been making higher academic achievements. First, archival data regarding the demographics of these two middle schools was analyzed to establish the similarities and differences between the schools. Second, qualitative interviews of the teachers and site administrators at both middle schools were conducted. The focus of this research was to learn from the teachers how they would describe their academic life and what they believe should be the next steps to improve their schools.

Description of the Population

This research examined the academic life in two middle schools that achieved different academic results, but with similar demographics. Both schools were comprised of a majority of students that qualified for free/reduced lunch in a small, low-income school district in Los Angeles County, California, USA. Both schools were also comprised of a large number of ethnic minority students. The characteristics of schools with low socioeconomic status and a high percentage of minority students commonly signified low academic performance (Mintrop et al., 2007). In this study, the academic performance of Baker Middle School was one year 46 points lower on the API scale than Adler Middle School. However, Adler Middle School was a new school that was split

from Baker Middle School because of high student enrollment. Teachers and administrators could choose to remain at Baker or move to Adler, the new school.

Table 2 presents the example of these two middle schools and their different academic achievement scores. In Table 2, Adler Middle School is the new middle school in the district that had been open for 3 years. Yet the State Test Score column illustrates their API score had been at least 40 points higher than the API at Baker Middle School until 2010 when the scores at Baker are now as close as 24 points.

Table 2

Academic Progress and Ranking and Projections of Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 2006-2010

| Adler Middle School | State Test Score | +/- Projected Target Score | Next Target | Projected API Score |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 2006-2007 | 715 | 1st yr. | 5 | 720 |
| 2008-2008 | 750 | +35 | 5 | 755 |
| 2008-2009 | 776 | + 18 | 5 | 781 |
| 2009-2010 | 800 | +28 | to be determined | to be determined |
| Baker Middle School | | | | |
| 2006-2007 | 675 | + 17 | 6 | 671 |
| 2007-2008 | 706 | + 24 | 5 | 711 |
| 2008-2009 | 730 | + 24 | 5 | 735 |
| 2009-2010 | 776 | + 46 | to be determined | to be determined |

Design of the Study

Archival data. First, archival data, namely academic record data regarding the demographics of these two middle schools, was gathered and analyzed to ensure the similarities of qualitative data of these two schools. Most information was gathered based on state data. This data was chosen because it was collected by the state as part of the state exam process. This information was regarding different facets that can be a factor of students learning. Such factors include education level of the teachers,

education level of parents, economic level of the student's family, and English education level of students to name a few.

Statistics regarding many aspects of the composition of the school and its community using data from the State of California Department of Education website were analyzed, including academic performance of the school, ethnicity, academic achievement level of parents, socio-economic status of parents, education level of teachers, and ratio of faculty to students. This data was used to establish the similarities and differences between the schools in order to accurately interpret the demographic and interview data gathered from participants. The sites used to obtain data include Dataquest (California Department of Education, n.d.a, n.d.b), and Ed-Data School Reports (Ed-Data, 2011). The tables used at these sites include:

- School description
- API base scores
- Enrollment by grade
- Average class size
- School technology
- Students by ethnicity
- Special programs
- English learners
- Languages of English learner students
- Certificated staff
- Teaching credentials
- Teachers by ethnicity

- Classified staff
- Accountability (API/AYP/high schools)
- Adequate yearly progress
- Performance - annual measurable objectives (AMOS)
- Participation rates
- Additional indicator(s)
- Program improvement - Title I
- Subgroup performance and participation
- Academic performance index (API)
- API score, ranks, and targets
- Student subgroup performance
- School report on API growth and targets met
- State accountability: academic performance index (API)
- Local educational agency (LEA) list of schools

Faculty and administrative interviews. Before the interview questions, there was one page titled preliminary questions. This information was gathered to learn more about the teachers and administrators at each site (Appendix F).

Since this study was examining data from a large number of current participants within a similar time frame, the researcher sought to develop an approach that would gather honest information from all participants. This descriptive study adopted a new data gathering approach for the teachers that combined focus group, semi-structured interviews, and survey approaches into a methodology that will be termed *team interview*.

The team interview was adopted because all of the teachers at both schools operate in teams. Each team meets on a weekly or more basis and shares teaching with the same group of students. Thus, data collection occurred during a team meeting. Also, the study wanted to ascertain individual teacher perceptions as well as note any team similarities and differences across teams. The study considered conduct focus groups for the teams, but the researcher know from his work experience at both schools that some teams had dominant members and teachers' voices would not equally be heard. Thus, an approach was developed that would provide teachers opportunity to share their responses to trigger terms and then write their own response after the discussion.

At Adler Middle School, there were three teams at the Grade 6 level, and two teams of teachers at the Grade 7 and at the Grade 8 levels. There were a total of 38 credentialed professions at Adler, which included the classroom teachers, Learning Center teachers, teachers on special assignment, and counselors. Of this number, 35 of the 38 or 93% of the teachers at Adler participated in the interview. The principal and the assistant principals participated in the interview of the site administrators.

At Baker Middle School, there were three teams at the Grade 6 level and Grade 7 levels while there were two teams at the Grade 8 level. There was total of 45 credentialed professions at Baker that included the classroom teachers, Learning Center teachers, teachers on special assignment, and counselors. Of this number, 40 of the 45 teachers at Baker participated in the interview. The principal and the assistant principals participated in the interview of the site administrators. This is sum of 90% of the credentialed staff that participated in the research.

Procedures of the interviews. Permission for this study was approved by the district superintendent and school principals. Information for this research was presented at individual meetings. Such information presented was of the prompts for discussion that would be conducted at the team interviews. All information gained from the teachers and site administrators are kept confidential. Also, participation by the teachers and administrators in the interviews was completely voluntary. Those participating were not required to complete any written surveys. Because time for teachers and administrators is so valuable, discussion time was limited.

To accomplish a smooth interview process, the superintendent and site administrators approved the researcher to present at a faculty meeting at each site a brief summary of the dissertation. The teachers first learned that their participation in this study was completely voluntary. The teachers also heard that all information obtained in the interviews would be kept confidential. Teachers were told that a packet of prompt questions would be distributed to each teacher 3 to 5 days before the scheduled interviews. Educators were told that the first page would be preliminary questions asking them about their years and location as a teacher, their years at a middle school and that in elementary or high schools, and their education level (Appendix F). Teachers were not required to complete any writing if they did not so desire. The focus of the distributing the prompt packet in advance was so that the teachers knew what the topics of discussion were. They also saw on the packet a set time of discussion and a short time for them to write about the topic if they so desired. Teachers were also informed that the topics on the prompt packet were possible topics. Teachers were able to discuss any element related to that topic that they felt was important.

When approval from both principals was obtained, the site administrators both acknowledged that since the researcher was not at that time a teacher at Baker Middle School and hence was not known by the Grade 6 teachers or by the Grade 7 and 8 teachers new to Baker in the last 4 years, the percentage of teachers who volunteered to participate in the study were 3% fewer than that of the teachers at Adler Middle School. Also mentioned by both principals was that there might be a feeling of competition between the two middle schools. Since the researcher was from Adler Middle School, there may have been some educators from Baker Middle School who preferred not to participate.

To inform the faculty of Baker Middle School of the researcher's goal, which was to learn what might be important components for the academic success of middle schools, he presented a brief biography of himself and the purpose of his study. He informed the faculty that he had been employed at Baker Middle School when it was the only middle school in the district. He also informed the teachers at Baker that while their state API score may be behind that of Adler Middle School, there has been great growth in the API score of this school over the last few years. As a researcher, he wanted to know what the teachers believed were the reasons for their great growth.

To gather the thoughts of the teachers and site administrators, the teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools were interviewed as teams while the site administrators were interviewed individually. Interviews were conducted during the preparation time of each team at each school. At both schools, teams were comprised of one core subject teacher per team, which included one language arts, one math, one science, and one history teacher per team. At Adler Middle School, teachers of other subjects were

organized as separate departments (i.e., art, music, technology, learning center, physical education). At Baker Middle School, these individuals were still assigned to individual teams, even though they would have a different preparation period. However, at both schools, non-core subject teachers often had different preparation periods. Attempts were made to schedule additional group interview times when such teachers were available. As a last resort at Baker Middle School when teachers still did not have the chance to participate in the interview process, several teachers asked and were given the option of submitting their thoughts about the academic progress as their school to the interviewer either on paper or via a survey website that had been created for such respondents (refer to Appendix H).

During the interview, notes of the discussion were typed so that participants could view the bullets and make corrections. Many teachers also wrote comments on their packet before turning in their paper at the end of the interview. At the conclusion of each discussion team for each component, silent quick-write time was allotted. Quick-write time was a silent 1 to 3 minutes for participants to write any further comments or additional thoughts on the subject that they wanted to share.

Instrumentation

A detailed interview protocol is contained in Appendix D. The semi-structured interviews had been designed to allow participants to elaborate on their feelings of their school and its academic success and thoughts about the future at their schools. This semi-structured interview process, in addition to the interview questions on paper, did supply additional information and data to corroborate the conclusions that were drawn from this research project (Creswell, 1998). The Preliminary Survey Questions (refer to

Appendix F for Preliminary Survey Questions) and the interview questions were distributed to the participants approximately 3 to 5 days in advance. This gave each individual time to answer the preliminary questions about their demographics and review the prompts for the scheduled interview. It also gave them time to review the topics and contemplate their response to interview questions.

At each school, there were two to three teams from each grade level that were interviewed. Teachers were met in their school for an interview of their teams, as a group interview. Each interview was limited to last no more than 1 hour. Approximate times for discussion for each component were listed next to each component on the interview questions. After asking questions regarding the seven components, the survey concluded with one open-ended question asking participants what they believed should be the next steps to continue the academic growth of the students at their middle school. The interview questions for the teachers and administrators in the interview process are located in Appendix G. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

A primary disadvantage of interviews, particularly as it pertains to this study, was the inability to delve further into particular topics. Interviews and the survey questions were inflexible in design, meaning that both the interview instrument and the process for collecting data remain constant throughout the process of collecting data. A survey was selected for this study in order to collect data from a purposeful sample population of the 78 middle school teachers at the two schools in this study.

Interview protocol. The researcher followed these steps in the interview process:

1. The researcher met with the two principals of the middle schools to schedule time to attend a faculty meeting to present the interview process to the teachers. The researcher also reviewed the team interview schedule with the principals.
2. The researcher attended the two faculty meetings and explained the process of the study and the interview process.
3. Interviews were scheduled. A schedule for the interview process was set for April, 2010 (refer to Appendix C for Interview Schedule).
4. The research distributed the Preliminary Survey Questions and interview questions to each teacher of a team approximately 3 to 5 days before the scheduled interview.
5. On the day of each scheduled interview, the researcher welcomed the team teachers into a room agreed upon with the team. The researcher had an area with beverages and snacks for the teachers.
6. The researcher read the Interview Protocol Form (refer to Appendix D) to the teachers.
7. The teachers were asked to read and sign the Participant Consent Form (refer to Appendix E).
8. The survey was not coded in any way identifying the subject.
9. When the interview process began, a set time not to exceed 1 hour was scheduled for each component (refer to Appendix G). The researcher conducted interviews of administrators at their respective schools after the interviews of teacher teams.
10. For teachers who did not have time to participate in the structured team interview process, but still wanted to share their information on the topic questions, they

were given a confidential location to return Survey Question packets. Those who preferred to give their information to an electronic site were given the web address of the survey questions and a set time frame when this site would be available. Teachers who used this site were told that this time frame would be the opportunity when they could return to the site to change any responses they had entered. (Refer to Appendix H).

Validity

Expert panel. The interview questions were reviewed by a panel of six experts. The experts provided feedback to ensure that the final instrument was clear, unbiased, and related directly to the research questions. Expertise in this area was determined by experience in the field of public and private school teachers and administrators. One of the experts was an educational leadership doctoral candidate who serves as a teacher in a private school. A second expert was an educational leadership doctoral candidate who was a counselor at a middle school. The third expert was an educational leadership doctoral candidate who was a vice principal at a public middle school. The fourth panel member was an elementary school principal. These four educators, along with two additional panel members who were doctoral candidates in the technology field, were asked to read and review the interview questions for clarity, ease of task, and relevance to the research questions. These experts discussed their assessment of the instrument in a group discussion. The panel of experts reviewed the interview questions in February, 2010.

Pilot study. After review by the panel of experts, the interview questions were piloted with a principal and with three teachers of different content areas. The

individuals who piloted the interview questions work in a middle school with demographics similar to the two schools in this study. The work of the pilot teams took place in February, 2010. The comments from the panel of experts and pilot study teams regarding the interview instrument were applied and can be reviewed by reading the current interview questions (refer to Appendix G).

Human Subject Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with regulations and guidelines established by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study complies with the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, DHHS (C.F.R.), Title 45 Part 46 (C.R.F.R. 46), titles Protection of Human Subjects, and Parts 160 and 16 (Pepperdine University, 2005). The researcher applied to the Internal Review Board (IRB) for an exempt review process in February, 2010. This process was selected because the study presented minimal risk to participants. The district superintendent and school principals were contacted to approve this research process at their schools (refer to Appendices A, B, and C for Approval Letters).

The researcher conducted the interviews of the teams of teachers and of the site administrators at both middle schools. The researcher only knows the identity of each adult participating in this study as they were asked to sign a Participant Release Form. The interview instrument was not coded in a way that the data could be associated with the individual who participated in the interview. The survey did not require the participants to enter their name or have any identification code associated with it. The data files are password protected. Any information that was saved to a disc was deleted from the hard drive and the disc was secured in a locked file cabinet. Results of the

interview questions were reported for the group as a whole, and individual responses to the survey questions were not be reported.

For the welfare and well being of the participants in this research, the confidentiality and anonymity was and is protected. To secure this confidentiality and anonymity, participants were provided with a consent form (refer to Appendix E) that detailed the purpose and significance of this study. A coding system was established to maintain the anonymity of those surveyed and interviewed. The name and personal information of each participant was not be used by anyone other than the primary researcher. This information was not available to coders. Adults participating in this study did so voluntarily and they could have chosen to discontinue their participation at any time during the study. The transcribed interviews were forwarded to interview participants for review. Participants were allowed to make further comments and edit as needed. The researcher followed all federal and professional standards for conducting research with human subjects.

Furthermore, the study's content in no way physically harmed participants. The emotional well being of participants was considered as the questions for this survey were proposed. Participants were given an opportunity to review their responses for verification. All data was stored and locked in a file cabinet that can be accessed only by the primary researcher. After 5 years of storage, raw data, and any documents with personal information from the participants will be shredded and destroyed.

Summary

The research first reviewed archival data to analyze the statistics of the two middle schools to verify the similarities of the people of these sites. The researcher next

examined the seven components and factors of each component that influenced middle school academic growth at two middle schools with similar demographics within the same school district. Teachers and site administrators were as well asked to share their ideas about how these components affected the academic success of their school. Also examined was what the teams and administrators at the two schools listed as what they considered should be the next three steps to continue development at their school. This was achieved by interviewing the professional educators at these two schools.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data and Findings

Introduction

This chapter reports the important findings from the research regarding the similarities and differences between the two schools regarding the seven components (see Figure 1). First, this chapter will present the quantitative data exploring similarities and differences regarding the demographics of these two schools. Then, the qualitative responses from teachers and site administrators at the two schools who participated in the interview process will be presented.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

This section will first explore data analyzing the similarities and differences between the two middle schools under investigation. Most data for this aspect of the study was obtained from the California Department of Education website (<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>) that presents data regarding every K-12 educational site in the state. Standard data will be presented, including: student enrollment, API scores, ranking with all state schools, ranking among similar schools, gender, student ethnicity, teacher ethnicity, ESL students, free/reduced lunch, credentialed teachers, ratio of students per credentialed teacher, ratio of students per pupil personnel services, ratio of students per administrator, and ratio of students per computer. This section will also present a brief history of these two schools, including the ethnic makeup of the city where the two schools are located. Other data to be analyzed will include: different levels of years parent education in 2010, parent education by degrees and by year, teachers and years of education, and teachers and degrees of education.

Archival data. Statistics regarding many aspects of the composition of the school and its community using data from the State of California Department of Education website were analyzed. This data set was used to establish the similarities and differences between the schools in order to accurately interpret the demographic and interview data gathered from participants. The researcher compared the data from the two schools and determined whether any differences were statistically significant.

Demographic data. Data from the Preliminary Survey Questions regarding the demographics of the credentialed staff of these two middle schools were analyzed using a quantitative approach (see Appendix F). Data included primary grade levels taught, subjects taught, name of their school team, gender, ethnic background, identification of core subjects for their team, length of teaching experience, teaching experience at middle schools, and professional educational training.

The responses from the Preliminary Survey Questions were entered into a database and tallied using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researcher compared the data from the two schools and determined whether any differences were statistically significant. These data were used to explore whether such topics as ethnicity and years of teaching experience could relate to policies and procedures that may have resulted in superior performance at one school. The comparison also reviewed statistics that the state collects for each school regarding the state exam each year.

Interview data. The researcher and coding teams each individually reviewed the transcripts to determine codes and capture themes among participant responses. The researcher and other coders were doctoral students from Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. The primary researcher trained the

coders to code the data. Interview questions were classified into the categories shown in Table 3. Table 3 also shows how the eight interview questions relate to the research question.

Table 3

Linkage Between Interview Questions, Research Questions, Factors, and Literature

| Interview Questions | Categories in Literature Review |
|--|---|
| Question 1: Classroom instructional practices component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Anderman et al., 1998; Bardach, 2008; Boller, 2008; Copeland, Davis, Foley, Morley, & Nyman, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; George, 2010; Mills & Pollack, 1993; Montgomery, 2008; Strahan, 2003. • Block schedule: Ames & Miller, 1994; Cuban, 2008; Hough et al., 1989; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Peterson, 2001; Southern Regional Educational Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997; Whitehouse, 2009. • Looping: Peterson, 2001. • Links to real-life experience: Mills & Pollack, 1993; Strahan & Layell, 2006; Strahan, 2008; Copeland, Davis, Foley, Morley & Nyman, 2001. • Service learning: Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon, 2002, Peterson, 2001. • Cooperative learning: Copeland, Davis, Foley, Morley, & Nyman, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hough et al., 1989; Turner & Meyer, 1995; Willis, 2007. • Assessment: Hough et al., 1989; Ames & Miller, 1994, Montgomery, 2008, Whitehouse, 2009; Ozgun-Koca, 2008. • Second chance: Anderman et al., 1998. • Teaching students strategies for learning and organization: Hough et al., 1998; Boller, 2008; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn & Lowe, 2009; Strahan & Layell, 2006, McCoy, 2000; Laase, 1996; Cuban, 2009. • Technology: Doblar, 2010 |
| Question 2: Teaming and interdisciplinary instruction component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaming: Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997; Ames & Miller, 1994; Hough et al., 1989; Mills & Pollack, 1993; Wallace, 2007; Midgley et al., 1992; Mills & Pollack, 1993; Trimble & Peterson, 2000; EdSource, 2010; Peterson, 2001; Reiser & Butzin, 2000; Mertens & Flowers, 2003; Wilson, 2007; Flowers, Mertens & Mulhall, 2000. • Interdisciplinary instruction: Strahan, 2008; Duerr, 2008; Cuban, 1999; Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997; Anderman et al., 1998; Whitehouse, 2009. • Integration of interdisciplinary team methods: Fullan, 2002; Strahan & Layell, 2006; Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon, 2002. |
| Question 3: School and classroom climate component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Peterson, 2001; Anderman et al., 1998. • Student motivation: Anderman et al., 1998; Strahan, 2003; Strahan, 2008. • Caring environment: Peterson, 2001; Strahan & Layell, 2006. • Multicultural understanding: Strahan & Layell, 2006; Bardach, 2008; Lindsay, Robbins & Terrell, 2005; Payne, 2005. • Classroom support and structure: Strahan & Layell, 2006. • Setting goals: Strahan, 2008; Strahan & Layell, 2006; EdSource, 2010. • No tracking: Jackson et al., 2000; Peterson, 2001; Southern Regional Education Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997; Anderman et al., 1998. |

(continued)

| Interview Questions | Categories in Literature Review |
|---|---|
| Question 4: Professional development component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Reiser & Butzin, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Nieto, 2009; Whitehouse, 2009. • Content and delivery: Nieto, 2009; Bardach, 2008; Strahan, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Heck & Marcoulides, 1990; Wallace Foundation, 2007; Kester, 1989. • Credentialing: Strahan, 2003; Ames & Miller, 1994; Mertens & Flowers, 2003; Hough et al., 1989. |
| Question 5: School safety and management component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Waxman, Garcia & Read, 2008. • Inside the classroom: Waxman, Garcia & Read, 2008. • Outside the classroom: Kleiner et al., 2004; Mertens & Flowers, 2003. |
| Question 6: Parental involvement component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Benson & Martin, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998; Whitehouse, 2009; Byrk, 2010; Hiatt-Michael, Hands, 2010; Goodlad, 1975; Fullan, 2003; Benson & Martin, 2003; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Peterson, 2001; Montgomery, 2008; Strahan & Layell, 2006; Nieto, 2000; Flowers et al, 1999; Clark & Clark, 2003; Grossnickle, 1988. |
| Question 7: Leadership and decision-making component | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information: Peterson, 2001; Wallace Foundation, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007. • Traits of leaders: Bardach, 2008; Cuban, 1998; Southern Regional Educational Board of Atlanta, GA, 1997; Midgley et al., 1992; Collins & Ingram Digital, 2001; Strahan, 2003; Sanders, 2006; Whitehouse, 2009. • Trust: George, 2010; Vodicka & Hancock, 2008. • Leadership-collaboration with teachers: Cuban, 1998, 2001, 2007; Fullan, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2009; Smylie, 1992; Pankake & Moller, 2007; Hartzell & Winger, 1989; Good, McCaslin, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Elmore, 2000; Patterson, Patterson & Collins, 2010. • A leader's role in establishing school culture: Sergiovanni, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; U.S. Department of Education's Blueprint for Reform, 2010; Patterson, Patterson & Collins, 2010. • Vice principals: Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995. |
| Question 8: Next 3 steps for future development | Descriptive statistics of data segmented by school |
| Stories of success that work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Las Vegas, Nevada: Rourke & Hartzman, 2008. • Florida: LaRocque, 2007. • Midwest: Center for the Prevention, Research & Development at the University of Illinois, 1990; Wallace Foundation, 2008; Mertens & Flowers, 2003. • Fair Oaks, California: Becker & Bebout, 2007. • Los Angeles, California: Felch, Song, Poindexter, 2010. |

Data were analyzed to provide insight regarding the educators' perceptions of the relationship between their school's academic success and the seven components formulated for this study. The researcher compared the results from each school separately with the literature and reviewed other studies to identify what themes, if any, were more prominent in one school than another and how that might account for

differences in academic achievement at the two middle schools. Research questions 2 and 3 relate to the perceptions of the teachers at the two middle schools while research questions 4 and 5 are based on the perceptions of the site administrators at these two middle schools.

History of two middle schools. Adler and Baker are middle schools in the Ingle Beach Elementary School District. Ingle Beach is a small, urban area of only 1.98 square miles. This area's population for the 2000 census was 31,711 people. It is a multi-ethnic city with a population that is 52% Hispanic, 22% White, 13% African American, 10% Asian, and 4% other (see Figure 2). The area's multi-ethnicity is highlighted by the fact that 7% of the population states that their family is of two or more races.

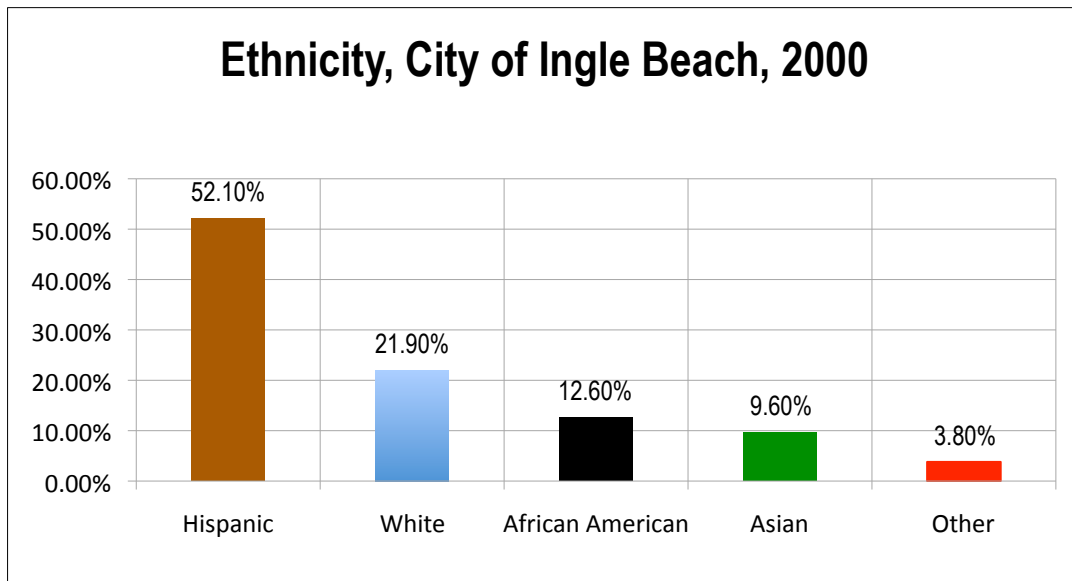


Figure 2. Ethnic distribution of the population of the City of Ingle Beach (Census 2000).

For many years, Baker Middle School was the only middle school in this district. During the 2005-2006 school year at Baker, there were 1,328 students in grades 7-8 and enrollment was growing. Given this large enrollment, the district decided to create a second middle school within their city boundaries. During the 2006-2007 school year,

the district took one of their K-6 elementary schools—Adler Elementary School—and converted it into a middle school. Baker and Adler are only 0.63 miles apart. In its first year, Adler would house approximately 800 students in grades 6-8. The district converted all K-6 feeder schools to K-5 sites so that the two middle schools would now be grades 6-through 8 instead of grades 7-8, as middle schools had done in the past. During its first year as a middle school, all of the grade 8 students at Adler had been grade 7 students at Baker Middle School in the previous year. All of the grade 6 and 7 students entered from the district's six elementary schools. During the 2005-2006 school year, half of the teachers from Baker Middle School transferred to the new Adler Middle School. The grade 6 teachers at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools newly comprised one third of the faculty members at both schools and had transferred from the district's K-6 schools, which were now K-5. Adler was a new middle school in the Ingle Beach Elementary School District, but 66% of the teachers and staff and 33% of the students had transferred from Baker Middle School.

Student enrollment. As Figure 3 shows, in the 2005-06 school year, Baker Middle School (grades 7-8) had an enrollment of 1,328 students. For this reason, district officials decided to open a second middle school. Adler Elementary School was converted from a K-6 school to Adler Middle School with Grades 6 through 8. Baker was also changed to add Grade 6. All of the elementary schools in the district that had been K-6 were K-5 starting in 2006-2007.

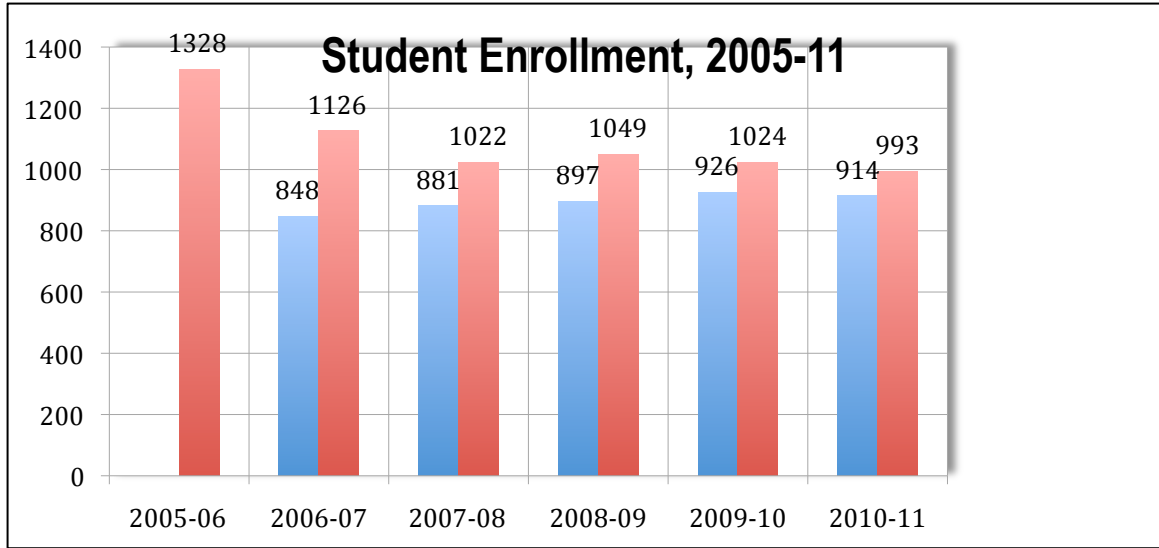


Figure 3. Student enrollment at Adler and Baker middle schools, 2005-2011

The Baker campus could accommodate more students than Adler, so despite the split of the grade 7 and 8 students at Baker, this campus would still have more students than Adler. Since converting to grades 6-8 in 2006-2007, Baker has had between 923 and 1,126 students, with 923 students during the current year of 2010-2011. Adler has ranged between 848 and 926 students, with 914 students during the current year of 2010-2011.

Both the city and these two middle schools are separated by a major thoroughfare; Adler is on one side, while Baker is on the other. This major thoroughfare also serves as the boundary for the elementary schools. Those who live on the west side of the thoroughfare attend Adler while those who live on the east side must attend Baker.

API scores. This school district's attention was drawn to these schools because of the difference in the schools' API scores after the transfer of teachers and students to the new school. In order to understand this discrepancy, it is important to first explore the academic standing of Baker when it was the only middle school in the district. As shown

in Table 4, there was great improvement in the API scores of Baker Middle School from 2002-2006; during this time the school exhibited overall growth between 16 and 43 points. In 2002, they had earned a rank of 3 when compared with all schools in the state of California. By 2006, this rank continued to be a 3. In 2002, Baker had been ranked a 7 when compared to similar schools in California, but after their years of improvement, this ranking dropped to a 1 by 2004. The school then improved to a ranking of 6 for two additional years. In 2002, the API score of 639 did not improve at all, but with changes in operation of the school, dramatic growth happened. In 2003, their API score was 682, a growth of 43 points from the previous year. In 2004, their growth was 16 points, and in 2005, their growth was 25 points. Yet as a school reaches higher API scores, they become more difficult to maintain. In 2006, there was a slight drop of 6 points in the API score. As a former student from a middle school that advanced academically mentioned, “Comfort zones are not meant to be parked in” (Becker & Bebout, 2007, p. 25).

Table 4

Academic Progress and Ranking of Baker Middle 2002-2006

| Year | API Scores | Growth | Statewide Rank | Similar Schools Rank |
|------|------------|--------|----------------|----------------------|
| 2002 | 639 | -- | 3 | 7 |
| 2003 | 682 | + 43 | 2 | 4 |
| 2004 | 698 | + 16 | 3 | 1 |
| 2005 | 723 | + 25 | 3 | 6 |
| 2006 | 717 | - 6 | 3 | 6 |

What draws the attention of this school district to these schools is the difference in the API scores between these two middle schools, after the transfer of some teachers and

students from the established school to the new school. Figure 4 graphically presents this change between the two schools from 2005 to 2009.

Figure 4 presents how Adler and Baker's API scores changed from 2005-2009. California STAR API Scores at Adler Middle School have been historically higher than at Baker. Table 1 showed the progress of the academic scores of both middle schools between 2006-2010. In 2005-2006, when Baker was a school of 1,328 students in grades 7-8, its API score was 658. That summer, half of the teachers and one third of the students would transfer to the new Adler Middle School. In 2006-2007, Baker did improve with an API score of 675. Adler opened their first year as a middle school with an API score of 715, which was 40 points higher than its sister school. This difference in scores would progress during the next 2 years. Both Adler and Baker middle schools have continued to make progress in their growth with state test results. However, while Baker Middle School has made progress during the last 2 years, the difference between the API scores of Adler and Baker has diminished this past year. During the team interview, teachers at Baker Middle School expressed their expectations for great growth in the next few years.

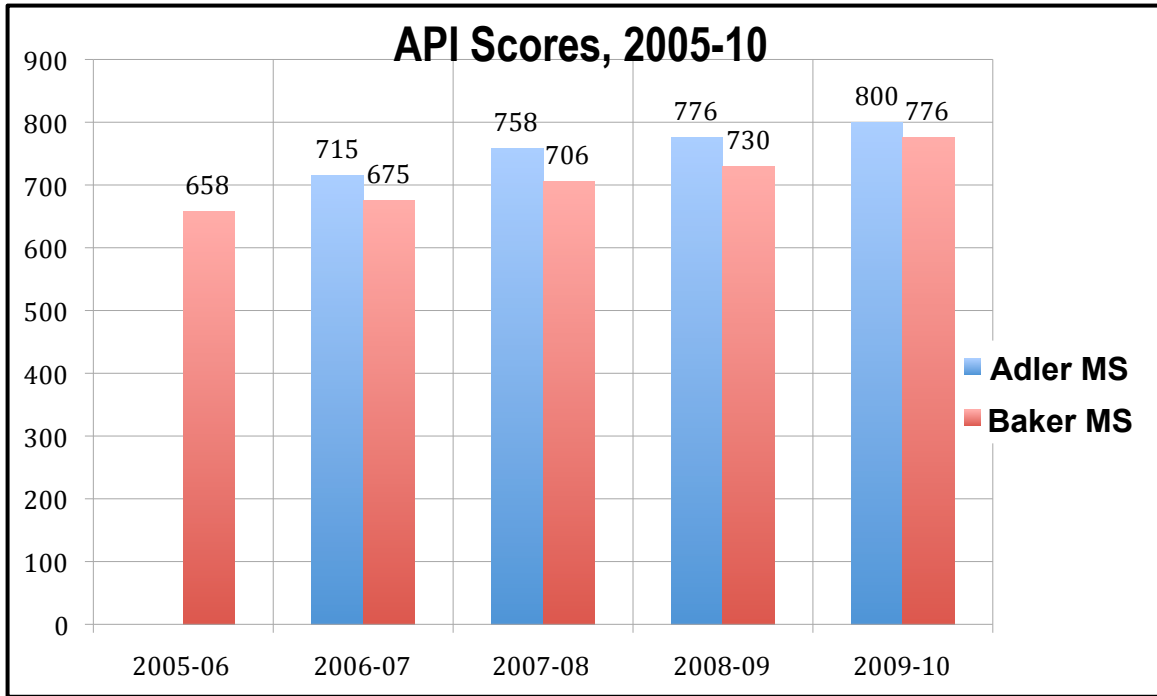


Figure 4. API Scores at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2010. This includes 2005-2006 when Adler was not yet open as a middle school

Ranking with all state schools. All schools in California are ranked each year on a scale of 1-10. This ranking compares the API score with all API scores across the state. On the basis of API reports, schools are ranked in 10 categories of equal size, called deciles, from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). A school's statewide rank compares that school to all other schools in the entire state. Each decile contains 10% of all schools of that type. A school's statewide rank is the decile where that school's base API falls compared with the base APIs of the other schools statewide. Special education schools and schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) do not receive statewide ranks. The California Department of Education will not rank the schools for the 2009-2010 until near the end of the following school year.

Figure 5 shows the ranking of Adler and Baker middle schools among all schools in the state. From the 2006-2007 to 2007-2008 school years, Adler has been ranked in the fifth and sixth deciles when compared with all schools in the state. Baker has been ranked in the third and fourth deciles during these two school years. As a grade 7-8 school from the 1999-2000 to the 2005-2006 school years, Baker was placed twice in the second decile and five times in the third decile. In 2006-2007, Baker was ranked in the third decile and in 2008-2009 increased its ranking to fall in the fourth decile.

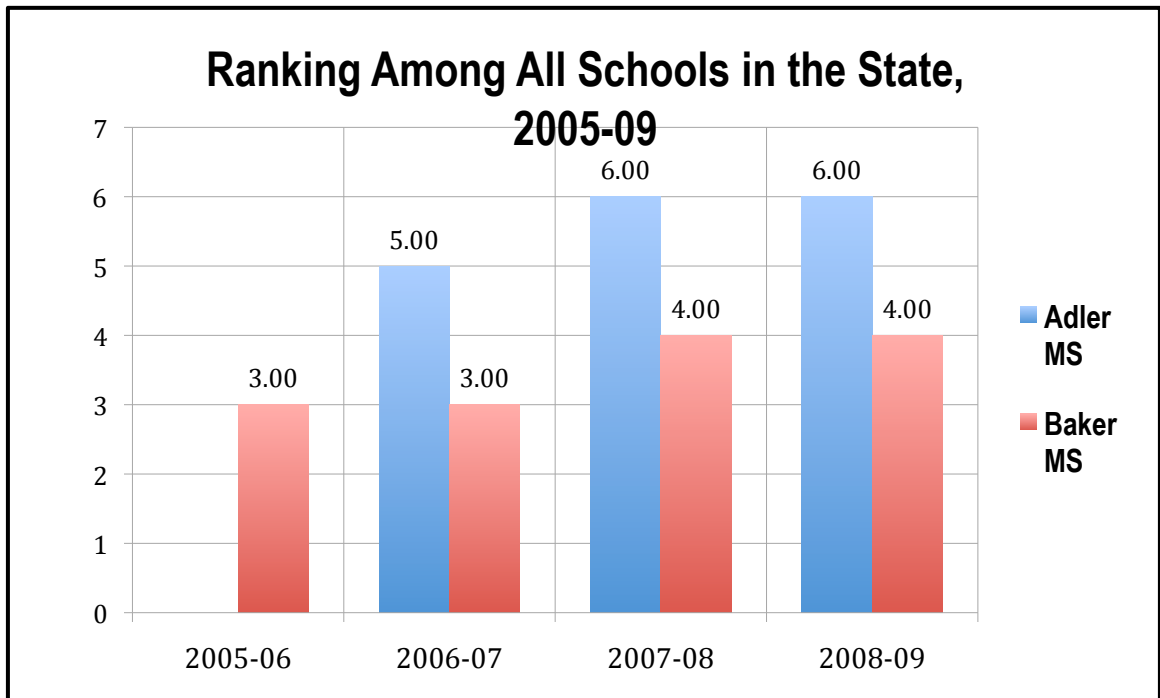


Figure 5. Ranking of Adler and Baker schools from 2005-2009 when compared with all schools in the state

Ranking with similar schools. In addition to statewide ranks, schools are also positioned in comparison to 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics. Figure 6 shows the rankings of Adler and Baker schools from 2005-2009 when compared with similar schools. For the similar schools ranking, schools are ranked into deciles

according to school type: elementary, middle, and high. To determine the similar schools rank for a school, a comparison group of 100 similar schools of the same type is formed for that school based on similar demographic characteristics. The APIs for this group of 100 schools are ranked into 10 categories of equal size, called deciles, from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Each decile contains 10% of all of the 100 similar schools in the comparison group. The school's similar schools rank is the decile where that school's base API falls compared with the base APIs of the 100 other similar schools in the comparison group. Special education schools, schools in the ASAM, and small schools with between 11 to 99 valid STAR Program scores do not receive similar schools ranks.

When ranked with similar schools, Adler has been placed in the 9th decile for the 2006-2007 and in the 10th decile for the 2008-2009 school years. A ranking of 10 means that Adler has a high API score when compared with schools with similar demographics.

As shown in Figure 6, Baker Middle School had varied greatly on similar school rankings between 1999 and 2006 when rankings ranged from the fourth to seventh deciles. Their ranking score has ranged from the first decile in the 2003-2004 school year to ranking of seventh decile in the 2001-2002 school year. Since converting to a school with Grades 6 through 8, Baker Middle School received a similar school ranking of fourth decile in 2006-2007, sixth decile in the 2007-2008 school year, and seventh decile for the 2008-2009 school year.

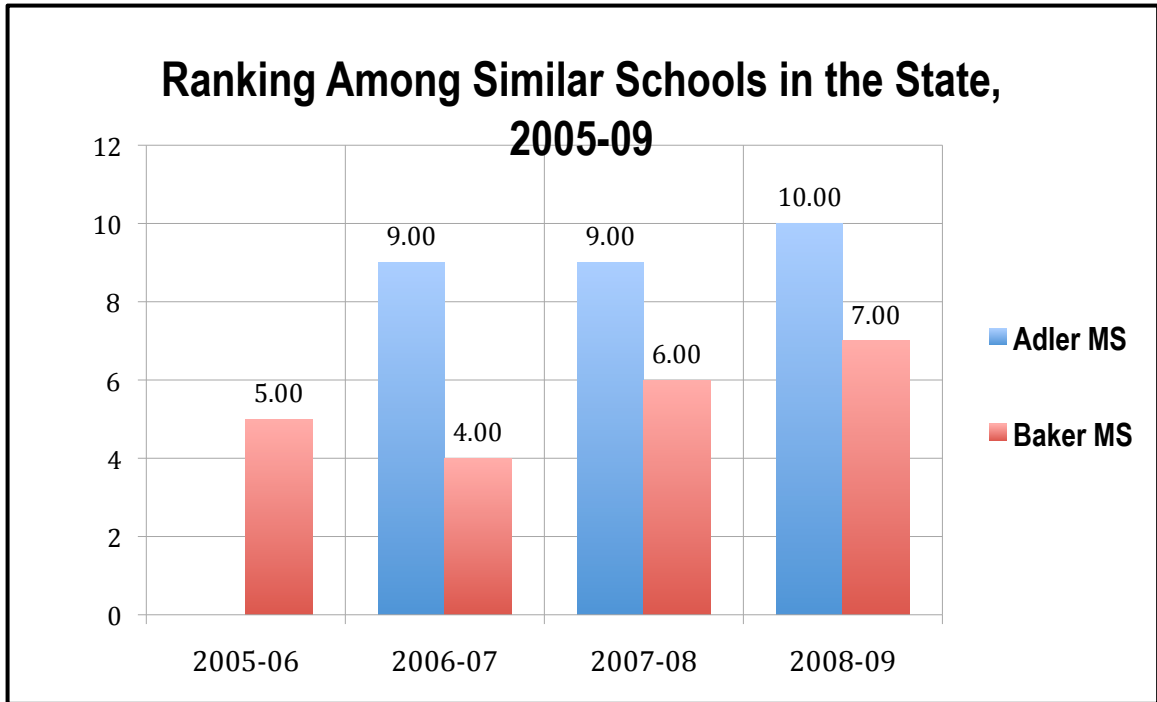


Figure 6. Ranking of Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2009 when compared with schools of similar characteristics that includes socioeconomic status and ethnicity

With demographics that are very similar, Adler and Baker schools fall into the same category when being compared with other schools. Adler has received a score of being in the top decile, while Baker has received a score of fourth decile and continues to grow with a score of sixth decile during the last 2 years.

Gender. The gender distribution of students at the two middle schools is also very similar. In 2009-2010, Adler was a school with 53% boys and 47% girls while Baker was comprised of 48% boys and 52% girls. These percentages have been very similar from 2005-2006 to the present time. Figure 7 shows the similarities in gender of students for these two schools.

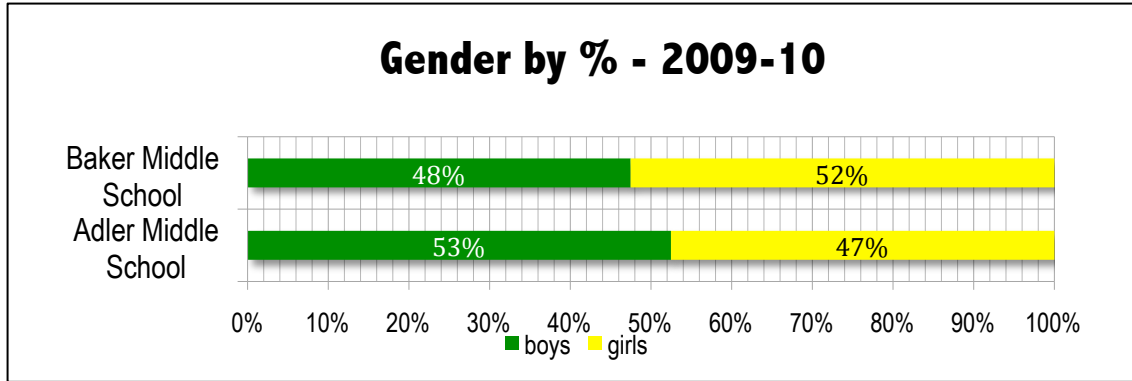


Figure 7. Distribution of gender at Adler and Baker middle schools in the 2009-2010 school year

Ethnicity. The ethnicity of Adler and Baker is also very similar. Figure 8 presents the statistics for the 2009-2010 school year regarding ethnicity for both Adler and Baker schools. This data for 2009-2010 has been very similar over the past 3 years. Since 2006, there has been a very small change in ethnic make-up at both schools. Over the last 5 years at Adler, ethnicity was distributed as follows: Hispanic: 75% - 79%; African American: 10%; White: 5% to 7%; Asian: 4%. Over the last 5 years at Baker, ethnicity was distributed as follows: Hispanic: 66% to 70%; African American: 14% to 17%; White: 3% to 5%; Asian: 7% to 9%.

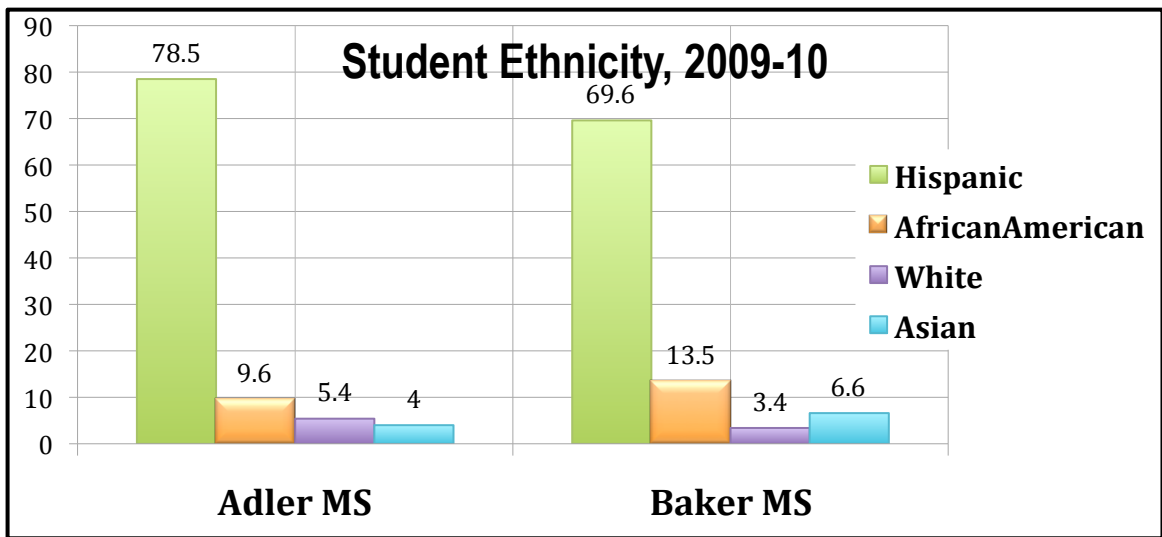


Figure 8. Distribution of ethnicity of students at Adler and Baker middle schools during the 2009-2010 school year

The difference in ethnicity of the two schools is not dramatic. In 2008-2009, the ethnicity of the students was as follows: Adler had 77% Hispanic students, while Baker had 66%; Adler had 10% African American students, while Baker had 16%; Adler had 7% White students, while Baker had 5%; Adler had 4% Asian students, while Baker had 9%. Although small, this difference in student population may contribute to the difference in test scores. Asians and Whites tend to score higher than Hispanic and Black students.

Teacher ethnicity is also a statistic that the state monitors. In the 2008-2009 school year, the ethnicity of the staffs at the two schools was similar (see Figure 9). Those of Hispanic origin comprised 8% of the faculty at Adler, while Hispanics comprised 17% of the teachers at Baker. During the previous 2 years at Adler, the percentage ranged from 5% to 9% Hispanic faculty members, while at Baker, the percentage ranged from 14% to 16%. African Americans comprised 3% of the staff at Adler and 9% of the teachers at Baker. Whites comprised 73% of the credentialed staff at Adler, but only 63% of the teachers at Baker. Asian Americans comprised 14% of the teachers at Adler while representing 9% at Baker. Figure 9 illustrates that although the ethnic makeup of students and teachers are not similar at either school, there is a high percentage of similarity in the ethnic makeup of the faculty of these two middle schools, where the greatest difference in ethnicity of one group is 10%. Furthermore, the differences in teacher population are not large especially when considering that in 2008-2009 Adler had 40 instructors while Baker had 55 teachers during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years.

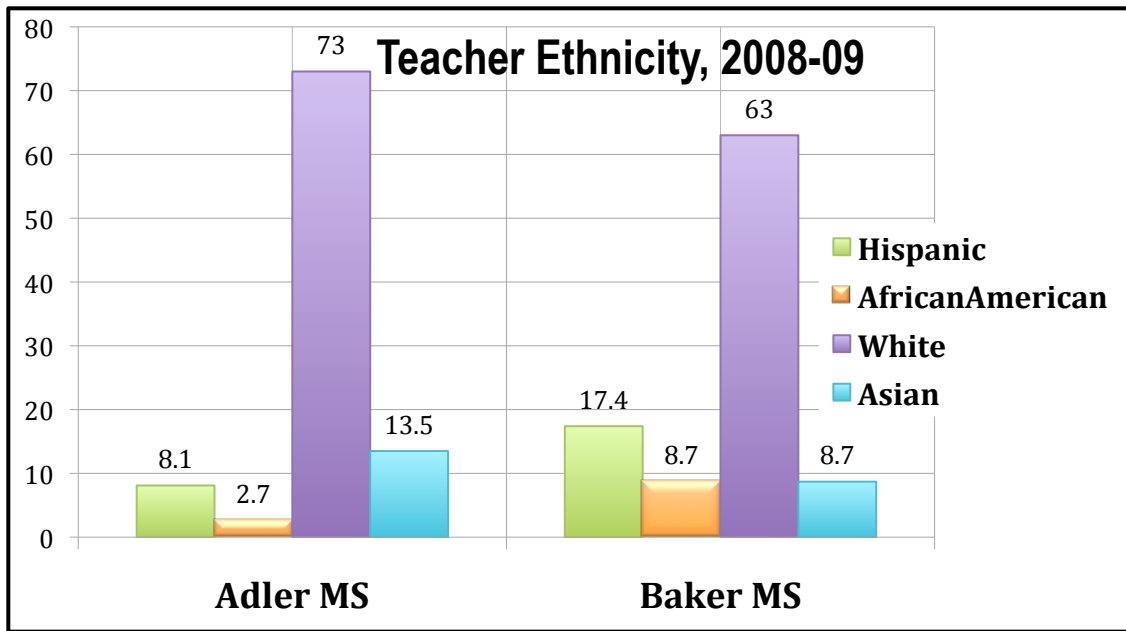


Figure 9. Distribution of ethnicity of teachers at Adler and Baker schools during the 2008-2009 school year

In 2008-2009, the ethnicity of the teachers was as follows: Adler had 8% Hispanic teachers, while Baker had 17%; Adler had 3% African American teachers, while Baker had 9%; Adler had 73% White teachers, while Baker had 63%; Adler had 14% Asian teachers, while Baker had 9%. However, this difference in teacher population is not large when considering that in 2008-2009 Adler had 40 instructors while Baker had 55 teachers during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. While the ethnicity between students and teachers at both school sites may be quite different, the similarities between student ethnicity when comparing the two sites is quite similar, as is the similarity among the teachers from both Adler and Baker middle schools.

ESL students. Adler and Baker middle schools also share commonalities in their statistics regarding students who are learning English as a Second Language (ESL). This learning status is represented by other phrases and acronyms in the education field. Other common phrases include: English Language Learners (ELL), English Language

Development (ELD), and Second Language Learners (SLL). All of these acronyms refer to students for whom English is not their native language. These students are learning English in school while also learning the core subjects. Figure 10 shows the percentage of ESL students at both schools and how this percentage has changed since Baker was the only middle school in 2005 to the present time. From 2006 to the present, this percentage has ranged from 25% to 30% at Adler and from 18% to 29% at Baker. Last year, the difference in percentage of ESL students at the two schools was only 1%.

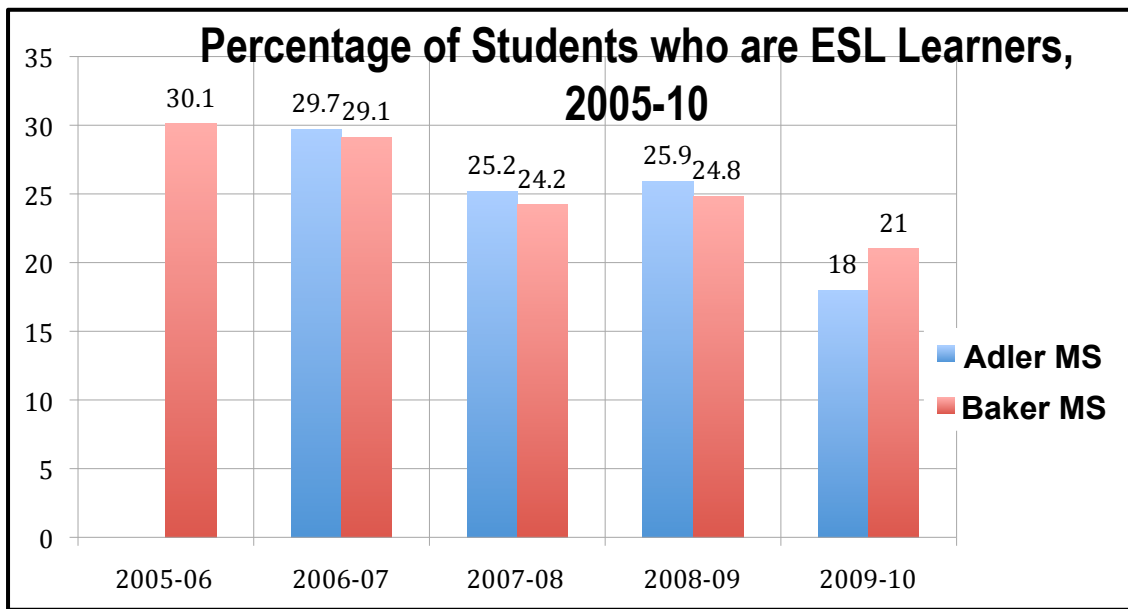


Figure 10. Percentage of ESL students at Adler and Baker schools from 2005-2010

Free/reduced lunch. Another similarity in demographics between these two schools is the percentage of students whose family qualifies for a free or reduced lunch through a program also known as the National School Lunch Program. These data were taken from the 2009 STAR Program student answer document. Parent education level and free or reduced-price lunch are used to represent student socioeconomic status in determining subgroups and similar schools ranks. Figure 11 shows how the percentage

of those who have qualified for free/reduced lunch has risen over the years. At Adler since 2005, between 76% and 80% of the student body has qualified for free/reduced lunch. The current percentage is 81%. At Baker, between 74% and 82% of the student body has qualified for free/reduced lunch with the current percentage at 82%. While the percentages of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch are similar at these two schools, the 2009-2010 year has seen the closest gap at 1% between these campuses.

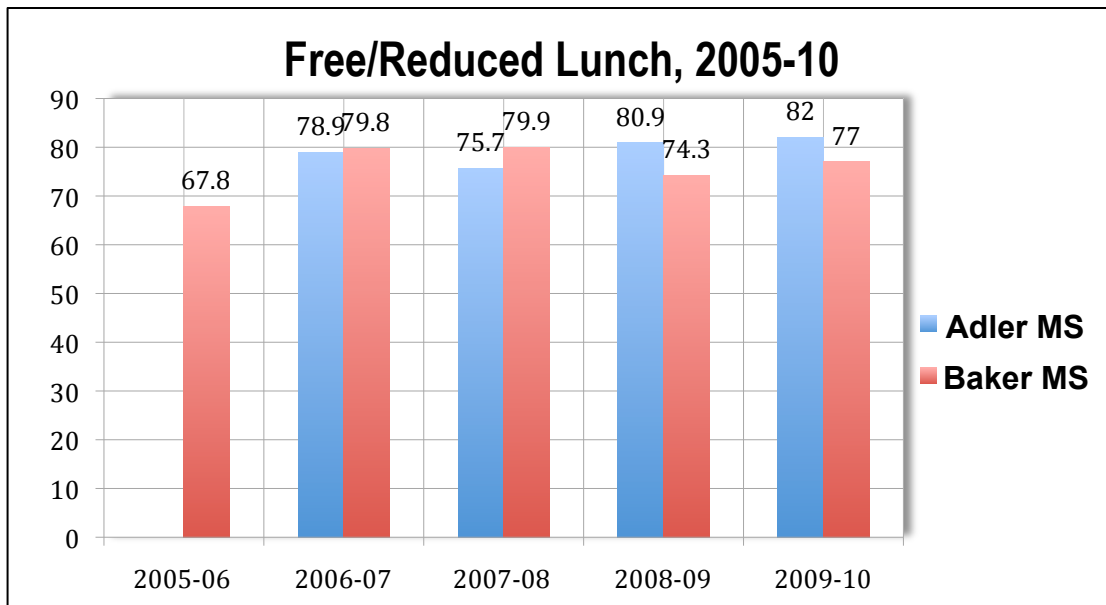


Figure 11. Percentage of students at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005-2010 who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

Credentialed teacher. It is also important to compare the demographics of the certificated staff at these two middle schools. The majority of the teachers at both schools are fully credentialed. In 2005-2006 during its last year as grade 7-8 school, Baker had 60 credentialed teachers on its staff. In 2006-2007, there were 50 credentialed staff members at this grade 6-8 middle school. From 2007 to 2009, the staff decreased from 50 to 40. Adler Middle School had 32 credentialed teachers during this time period. In the next 2 years, Adler's staff of teachers will increase to 37. These statistics align

with the statistics of enrollment at these two schools. The percentage of teachers who are fully credentialed at these two schools ranges from 90% to 98%. As Figure 12 shows, in the 2008-2009 school year, 92% of the staff members at Adler were fully credentialed, while 94% of the staff members at Baker were fully credentialed.

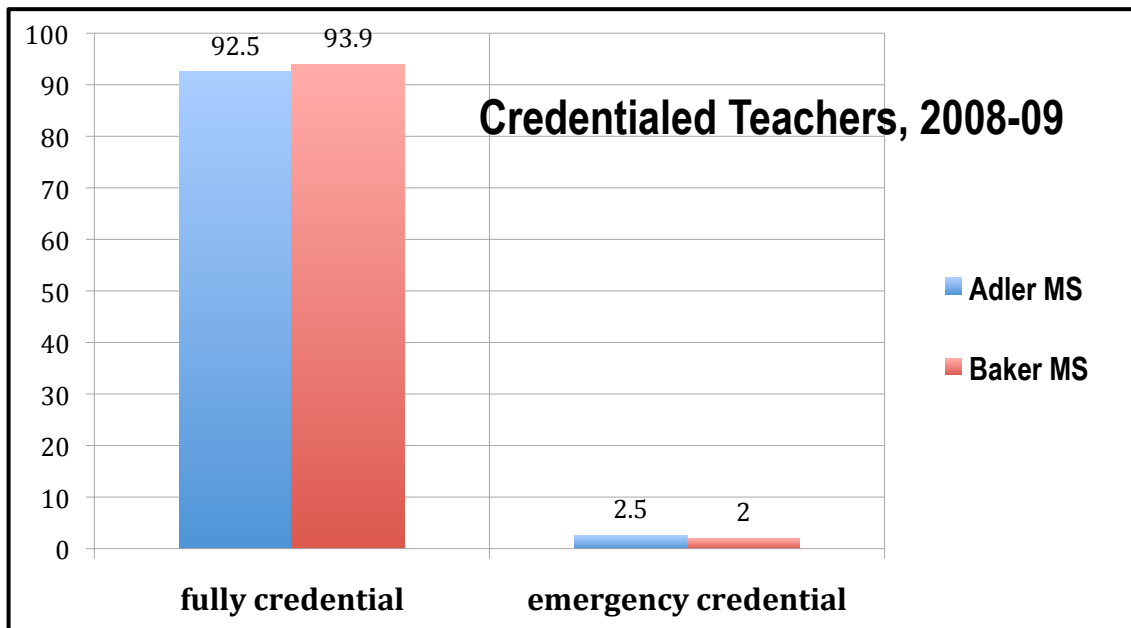


Figure 12. Percentage of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools that are fully credentialed or on an emergency credential for the 2008-2009 school year

Another statistic monitored by the state is the ratio of students to credentialed teachers. Figure 13 shows that Adler and Baker had close ratios in 2008-2009, ranging from 23% at Baker to 24% at Adler. While there was close to a 6% difference in this ratio in these middle schools' first year of existence in their current incarnation, this percentage has drawn closer since Adler middle school opened.

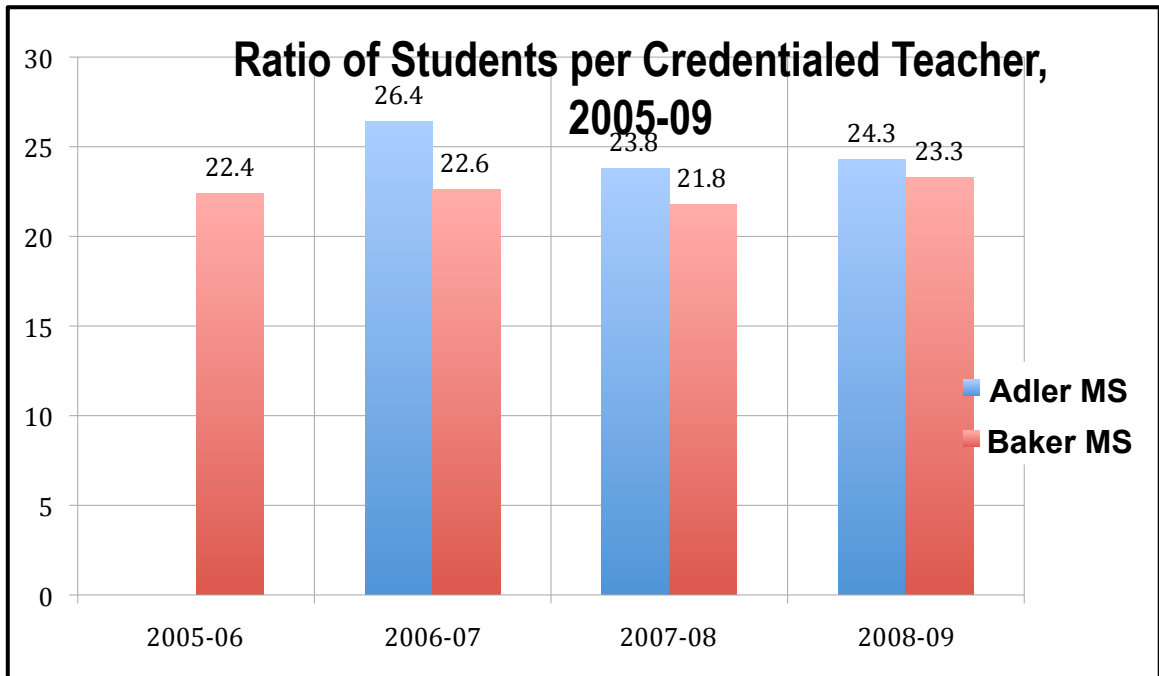


Figure 13. The ratio of students per credentialed teacher at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009

Pupil personnel services. Another part of school culture that the state monitors is pupil personnel services, more commonly called counseling. The duties of these individuals can vary widely from school to school. Duties that may be part of their job description can include creating student schedules, discipline, and assisting students with personal needs.

For the 2009-2010 school year, both Adler and Baker had three counselors. From 2007-2008 to 2008-2009, both schools had four certified pupil personnel staff members. For the 2006-07 school year, Adler had three counselors while Baker had five. At Baker, the number of counselors in 2005-2006 was six before declining to five the next year when the school was split to open Adler.

Figure 14 presents the ratio of students to counselors at these two middle schools. The ratio of students to counselor has changed over the 3 years. In 2005-2006, Adler had

more students per counselor (339.2) than Baker (288.7), but the ratio would change over the next 2 years. While Baker had more students per counselor (276.1) than Adler (263.8) in 2008-2009, the numbers are very close. These data do not reflect the presence of volunteer counselors, who are often university students in a student counseling position.

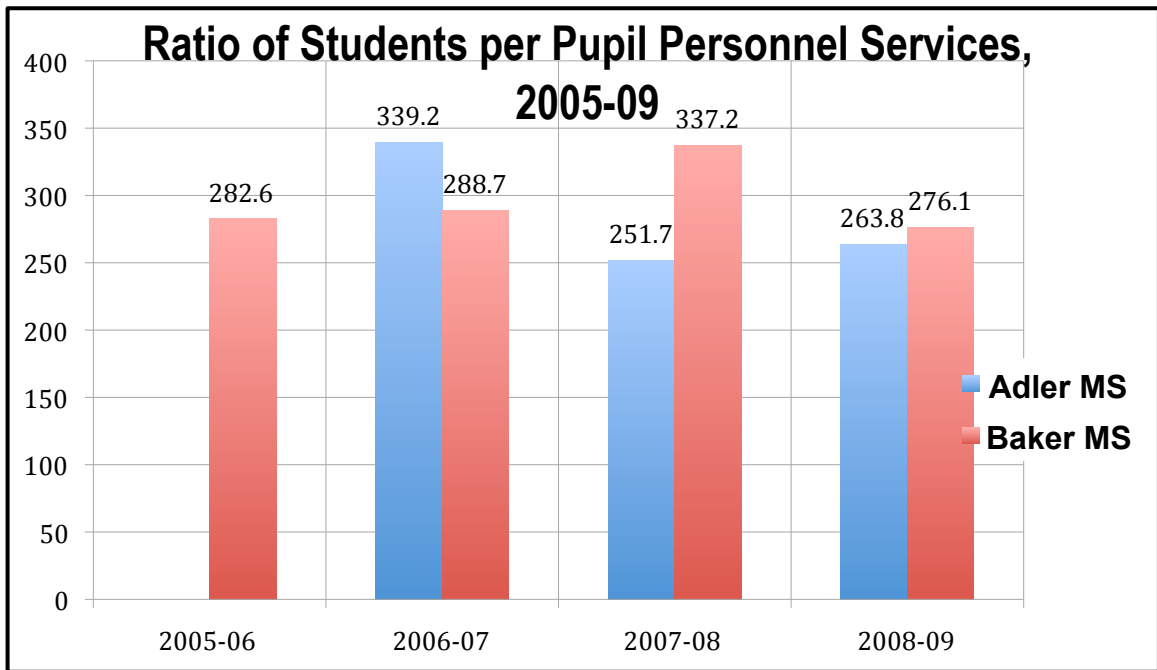


Figure 14. The ratio of students per counselor at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009

Administrators. The ratio of students to administrators is difficult to change in schools today. In order to be a principal, assistant/vice principal or dean, one must have an administrative credential. Additional administrators are usually added when a school has an additional 400 to 500 students. In 2005-2006 when Baker had 1,200 students, there were three administrators: principal, vice principal, and dean. When enrollment went down at Baker due to the opening of Adler, the position of dean was eliminated at Baker. For the last 3 years, both Adler and Baker middle schools have had two full-time

administrators. This does not reflect the possible number of Teachers on Special Assignment (TSA), either part time or full time, which may have been created at either school. A TSA is a credentialed teacher given assignments other than teaching in the classroom. With the position of TSAs, the job descriptions of other individuals at a school site may vary depending on the jobs that need to be completed and the number of staff members at a site who can complete tasks assigned by the principal.

As Figure 15 shows, the ratio of students per administrators is close between these two middle schools. In 2008-2009, the ratio of students to administrators at Adler was 448.5 to 1 while it was 524.5 to 1 at Baker. During that same year, enrollment at Adler hit 897 students. At Baker, enrollment hit 1,049. The difference in ratio was greatest in 2006-2007 when there was a difference of 139 students in the ratio, but the difference has steadily declined since that year.

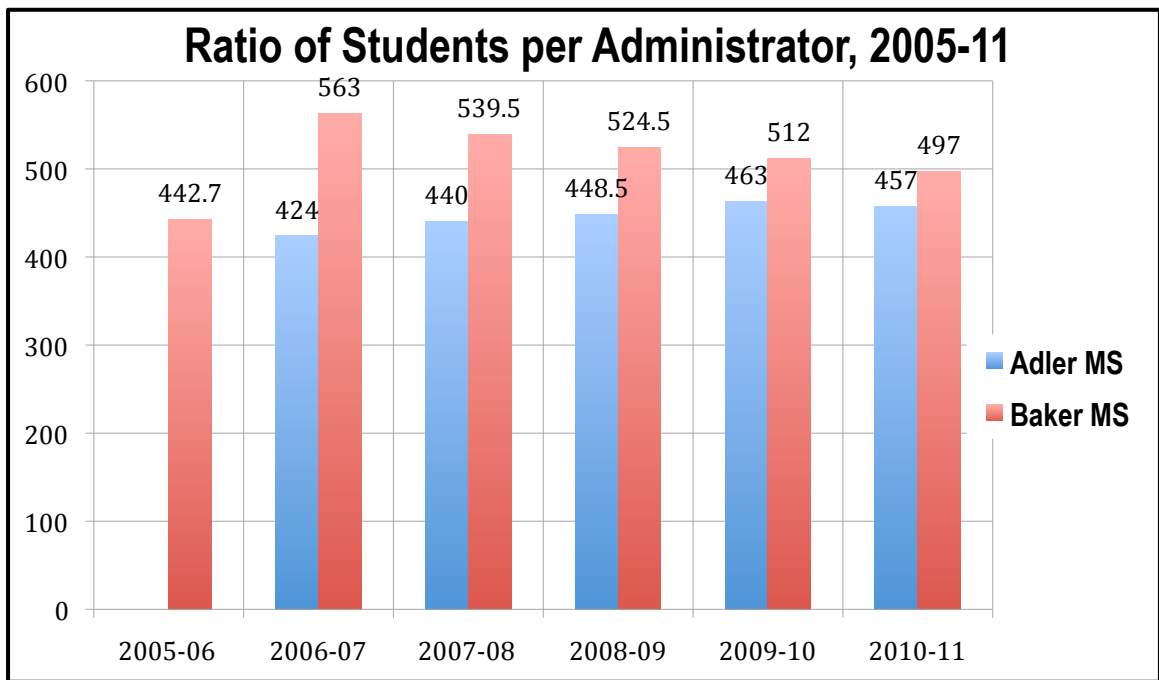


Figure 15. The ratio of students per administrator at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2011

Technology. One final area in which the state compiles yearly data concerns technology and computers. The computer count includes those used by staff for instructional activities in addition to computers available to students. Figure 16 shows the ratio of students to computers at the two middle schools between 2005 and 2009. Adler and Baker have had similar ratios in this field. In 2008-2009, the ratio of students and computers at Adler was 4.8 to 1 while the ratio at Baker was 4.7. These ratios ranged from 4.1 to 5.5 at these two schools from 2005 to the present.

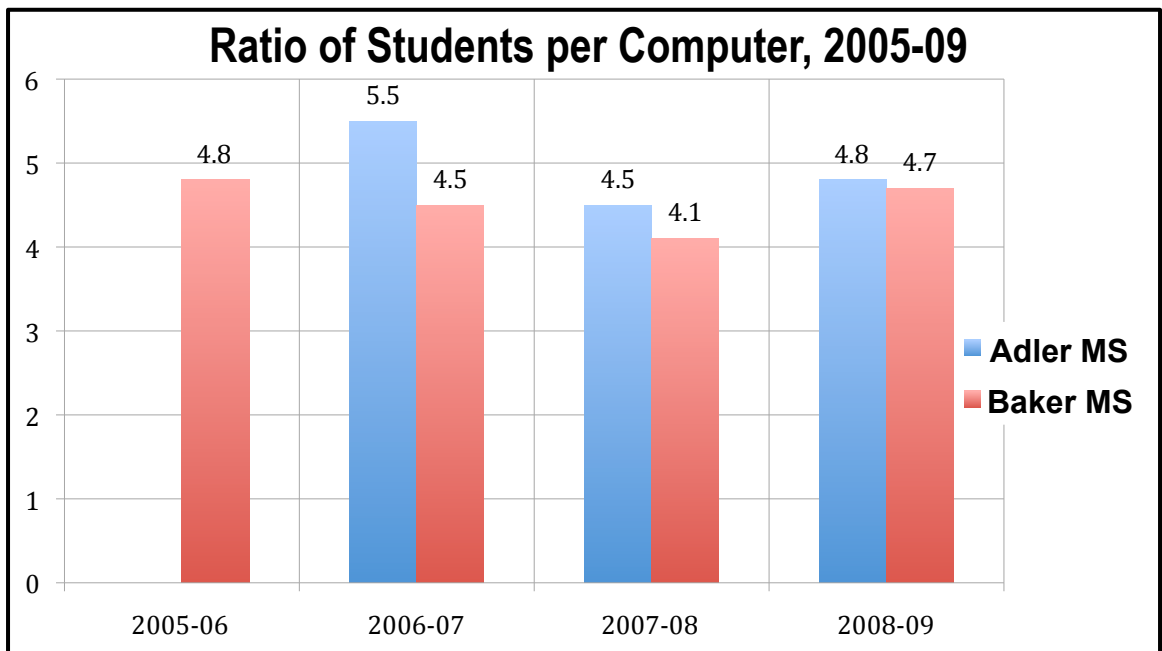


Figure 16. The ratio of students per computer at Adler and Baker middle schools from 2005 to 2009

Parent education level. Often times the level of parent education is a factor of student achievement on the state exam and general student achievement in K-12 education. The state analyzes parent education using the following criteria: not a high school graduate, high school graduate, some college attendance, college graduation (Associate's or Bachelor's degree), and graduate school. Adler and Baker have similar

ratios in this field from 2010 data. As shown in Figure 17, in the last 5 years at both schools, the categories of “not high school graduate” and “high school graduate” have slowly decreased from the mid-30s percentage while the other three categories of “some college,” “college graduate,” and “grad school” areas have slowly increased. In this graph, all categories per school add up to 100%. However, it must be kept in mind that responses to questions regarding parents’ education level are based on responses that students make regarding their parents and education. Students in from ages 11-13 (the average age of grade 6-8 students taking the state exam) may not know their parents’ the exact education level.

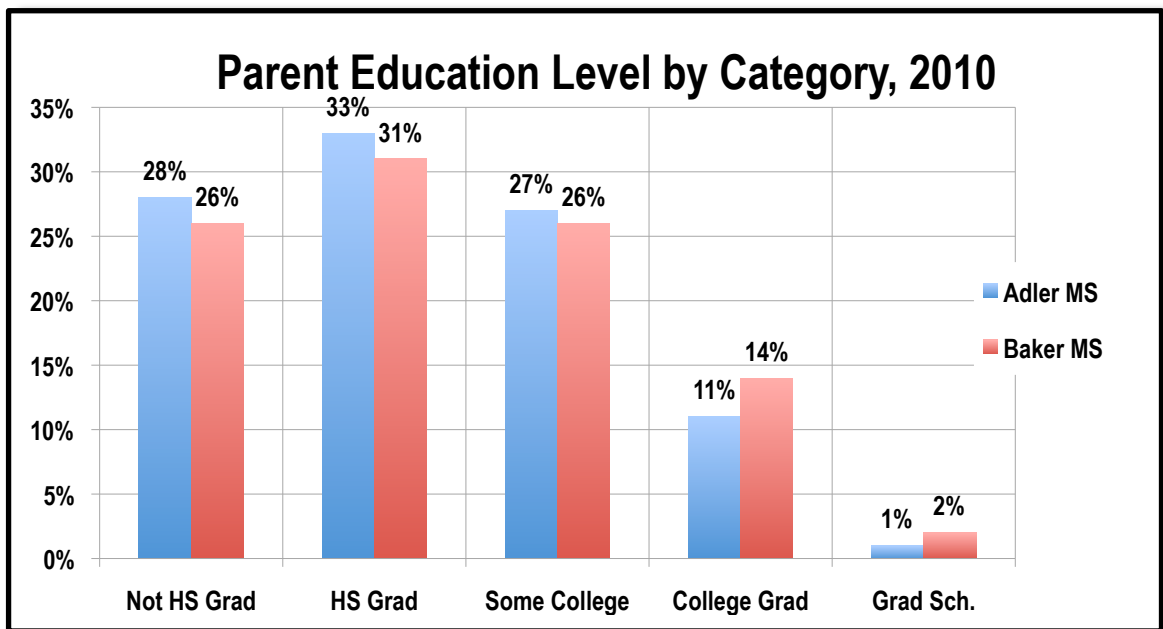


Figure 17. The five different layers of education of parents at Adler and Baker middle schools as marked on the 2010 state exam information sheet by the student

The state also records statistics regarding the average education level of the parents at a school over time. Figure 18 presents parent education level over the last 6 years in the City of Ingle Beach as presented in the 2000 census. Since Adler is a new

middle school, data for this school are not available for the first 2 years. Once again, parents' level education at these two schools is extremely close.

For Figure 18, 1 means *not high school graduate*, 2 indicates *high school graduate*, 3 indicates *some college*, 4 indicates *college graduate*, and 5 indicates *grad school*. In other words, the number range between 2 and 3 indicates high school graduation, while the range between 3 and 4 indicates college attendance. Numbers such as 2.24 signify the average education level being 2 plus 24/100, or approximately one-fourth of the distance after graduating from high school and taking some college classes.

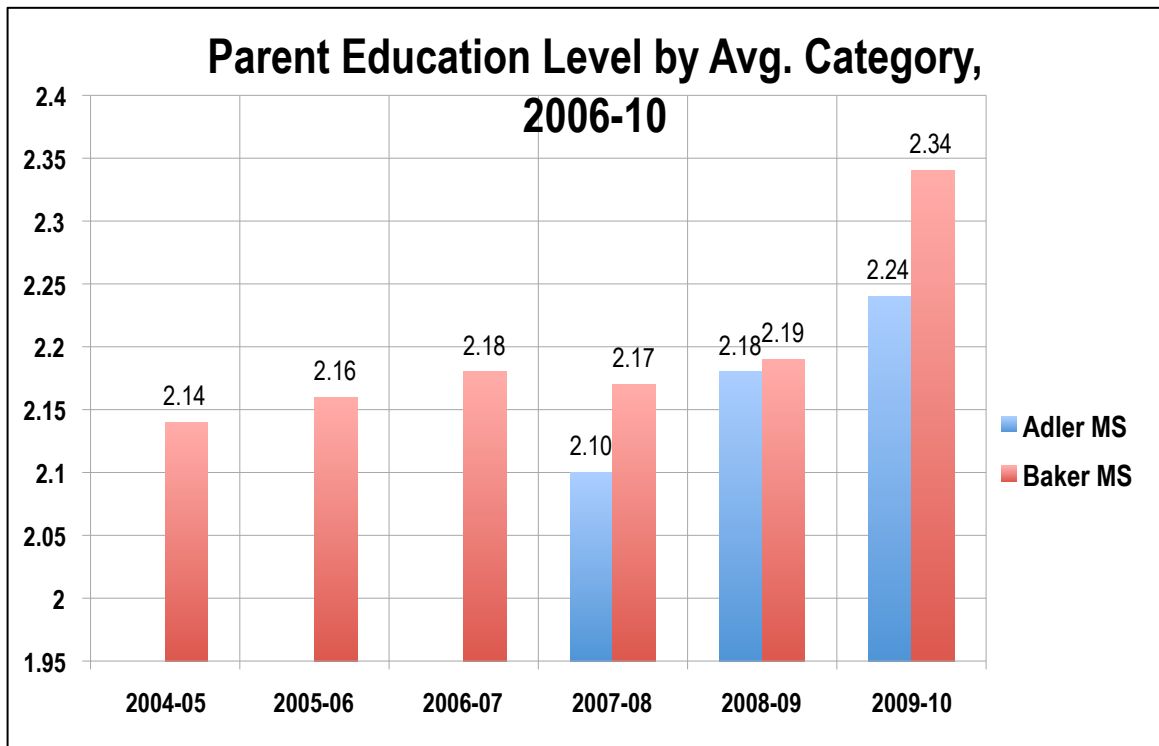


Figure 18. The education level of the parents at Adler and Baker Middle Schools as marked by the student on state exam information sheets from 2004-2010. On the y axis, 1 means *not high school graduate*, 2 indicates *high school graduate*, 3 indicates *some college*, 4 indicates *college graduate*, and 5 indicates *grad school*.

Teachers with years and levels in education. The number of years of education that teachers have can exert a significant influence on student outcome on the STAR

exam. Figure 19 shows the number of years of teachers at Adler and Baker middle school had been teaching when they participated in the interview session. The red and blue columns mark the average number of years in education of those who participated in the session and submitted the Preliminary Question Form.

Also note that when looking at years of service, Adler Middle School has a much higher percentage of teachers who are beginners or who are in their first year of teaching. At Adler, 59% of the teachers are in their first 10 years of teaching, while at Baker Middle School this percentage is 46%. The statistics regarding teachers with over 16 years of experience is different at these two schools. At Baker, close to half of the faculty or 45% of the teachers have 16 or more years of teaching experience, while at Adler Middle School the percentage is 30%.

Figure 19 contains data for the year 2010. The percentage of teachers with over 16 years of teaching experience was higher 6 years ago when the teachers at Baker Middle School were split into two teams. Since 2005, nine teachers have left Baker Middle School, either due to retirement or moving to other teaching positions. At Adler, only two individuals have left since the school opened. A school faculty with a high average of years of teaching experience can be a predictor of either student academic achievement or resistance to change.

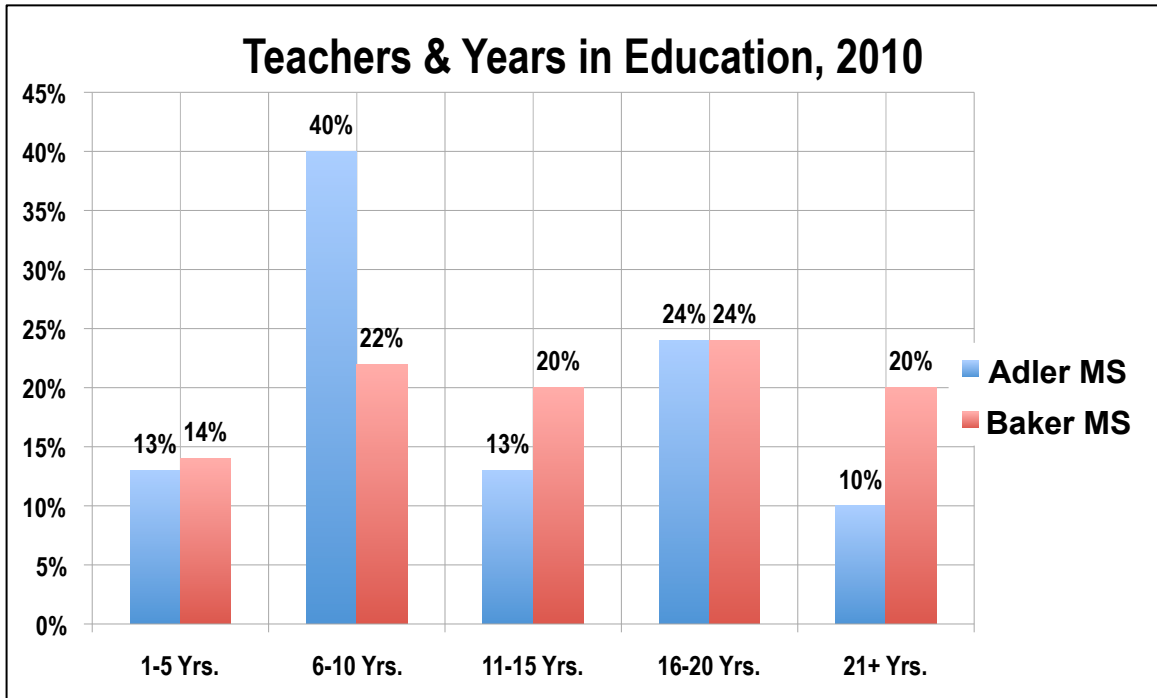


Figure 19. The number of years in education that the teachers of Adler and Baker middle schools have worked as of 2010

Figure 20 shows levels of education for teachers at Adler and Baker schools. The statistics are based on the data gathered in the survey administered as part of the present study. Adler Middle School, over half of whose faculty members are in their first 10 years of teaching experience, also has fewer teachers with a master's degree and more teachers with only a bachelor's degree. Baker Middle School, on the other hand, has more teachers with over 16 years of teaching experience and a higher percentage of teachers with a master's degree.

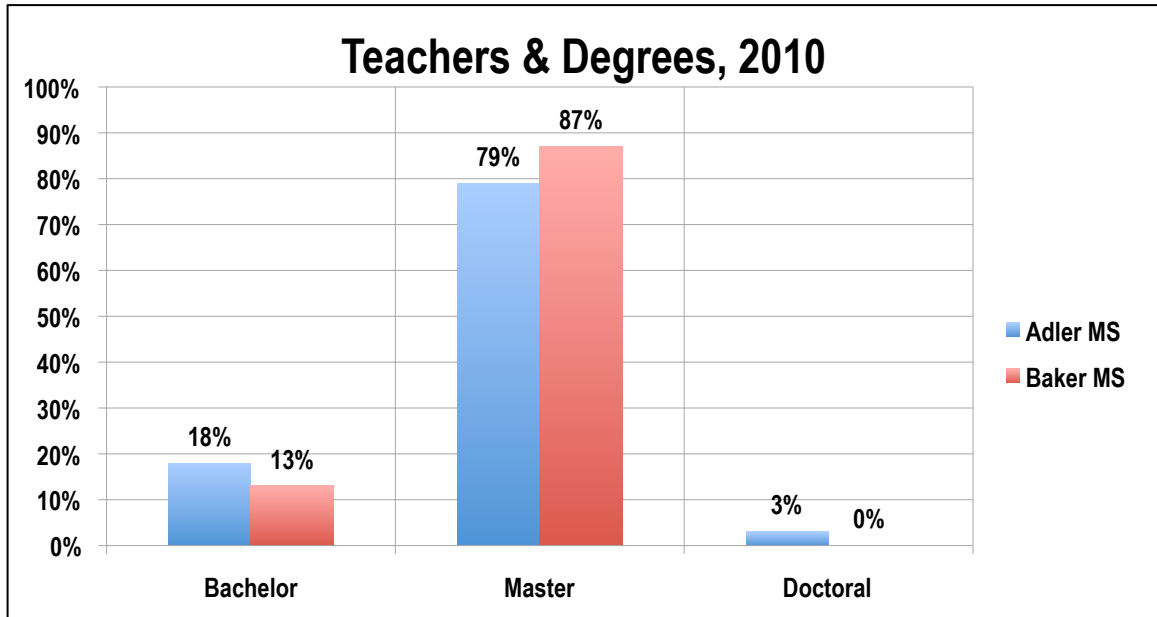


Figure 20. The percentage of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools and different levels of education in 2010

Summary of Demographic Data

Adler and Baker Middle Schools report many similarities and share similar demographics. Given the latest figures, the number of students enrolled at these schools differs by fewer than 100 students. Although the API scores continue to increase at both schools, the API achievement gap between these two schools is decreasing. The same applies to these schools' state rankings among all schools statewide and among similar schools.

The gender ratio between the students at these two schools is separated by only 5%. The ethnicity profile at both schools is also similar, with the biggest different being between African American and Asian American students; Baker has a higher percentage of each. The difference between the schools in percentage of ESL students differs by approximately 3%, with Baker having the higher percentage.

There are also similarities among teachers' gender composition at the two schools. The teachers' ethnicity profile at both schools is also similar, with the biggest difference being between African American and Hispanic teachers. The difference between White teachers at the two schools is 10%; for a school of 40 teachers, this indicates only four individuals. Both schools have similar percentages of fully credentialed teachers: around 92% to 93%. Other similarities between the two schools are the teacher-student ratio, the student-counselor ratio, and computer-student ratio. The gap between the two schools' administrator-student ratios continues to decline as enrollment approaches similar figures.

The most noticeable gap between these two schools occurred in 2008-2009 when the percentage of students at Adler Middle School who qualified for free/reduced lunch was just over 80%. The percentage of such families at Baker Middle School has declined to 74% while the percentage of families who qualify at Adler Middle School has grown to 81%. Given the economic decline in the United States between 2008 and the present day, qualification for free/reduced lunch has grown. At Adler Middle School, this percentage increased 2%, while at Baker Middle School, it has grown from 74% to 77%. However, these small differences in demographic factors do not seem sufficient to explain the difference in student test scores.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The qualitative aspect of this study involved application of the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life. These seven components were derived from literature review and were used to organize the data collection in the survey. Teachers responded in diverse ways to each component. Some individuals wrote their responses on paper,

while others only expressed their thoughts verbally, and some professionals did both. Because of limited time, some respondents asked if they could respond via the Internet, so an Internet site was created to collect additional responses. The data set included all responses, both written and verbal, to the prompts used in the interview process. Results of the interviews were coded to identify themes and similarities among teams, grade levels, and schools.

Interview organization and process. The interview process was organized to obtain information from the teachers and site administrators at both schools in a process that was as unobtrusive as possible. This involved giving packets of prompt questions to the teachers and administrators in advance. Educators could address these and any other questions they so desired during the actual interviews. Teachers were interviewed by groups; administrators were interviewed individually.

This small, urban district that now has two middle schools has set schedules that are mandated for both middle schools. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday schools observe a full day schedule. On Thursday, schools have a shortened-day schedule; classes are dismissed before 1 p.m. so that teachers can gather for professional development. However, each school is allowed to set its own schedule for the school day and determine its own organizational structure. As a result, each of the two middle schools under investigation has established different schedules.

Adler Middle School. For the 2010-2011 school year, Adler Middle School's schedule for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday includes a school day that runs from 8:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. On Thursday, student hours run from 8:15 a.m. to 12:50 p.m. Block schedule days take place on Wednesday and Thursday, with periods 2, 4, 5/6, and

7 meeting on Wednesday, and periods 1, 3, and 8 meeting on Thursday. Period 3 is the school homeroom time.

The school is organized on a team platform with three teams for grade 6 and two teams each for grade 7 and 8 students. Each of the grade 6 teams is comprised of three teachers. Each teacher keeps his or her own group of students for four periods of the day. Language arts is the only subject that all team teachers teach for three periods each day. In the afternoon, each teacher teaches three periods of math, science, or history. This is the time when the students change teachers. Students rotate through the each of the three team teachers to learn these subjects, ending the day with their morning teacher. Physical education and the elective class take place during the same period each day, so students take their physical education class for one week, and then switch to the elective class for the next. Students rotate between physical education and the elective class every other week.

The grade 7 and 8 teams are based on four teachers per team with one teacher for each of the core subjects: language arts, math, science, and social studies. These grade level teams each have the same preparation period. A physical education teacher, elective/arts teacher, and a resource teacher are assigned to each team, but these instructors have different preparation periods (see Table 5).

Given Adler's organizational structure, interviews were scheduled for each team with separate interviews scheduled for the physical education teachers as a group and the resource teachers as a group. Elective/arts teachers and counselors were asked to sit in on any interview time that was most accommodating for them. For this school, 37 of the 40 credentialed staff members (which includes site administrators) participated in the study.

The site administrators' schedules required separate interview times for the principal and assistant principal.

Table 5

Adler Middle School Organizational Structure

| Grade Level | Organized by Preparation Period | Number of Certificated Staff |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Grade 6 | 3 teams | 3 teams x 3 teachers per team: language arts, math, science/social studies = 9 teachers |
| Grade 7 | 2 teams | 2 teams x 4 teachers per team: language arts, math, science, social studies = 8 teachers |
| Grade 8 | 2 teams | 2 teams x 4 teachers per team: language arts, math, science, social studies = 8 teachers |
| All grades | 1 dept. (physical education) | 4 teachers |
| All grades | 1 dept. (elective/arts) | 3 teachers |
| All grades | 1 dept. (ELD) | 1 teacher |
| All grades | 1 dept. (learning center) | 4 teachers |
| All grades | 1 dept. (counseling) | 2 counselors |

Note. P.E. teachers interviewed together. Learning Center teachers interviewed together. Elective/arts teachers and counselors joined the team interview of their choice. The classes of math teachers could be cross-teamed and cross-grade-levels. The classes of elective/arts teachers could also be cross-teamed and cross-grade-levels.

Baker Middle School. The schedule at Baker Middle School is slightly different from Adler Middle School's. For the 2010-2011 school year, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, classes are in session from 8:20 a.m. to 3:04 p.m. On Thursday, student hours run from 8:20 a.m. to 12:55 a.m. Block schedule days occur on Wednesday and Thursday; periods 2, 4, 5/6, and 7 meet on Wednesday, and periods 1, 3, and 8 meet on Thursday. Period 8 is the time established for the intervention class. Because it did not reach the goals set by the state regarding API points for two or more years, Baker has been labeled a Program Improvement (PI) school. An intervention class

is a set period of time that PI schools must provide for their students to provide extra instruction in the areas where API scores are most behind.

The formation of teams at Baker is also different than that of Adler. At Adler, the team system was based on the four core subjects: English, math, science and history. At Baker, teams are formed with the four core subjects along with physical education and resource center teachers. As such, teams can range in size from four to seven teachers. Teams that are comprised of seven members can have a physical education teacher, a resource teacher, and an elective/art teacher on their team. For the 2010-2011 year, there are three teams each for grades 6 and 7 and two teams for grade 8. Most teams include four or more teachers, with one teacher for each of the core subjects: language arts, math, science, and social studies. Some teams also have a physical education, elective, and/or resource teacher assigned them, so the number of instructors on each team in actuality ranges from three to seven. As a result, though the core teachers on a team have the same preparation period, the other teachers (physical education, elective/arts, and resource teachers) assigned to a team can have different preparation periods. Also, since grade 6 teachers possess a primary credential, they are not organized by department. Since grade 7 and 8 teachers possess a secondary credential, they are organized by team and by department (see Table 6).

The inclusion of departments other than the four core subjects created a challenge for scheduling team interviews. Initially, it appeared that all team members had the same preparation period. When initial interviews were scheduled, however, three to four members of a team were not present. Also, special planning for a grade level field trip and for the state exam were taking place, so some team members chose not to attend the

interview session, even after a second interview session was scheduled. To increase feedback from the educators, teachers who had not participated in the first two interview sessions were told that they could also participate by submitting written responses to the same prompts or by replying via an Internet survey (see Appendix H) that contained the same prompts. For this research, 42 of the 47 adults, or 90% of the credentialed staff members (which includes site administrators), participated in the survey. The site administrators' schedules required separate interviews for the principal and assistant principal.

Table 6

Baker Middle School Organizational Structure

| Grade Level | Organized by Preparation Period | Number of Certificated Staff |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Grade 6 | 3 teams | 2 teams with 4 teachers; 1 team with 3 teachers; teams with 3 members have only 3 of the following core teachers: language arts, math, science, social studies = 11 teachers |
| Grade 7 | 3 teams | 1 team of 3 members; 1 team of 4 members, 1 team of 7 members; teams with 3 members have only 3 of the following core teachers: language arts, math, science, social studies = 14 teachers |
| Grade 8 | 2 teams | 1 team with 5 members; 1 team with 7 members; teams with only 3 members have 3 of the following core teachers: language arts, math, science, social studies = 12 teachers |
| All grades | 1 dept. (physical education) | 4 teachers (3 teachers not listed on a team) |
| All grades | 1 dept. (elective/arts) | 2 teachers (1 teacher not listed on a team) |
| All grades | 1 dept. (tech coordinator) | 1 teacher (1 teacher not listed on a team) |
| All grades | 1 dept. (learning center) | 6 teachers (2 teachers not listed on a team) |
| All grades | 1 dept. (counseling) | 2 counselors |

Note. All teachers not assigned to a team were asked to join the team of their choice. These teachers included physical education, elective/arts, technical coordinators, learning center teachers, and counselors not on a team. With such different schedules, some participated by submitting responses on paper or on the Internet survey site. Many instructors such as math, physical education, or art teachers could be cross-teamed and cross-grade-level.

Data analysis and coding. The researcher reviewed the data provided by credentialed staff at Adler and Baker Middle Schools, which includes teachers, school administrators, and school counselors. At Adler Middle School, 35 of 38, or 92%, of the credentialed staff participated in this research. At Baker Middle School, 40 of the 45 credentialed staff, or 90%, participated in this research.

At Adler Middle School, all of the participants participated in the research by attending a team interview session. Due to time constraints, administrators were interviewed separately. Adler Middle School's organizational structure includes teams comprised of four teachers each. These four teachers cover the academic topics of language arts, science, math and history. Teachers on a team have the same preparation period. Other teachers not on a team—those who teach art, music, technology, and physical education—are organized by departments, not teams, as they teach all students from all grade levels and all teams.

At Baker Middle School, teachers are organized in a different fashion. Each team has three to seven credentialed staff members. For most teams, this includes the four core subject teachers and electives teachers (art, music, etc.), as well as special education and physical education teachers. As such, the only teachers on a team who have the same preparation period are the core teachers. Other teachers on a team (the physical education, art, and/or special education teachers) have different preparation periods. Interviews for this research were initially organized by instructional teams. After learning that not all teachers on a team have the same period for preparation and hence would not be able to attend the interview time with their team, separate meeting times were organized. However, some teachers who could not participate in the interview still

wanted to share their thoughts on the academic growth of their school. Such participants were encouraged to give feedback to the survey questions and the prompts on paper or via the survey website.

All of the data from the interviews were compiled into sets describing the team, grade level, and school. The data set included the notes written on the packets left by the teachers and notes about the verbal discussion that were taken during each interview. These notes were grouped by the timed discussion sessions that were based on the seven components of academic success along with the final discussion topic: what the professionals thought should be the next three steps their school should take to continue academic growth. All of the information collected had been grouped by team and was divided by component.

Eight Pepperdine University doctoral candidates assisted in analyzing and coding the data from the interviews, looking for common themes within the compilation of written responses and typed notes of the verbal discussions. Interview data from the two or three teams that comprised one grade level were grouped into one set of data that was submitted to the coders. Other coders were given responses sorted by department. Still others were given responses given by school administrators. Two individuals was assigned to each team and asked independently to code each set of data.

Coders were first briefed on the purpose of the data analysis (see Appendix I).

The objective of this qualitative study is to answer the main research questions:

1. What are the demographic similarities and differences of these two middle schools as provided by data from the state Department of Education?

2. What are the perceptions of the teachers who work at each middle school regarding the following: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, as well as leadership and the decision-making process?
3. What do the teachers at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?
4. What are the perceptions of the site administrators who work at each middle school regarding the following at their school: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, as well as leadership and the decision-making process?
5. What do the site administrators at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?

Next, the coders were given step-by-step directions. (Please refer to Appendix I).

These directions included the following:

1. Get a sense of the whole.
2. Read through the interview notes in the margin.
3. Make a list of topics or themes formed through the readings.
4. Review list and again review the data set.
5. Find the most descriptive wording of the terms ascertained from the readings.
6. By combining like terms and eliminating overlapping terms.
7. If necessary, recode to ensure that themes use consistent terms.

All of the coders are certificated teachers, so they were asked to review the teachers' response data. The two coders who are also school administrators were given the administrators' response data, were asked to review the data, and were asked to look for themes as administrators and identify how these could relate to themes shared by teachers. Coders returned their data with notes that they hand-wrote or typed to the right of the text they were given for a team, department, or school. All information regarding the names of the teachers, teams, departments, and schools was kept anonymous and was not known to any of the coders besides the primary researcher.

There are direct quotes from team members in the following report of team interviews. To maintain anonymity, quotes are referred to by the team with which the interview was conducted. The teams, grade level, and schools will be referred to as follows:

- Adler Middle School
 - 6th Grade: Teams A, B and C
 - 7th Grade: Teams D and E
 - 8th Grade: Teams F and G
- Baker Middle School
 - 6th Grade: Teams H and I
 - 7th Grade: Teams J and K
 - 8th Grade: Teams L, M and N

Component 1: School safety and management. Through the review of literature, the researcher identified the most common factors that comprise effective school safety and management; these factors served as the prompts for this component.

These factors include the following: concern at your site, teams and team discipline policy; school discipline policy; school safety features; and enforcement of policies. For this component, the time for group discussion was limited to three minutes; participants were given an extra minute for a quick-write at the end of discussion. Some Baker teachers submitted additional data on paper or on a website created for this research.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. The teachers at Adler Middle School discussed three factors. In general, team members asserted that Adler's campus is a very safe environment. However, it is possible that teams were not willing to bring up issues that constitute a safety concern. The positive comments about school safety came from teams at all three grade levels. One team shared their thoughts that everyone at the school, from teachers and administrators to secretaries and custodians, all work together towards a common goal of a safe environment. Several explanations for this step towards a safe environment started with the administrators. The principal and assistant principal "are present and visible throughout the day, inside and outside the classrooms at our school" (Team A). Two grade 6 teams and one grade 7 team also mentioned that the two campus security staff members have developed a great rapport with the students, noting, "The kids at this school don't consider them [campus security] to be narcs" (Team D). Teachers are also open and close to the students at Adler. Said a teacher from 7th grade Team E, "There is no concern about safety at our school...kids share important information with us, the teachers."

One respondent from Team B noted that the most important aspect of school safety is that "the kids at this school know that we all care about them." As one teacher from Team C said, "Even the bad kids complain, but they really do like it here!" Another

teacher from the team commented on how graduates of Adler miss the school, stating, “High school kids, even those who used to get into trouble, like to come back and visit!”

Other than one grade 8 team, all of the remaining teams at Adler felt that their team had a strong, shared discipline policy. In spite of this, however, all teams across all three grade levels still felt that there “needs to be more consistency with school discipline” (Team G). Every team deals with minor issues, but the administration deals with major issues. The way the school handles issues “between minor and major” that can lead to inconsistency. Schools have attempted to deal with these “middle level” topics, but have not reached a definitive conclusion about how to handle them. Such middle level issues include repeated absence at team detention, repeated gum chewing, and repeated failure to complete homework. Each team deals with these issues on its own level, but when the problem continues to go unresolved, it becomes a school issue, and consistency in addressing the problem is needed. More stringent and consistent policies are needed school-wide because “kids aren’t afraid to go to the office” (Team F). One grade 6 team referred to a discipline matrix that was established when the school started four years ago, but has not been in practice. Following this matrix would help assure that “punishment fits the crime” (Team C). Each team concluded the discussion of this component by restating their feelings of overall safety and support by administration.

The constant jovial mood made by team members used to share positive comments about their work infers good teamwork. This applies to the grade 6 and 7 teams, as well as one grade 8 team. Teams offered a variety of positive statements, particularly grade 6 and 7 teams, describing good communication among their team members, consistent discipline within their team, and their team’s creation of a safe

instructional learning environment for their students. One grade 7 team stated specifically, “We have a great team!” (Team D). However, one grade 8 team felt there were inconsistencies among team members regarding many elements of teamwork.

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. The results of the interview of the teachers at Baker Middle School were very similar to that of Adler. Teams at all three grade levels discussed the topics of school safety, discipline, and teamwork. Teams generally agreed that “there are no safety concerns at this school” (Team J). Teams attributed some of this sense of safety and good discipline to the two campus security staff members who “enforce policies.” Another team member noted that “Campus security staff members develop a great relationship with our kids” (Team L). Still another commented, “Our campus security staff is pro-active, not just reactive!” (Team H).

Like Adler, part of school safety is directly related to team discipline. The grade 6 and 7 teams expressed a need for improvement with school-wide discipline, but felt that their within-team disciplinary strategies worked well. Only one grade 8 team discussed discipline, discussing inconsistencies in their own team management of discipline. The other grade 8 team discussed their team’s discipline contract that all children and parents must sign. One grade 7 team discussed how their team’s discipline policy worked. One stated, “We even have our own team lunch detention” (Team K).

One respondent summed up Baker’s school-wide discipline thusly: “I’m not sure who deals with school discipline...is it the role of administration, or campus security?” (Team H). Indeed, team members were generally concerned about the operation of school-wide discipline, stating, “Our school discipline is inconsistent” (Team J). Another

stated, “Each team handles minor discipline issues, and administration handles the major concerns, but there is not discipline at the middle level” (Team H).

Another important facet of school discipline involves communication. “Teachers need to be informed of consequences” (Team M) when issues have been settled with administrators, students, and their parents. Even though the area of school discipline is a concern of all teams, all teams reported that they feel the administration strongly supports them. One respondent noted, “Our school policy of Thursday School, Saturday School, and the I.C.E. House [detention room with a supervisor] really works! This is the support from our administration” (Team N).

Despite the discussion of school discipline needing improvement, all grade levels emphasized that they felt a sense of safety at Baker. This was particularly true for teachers who have been at Baker Middle School for over 5 years. In the interview, all of these teachers referred to times in the past when the school was not considered a safe place. For example, one teacher from Team L stated, “I and the kids feel safe at this school. There is no one in the hallway during class time...kids are in class. This is quite different than 5 to 6 years ago!”

Teamwork was the third topic that drew discussion at Baker Middle School. All grade 6 and 7 team respondents offered positive comments about teamwork; however, the two grade 8 teams felt that there were inconsistencies in management. Grade 6 teams made statements about inferring their team strength such as “our team discipline is strict” (Team B), “we have a great team incentive chart” (Team A), and “our team gives students rewards at the end of each trimester” (Team C). Statements from grade 7 teams were more varied, such as “our team shares discipline, but not great...it could be better”

(Team E) along with the more clear and concise comment, “we even have our own team lunch detention” (Team D). Grade 8 teams’ perceptions of their teamwork also varied, including statements like “our team has contracts, but they’re not so good...need to be better” (Team F) and “our team is not strong...we have personalities and instructional techniques that are too different” (Team G). All teams tended to agree that “The grade 6 teams are much more positive than the other teams at our school” (Team D).

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. The responses from the principal and assistant principal at Adler middle school were similar to the teachers’ responses for all topics. The principal said the school is a safe environment. While the assistant principal feels that the school is safe, he keeps aware of other safety issues that are prevalent in the community. “I am concerned with the modern issues of drugs and sexting at middle schools.” Administrators generally agreed with teachers regarding team discipline policy. The assistant principal noted, “I think team policies are good at our school.” The principal also noted that the “school discipline policy is pretty clear.”

Site administrators also reflected on varying degrees of team organization at their school. One stated that team strength varies at the grade 7 and 8 levels, but is quite strong with the Grade 6 teams; however, “though the sixth grade teams are strong, we could always look for ways to continue to improve.”

Site administrators’ responses from Baker Middle School. Both Baker administrators agreed that school safety now is much better than it used to be. Both had heard stories from staff members that had been at Baker for many years about gangs, arrests, graffiti, and how students with allied with the negative aspects of the community in the past. However, the principal said recognizing the many good things that happen at

Baker was one tool that was used to put an end to school violence. The good deeds that the principal recognized included thanking students who informed adults about negative events taking place on site. When feasible, more consequences were administered on campus rather than with local authorities. In just a few years, there have been advancements in safety at this site.

There is an overall perception of safety at this school according to the assistant principal. "I do feel this school is safe. I feel that the kids have made a big improvement on how they feel at this school." But as the principal explained, safety requires a coalition of administrators working with teams of teachers to build a progressive system. According to the principal,

This school is very safe. It's not a big issue, but it is because we have a progressive level discipline plan. It starts in the classroom. Teachers deal with the minor issues first, but when it gets to be a repeated or a more serious problem, teachers send the problems to us. That's why we have our ICE House. The ICE House is small...ICE stands for Individual Classroom Environment. It is where kids continue to work on their classroom assigns. They are constantly supervised. Though the social element is taken out, kids still learn.

Regarding school discipline, site administrators feel that they "try to be consistent on discipline for school issues." The principal also stated that teachers and students are spirited about the current discipline system: "We tend to be very proactive. The kids know this. When we hear about something, we investigate. We constantly give rewards when something good happens, but we also issue consequences when the situation so requires."

The administrators noted that Baker more challenging issues than other school sites in the district face.

We have a difficult site to control, but I do think we are diligent in sharing our property with city and with district offices that are on this site. This task draws on our effort for other tasks on campus. We're always working on this. This takes our time.

The assistant principal has seen firsthand how this school has made great changes in terms of safety and security over the last few years. "Five plus years ago, I used to feel that we could lose control at any time, but I don't feel that way now." The principal noted, "Just 5 years ago, we used to have lots off campus suspensions and expulsions, but not anymore. I used to hear from teachers 'That's not how we do it at [Baker].' I used to hear that all the time, but I don't hear that now."

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. The teachers and principal at Adler Middle School expressed the same perceptions regarding most factors, except one. All felt that the school is safe and that the students and parents share this same perception. Teachers and administrators also stated that teams work well at Adler Middle School.

The teams at the grade 6 and 7 levels believe that team discipline policies are coherent and clear. However, while the principal believes that school discipline policy is clear and concise, teachers across the board believe that school discipline should undergo major improvement. They also believe that enforcement of school discipline policies need more consistency and that administrators also need to deal more with middle level

discipline issues such as repeated defiance of teacher detention and repeated class disruption.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School.

Teachers and site administrators at Baker Middle School expressed similar perceptions in all areas of this component. All respondents shared that the school is safe. However, both sides believe that there exist different degrees of strength and consistency with team structure and discipline, and many teachers expressed the feeling that greater consistency is needed with school discipline. Teachers and site administrators who have been at Baker Middle School for 5 or more years also expressed the feeling that operation at this school, particularly school safety, has improved greatly over the last 4 years.

Comparison of findings at Adler and Baker Middle Schools. For the component of school safety and management, the teachers at Adler and Baker Middle Schools shared discussed common topics and shared similar perceptions. The teachers and administrators at both schools feel as a whole that their school is a safe environment. The staff at Baker shared how such safety was not the case in the past. Teams at both sites also recognized the support of administration to maintain feelings of safety at school.

Grade 6 and 7 teams believed that they manage discipline well at team levels. The topic of team discipline was either not discussed or was regarded as an element of their team with inconsistencies. However, teams at all grade levels at both schools also believed that school discipline needs improvement at both schools. The site administrators at Adler believe that the school discipline policy is “pretty clear.” Yet while most teams maintain easily understood, clear discipline policies at the lower level,

most teams stated that a policy with greater consistency is need for middle level discipline.

Adler staff and teachers feel their school’s management it has always been good since it opened, but could still improve. Respondents at Baker feel that its school management has varying degrees of strength and weaknesses with the degree of strength or weakness being set by the teams. Respondents uniformly agreed that the grade 6 teacher teams, who are new to Baker since the school added 6th grade to its student roster, have the best management skills.

| Credentialed Staff | | |
|--|--|--|
| Response to 1: School Safety & Management | | |
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| School safety | Site very safe as discussed by teams across all three grade levels. | This topic was discussed by teams across all grade levels. Site has improved tremendously over the last few years and is much safer today! |
| Discipline | Common themes among all teams across three grade levels; teams handle good discipline; need more school consistency discipline! Administration should handle more. | Comments shared from teams across all grade levels. Grade 6 and 7 teams discussed clear, concise team discipline; one Grade 8 team discussed inconsistencies, however all agree that school discipline needs to improve with more consistencies. |
| Teamwork | There are different degrees of strength among teams, the most clear, concise teams are Grade 6. Only one Grade 8th team discussed inconsistencies in their work. | All teams at Grade 6 and 7 levels discussed organized teams; Grade 8 teams said there are different degrees of strength among teams with their Grade 8 team being inconsistent. |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 21. Factors of “Component 1: School Safety & Management” discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | Response to 1: School Safety & Management |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| School safety | Administrators feel that the site very safe, but are concerned with such topics as drugs and texting. | School safety much better today than in previous years. |
| Discipline | School discipline policy needs to be more clear/consistent with Team policies...need to <i>intervene</i> , not <i>prevent</i> . Need more administrator involvement with discipline and less Team involvement. Team discipline policies clear and concise. | School discipline is very proactive. We need more consistencies with team discipline. Feel there are established consistencies with school discipline. |
| Teamwork | There are varying degrees of team work across grade levels with six teams seeming to be the most organized. | Teams are great; have different degrees of working as teams. |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 22. Factors of "Component 1: School Safety and Management" discussed by administrators at both school sites

Component 2: Parental involvement. The review of literature revealed the following common factors of parental involvement in schools: communication, homework, working within the school, conferences, and stakeholders. These factors thus served as the prompts for the interview discussion of this component. For this component, the time for discussion was limited to 6 minutes per team, with of 2 minutes added for quick-write at the end of discussion. Baker Middle School staff members who were not able to participate in a team interview submitted feedback on this topic via written responses or by taking a web-based survey.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. Teacher discussions of component two focused on four topics: communication, homework, working within the school, and stakeholders. For this research paper, communication means the sharing of information back and forth between teachers and administrations using a variety of methods. Positive comments from all teams across all grade levels expressed how good

their communication is and how it has improved in the last few years. All teams discussed how the Internet has helped make biggest improvement to communication, since teachers all have email addresses. Teachers reported the results of an impromptu survey of their students, noting that approximately 70% to 80% of student households have Internet access at home. This was a surprise, particularly since 80% of the families at this school qualify for free/reduced lunch. The use of email has improved communication between teachers and parents.

Another facet of improved communication began just this year at this district, via the creation of school and teacher websites. Teachers can now have their own web page where they can post homework, announcements, calendars of events, and links to other websites. Also an important link on the school website is access to PowerSchool, where parents and students can check a student's current grade in any class at any time. One grade 7 teacher stated, "We now have great communication with parents with the use of our website and email" (Team D).

The discussion continued with the topic of parental involvement in homework. At least one team on each grade level explored topics. Although the parents have greater access to daily homework assignments via teacher websites, now "I would like to see parents more involved in the learning process, particularly with math and language arts," said a Grade 7 instructor from Team B. This is when teams across all levels discussed the topic of Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), noting that a parent link with the school was more vibrant when PIQE was in place.

PIQE is a program partnership between the school and PIQE. The purpose of PIQE is to enhance the educational achievement and reduce the dropout rate of minority

children by building strong parental involvement in their children's educational process at home and by forging a working partnership for the school. PIQE offered a 9-week course system offered several times over 2 years. The sessions were held during and after school hours. Topics for the PIQE sessions included: Adolescence: A Time of Change and Growth, How to Motivate Teenagers to Read, Obstacles that Get in the Way of School Success, The Road to the University, A Teenager's Social World, and How to Support our Teenagers' Ability to Learn. The school sponsored the program for the parents at a cost of approximately \$70 per person per session, which covered the cost of books and materials. The school earmarked their own funds along with funds from the state Department of Education to finance the remainder of this endeavor. Several of the topics for the PIQE sessions included: Adolescence: A Time of Change and Growth, How to Motivate Teenagers to Read, Obstacles that Get in the Way of School Success, The Road to the University, A Teenagers Social World, and How to Support our Teenagers Ability to Learn.

One respondent from Team F noted, "We could use PIQE back because parents could support and training on working with their kids and math." Another teacher discussed how parents could also use help on "how to deal with their kids in the teens" (Team G). While the English language could be a barrier to parental involvement, "offering such classes as English for parents could be great help for parents" (Team E). Since PIQE is no longer offered, teachers stated, "we see fewer parents this year volunteering at school than we used to see" (Team C). "How can we fix this problem?" "We need more parental workshops, at times that are good for parents!" (Team E). "PIQE was great...we need it back!" (Team A).

All of the grade 6 and 7 teams and one of the grade 8 teams discussed parents working within the school, sharing positive comments and expressing happiness about parents volunteering at school.

Parents are helpful in so many ways. One way in particular that has proven helpful for me is making copies! It is so easy for me to leave a work order for copies to be made. Parents are so generous in saving me some valuable time!
(Team B).

However, all teachers have also noticed a decline in the number of parents helping out at school recently. One-half of the teachers attributed this decline in parental involvement to the stagnant economy. Despite the decline of parental involvement, discussion of component two concluded with two of the teacher teams mentioning that parents would become stronger stakeholders in their school if the parents were more involved in school activities.

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. Teacher interviews at Baker Middle School explored the following factors for component two: communication, homework, helping at school, and stakeholders. Other common topics of discussion included more training and assistance for parents, as well as looping.

Positive comments regarding good communication came from every team at every grade level; however, teachers noted the need for continued dialogue with support for improved communication with parents in order to get them more involved. One grade 6 team shared that they have very strong communication with parents, stating that they meet with parents twice a week. However, the other grade 6 team, as well as the grade 7 and 8 teams, felt their communication with parents needs to maintain the improvement

strategies that are already in process. Teams at each grade level are very happy with the use of email, and even more satisfied now that each teachers has a website to post homework and communicate with parents. Communication was diverse in quality, style and frequency from team to team. “Our team members constantly communicate with email, even to the point of a daily email with certain parents” (Team H). Other teams at all three grade levels shared the thought that “communication with parents and the use of email could be better” (Team M). Several teams even discussed with more detail their forms of communication. One grade 6 team has a progress report that they send home each week with their students. Since this practice started at the beginning of the year and is strictly practiced by all teachers on the team, occasionally not receiving the report back with a parent signature from a student is not a major problem. However, a grade 8 teacher explained this variance in team communication with parents by saying that “team by team, communication is quite different in many ways” (Team L). Overall, teams shared the goal of improving communication and helping parents get more involved in the homework process.

While most teams thought that communication has improved, particularly this year with the school and teacher websites, teachers at all grade levels also believed that communication could improve. “It is difficult to get parents involved,” said one teacher from Team N, while another shared the thought that “we need to give parents help on how to communicate and get involved” (Team K). The discussion referred to parental assistance, particularly with homework. “This is where we can improve” (Team J), “We have a parent center, but we need more” (Team L). “We need help with homework policy,” said one teacher from Team M as the discussion turned to previous years when

PIQE had been offered. Teachers called for the return of PIQE, which had been a program at Baker Middle School in previous years. Teachers felt they “don’t have a way to let parents know how to get involved” (Team J). “We had PIQE...and it worked...we need it again, especially for math,” concluded one teacher from Team J. A common belief across all teams is that a return of PIQE would help improve communication with parents tremendously. Two teams, one from grade 6 and one from grade 7, discussed the topic of parents and homework specifically, but the focus of parental involvement with homework returned to the discussion of PIQE and using the program to help train parents to help their kids with homework.

Five of eight teacher teams at Baker discussed the subject of parents volunteering at school. Dialogue reached a consensus that home parental involvement was good, but has been declining. One teacher from Team K asked, “We need to do something to get parents more involved...how do we encourage them to come to school?” Some teachers suggested offering seminars to help parents in areas where they need assistance (i.e., English, raising teens, etc.). “We have a good parent center, our PTSA is fine, but we need ways to get them more involved” (Team L). Again, the discussion returned to PIQE and the participants’ desire for this program to return to Baker. A common belief among all grade levels is that with more parental communication and involvement with such programs as PIQE, parents would become more solid stakeholders working for their children’s academic success.

The topic of looping was briefly discussed in this component; respondents said that this form of teaming would greatly improve parental involvement at school. The two teams that currently engage in looping discussed this topic, but looping was also

mentioned in discussions of some of the other six components as well. One grade 6 team said that the “platooning” of students in their team greatly improved communication with parents. A platoon is similar to a team in that it is that is a group of students who work with a group of core teachers. Teaming occurs at both Adler and Baker and involves approximately 150 students who have the same language arts, math, history, and science teachers. However, due to scheduling conflicts, some students are “cross-teamed” meaning that these students may belong to the blue team, but they may also have one or two teachers who are part of the red team. A common criticism across teams, departments, and grade levels at both schools is that too many students are cross-teamed. A grade 6 team at Baker was allowed to platoon their students, meaning they would have the same students with no cross-teaming. A team of teachers at Baker who are platooned feel this has improved their parent communication tremendously. Teaming, looping and platooning all result in increased communication as a core group of teachers all have the same students. Four teachers that form a team of 150 students find it easier with the same parents because they are all working for the same cause, which is easier to attain in the team level.

Discussion of the topic of stakeholders was mentioned by two of the eight teams at Baker. Discussion concluded with teachers stating that they believe that the parents would become involved stakeholders in their school if they were more involved in the school culture.

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. Site administrators at Adler Middle School discussed two factors of parental involvement, the first being communication. Communication referred to telephone and Internet contact between

teachers, parents, and students. “I think we give parents many ways to contact us,” said the principal. Teachers also oftentimes make the first step in parent-teacher communication. One administrator noted, “Teachers call home all the time...this starts a good working relationship among school and parents.” Regarding the topics of communication and homework, a site administrator replied, “I’m really happy we now have our school website where parents and students can check homework and look at grades.” “Many parents do check our website,” said another administrator.

The interview with site administrators concluded with a discussion of parents working within the school. One administrator stated, “I think our school is good at getting parents involved as shown by the numbers who volunteer to spend time at our school.” However, the principal also sees the area as having room for improvement, noting, “I think we do a good job, but I also feel we can do better.”

Site administrators’ responses from Baker Middle School. Site administrators discussed three factors within the component of parental involvement at school. The first factor discussed was communication. Administrators shared positive feelings about this topic. One stated,

I think we’re doing much better today than just a few years ago. As I just said on the last component, many teachers used to take pride in not calling parents, but that has changed. Most teachers do call parents today when they feel it will help their students advance.

At Baker, the broadcast of information each week is an important form of communication. Said the principal, “Our community is great! We have our school portal on our school website where parents can now check homework daily.” The assistant

principal also shared that the principal “sends a PACE [automated phone call home to all parents] message home every Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. This message is titled ‘This Week at [Baker]’ where she tells about exciting things that happened in the previous week and important things that are scheduled to happen the next week. This is just one way that communication with our parents has greatly improved at our school.”

Administrators feel that communication is a strong area for Baker, but they also see constant needs for improvement. The principal commented, “For parents now online, our computer lab has a kiosk where homework can be printed and taken home. We also have a coffee session with the parents once a month to have time to communicate openly with our parents.” Baker Middle School also has established a mini-session of classes to assist parents with many different subjects, such as computer literacy, which has been popular with parents. The principal noted, “We’ve had three rounds of technology development for parents. It is getting more popular.”

The principal also shared his feeling on how the strength of communication between the teachers and parents has improved over the last few years. “Our parent conferences are great. Compared to 5 years ago, our Back to School Night and Open House is now mobbed with parents, especially since we’ve gone to a team structure.” Part of this success is paying special attention to children who need academic assistance.

We individually call parents of kids on the cusp to invite them to our conferences...It works. Teachers also do a lot of follow-up conferences with parents, particularly for kids on contract. These meetings close the gap in our relationship with parents.

Site administrators also are aware of a particular form of communication related to homework that was important just 2 years ago at this school.

We used to have PIQE. It was so successful! We could really use this program again. One area that could help parents is how to deal with their kids and homework. Our biggest need for parents is for them to learn how they could hold the line at home. This would involve parents working with their children and homework and how this all relates to our school planner, checking the school website for homework, and so forth. Parents could use help in building structure in this area.

Administrators also briefly discussed the factor of parents working within the school.

One site administrator stated, “We really want to get more parents to help out at school.”

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. Site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School independently discussed the same topics during their brief interviews. Both groups discussed how communication between parents and school site is good. The teachers and administrators also mentioned how the district and school website has helped with this communication. Teachers use their web pages to post homework and links to other instructional sites. Parents check teachers’ websites not only to review homework, but also to check grades. Site administrators and teachers both discussed how parents have been involved within the school, but have seen a decline in this area and would like to increase parental involvement at the school site.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School.

Teacher and site administrators at Baker discussed the same three factors of this component in their interviews: communication, homework, and working within the

school. Both teachers and administrators feel that communication with parents is good, partly due to the latest advancements in technology such as the school website. Both groups also discussed how student homework and parents being able to assist their child with homework is a concern and spoke about the learning seminars called PIQE that used to take place at this site. Both would like to renew these parent learning sessions. Both would also like to have parents more involved in their school, but are not sure how to invigorate parental involvement.

Comparison of Adler and Baker Middle Schools. Discussions of component two at both Adler and Baker middle schools focused on the same topics. Communication between parents and teachers seems to be good at both schools, especially with email and particularly with the new teacher websites. Parents of Adler students can also access PowerSchool via the school website where they can their child's latest grades at any time.

Parents do volunteer work within both schools, but the staff at both schools mentioned how it parent participation better in the past, particularly when PIQE, a series of educational sessions for parents, was offered. Teachers at both schools would like to resume the PIQE program, or something similar to it. Important topics that they feel parents could use to learn include: English as a second language, use of technology and computers, parenting teenagers, and helping children with homework (specifically math).

The conclusion for the topic of parental involvement is that teachers and administrators at both sites shared the thought that having parents involved in more events at their sites would make the parents even greater stakeholders in their school and the future of their children. Professionals at both schools also agree that while some improvement has been made with parental involvement, more is still needed.

| Credentialed Staff | | |
|---|---|--|
| Response to 2: Parental Involvement | | |
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Communication | Response from all teams at all grade levels: Communication with parents is good and has improved over the years, but must continue to improve! | Response from all teams across all grade levels. All teams state communication with parents is good and has improved over the years, but most also continue with dialogue on how communication must continue to improve! |
| Homework | Response from 1 team per grade level: Wants parents more involved with homework. Good establishment by district of web page and PowerGrade for teachers to create and parents to visit. | Topic discussed by two teams, one with the 6th and one with the Grade 7 teams. Wants parents more involved with homework. This topic evolves with the next row and PIQE. |
| Want more training/assistant for parents | Would like PIQE back! | Would like PIQE back! |
| Working within the school | Response from all 6th and 7th and one Grade 8 team: Parents helping at school (i.e. with making copies, in the classroom) have been great support! | Response from 5/8 teams across grade levels. Parents helping at school (i.e. with making copies, in the classroom) have been great support, but has declined the last 1-2 yrs. |
| Stakeholders | Response from 2 teams: Parents would become stronger stakeholders if they were more involved in school activities. | Response from 2 teams: Parents would become stronger stakeholders if they were more involved in school activities. |
| Platooning/looping | | Topic of 2 teams, but more dialogue with other components. Platooning helps communication and hence parental involvement over time. Would like to continue platooning/looping. |
| Words in red were subjects added to factors during discussion. | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 23. Factors of "Component 2: Parental Involvement" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | Response to 2: Parental Involvement |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Communication | Communication is good (use of Internet, PowerGrade, PACE messages, etc.). | We are doing much better than a few years ago (website, weekly PACE messages, Team newsletters, etc.). |
| Helping at school | Parents have been very helpful at school, but we need to increase parent involvement. | This area has improved. More parents help out at school and with school activities. We will continue to improve. |
| Parent meeting and conferences | | There has been great improvement the last few years with parents attending conferences, meetings such as Back to School Night, helping out at school, and so forth. |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 24. Factors of "Component 2: Parental Involvement" discussed by administrators at both school sites

Component 3: Interdisciplinary teaching. The literature review revealed the following common features of interdisciplinary teaching: teams and their communication and collaboration, teaching about cultures and ethnicities, interdisciplinary instruction, and service learning. These features served as the prompts for interview discussions of this component. For this component, the time for group discussion was limited to 6 minutes, with 2 minutes added for a quick-write at the end of the discussion. Some teachers at Baker Middle School also contributed responses regarding this component in written form, either on paper or via the survey website.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. Teams at all grade levels at Adler discussed all four factors of this component, ranging from one or two comments to a more in-depth exchange of ideas about each factor. Teachers also added an additional topic to the discussion if this component: the range of degrees to which different teams integrated these common factors into their instruction.

All teams had positive comments about communication and collaboration within and among teams, although some offered constructive feedback as well. The grade 6 teams started the dialogue with the following comments: “Our team is important...our team is great!” (Team A). “Our team has good communication skills” (Team C). “There are very strong teams across all of sixth grade!” (Team B).

One grade 7 team reported that they communicate and collaborate among each other via email very frequently. Besides emailing on weekends, team members also email one another at the end of each period to share information about the conduct of a student in the class that just ended. Teacher collaboration also includes teaching about diverse cultures and ethnicities and sharing this information with students around the world. Students of one grade 7 team have become pen pals with elementary students in Germany and high school freshmen in Ghana. Several teams also used interdisciplinary instruction between language arts and writing and the other disciplines of science, history, and art. Another grade 7 team reported that it has established a well-known reward system used throughout the year. This same team makes it a point to “target students who need support” (Team D). Despite this school-wide participation in communication, collaboration, and interdisciplinary instruction, many individuals mentioned that they still “need collaboration between interdisciplinary teams to continue to help our students grow” (Team D).

One grade 7 team reported that it integrates two facets of their curriculum in a unique way. In this integration strategy, the social studies teacher assigns students to write on a particular topic in a specific language arts style. Both the language arts teacher

and the history teacher then grade this paper. This grade 7 team focuses on integrating language arts and social studies assignments several times throughout the year.

Regarding the feature of team communication and collaboration, the grade 8 team teachers reported that they regularly join their teams together for a group motivation activity. Joint planning time for this reward activity involved all grade 8 students several times during the year. The grade 8 teachers also use this time to target students who need additional support.

One of the grade 8 teams also briefly discussed how they integrate elements of culture and ethnicity in their language arts and history classes. There seems to be a correlation among the following factors: culture and ethnicity, team communication and collaboration, and interdisciplinary instruction. One team from each grade level reported that they discuss culture and ethnicity in the classroom, while every team dialogued about interdisciplinary instruction. The grade 6 teams exhibited the highest degree of interdisciplinary communication, and hence more discussion of different cultures and ethnicities, and interdisciplinary instruction. One sixth grade teacher from Team C stated, "Our team is great! We collaborate much, which makes the job for each of us even easier. It also makes what we are teaching more consistent." One reason could be that grade 6 teachers possess a primary credential; within each grade 6 team, one person teaches math and science while another teaches language arts and history. Thus, it is easier to access and create interdisciplinary instruction and communication at this grade level. Another teacher showed the strength of interdisciplinary instruction with the comment, "Interdisciplinary instruction is effective with the kids...they know that we all are teaching them about life" (Team C). Members of all three grade 6 teams offered a

great deal of positive feedback regarding communication and collaboration within their teams.

The fourth factor of this component—service learning—was mentioned by at least one team on each grade level. Another term for service learning is community service. Service learning is defined as “a method of teaching, learning and reflecting that combines academic classroom curriculum with meaningful service, frequently youth service, throughout the community” (Service learning, n.d., para. 1). At Adler, there is a voluntary community service program for grade 8. The student government has also organized several school wide community service projects to raise goods and funds for organizations in the United States and around the world. One team has conducted several drives to raise funds for local non-profit organizations.

However, teachers throughout the school feel that more needs to be done in this area. Some members of each team felt that service learning should be required for all students at Adler. The grade 6 and 7 teachers were especially vocal about the need for more service learning, noting, “We need to use interdisciplinary instruction and link what we teach with the real world” (Team D). Another teacher stated, “I would like to integrate service learning with the curriculum” (Team B). “We need service learning school wide to give our students a real life experience... it needs to be mandatory” (Team A). Yet another respondent stated, “I’d love to have students at this school reach out and touch the world. To have them see the impact and power of each individual would be life-changing” (Team C).

Teachers added a new subject to the third component: cross-teaming. Cross-teaming is the time when a student from one team is enrolled in the class of a teacher of

another team. Members of all teams discussed this factor, but it was also mentioned in other component areas as well. There was a common complaint across teams at all grade levels that too many students are cross-teamed. One teacher noted,

It makes our job more challenging to try to integrate an activity across our team instruction when some kids are involved with our team for only one period.

These kids are involved with other team activities and instruction for three-fourths of their day. (Team E)

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. All four factors of this component were discussed by at least one team across all grade levels. Like Adler Middle School, all teams at all grade level added a new topic to the discussion.

All teams at all grade levels discussed communication and collaboration among teams. Their dialogue showed that communication and collaboration varies by degrees. The grade 6 and 7 teams as a group seem to have the highest degree of communication and collaboration. These groups offered universally positive responses about their teams, such as: “We constantly are communicating and collaborating as a group...we are the best” (Team H)! “This is a great team” (Team I)! “We are constantly collaborating as a team across the curriculum for language arts, science, math, and history” (Team K).

The grade 8 teams were divided in their responses to this component. Some teachers share their practices with communication, integration, and collaboration across the curriculum. Two teachers on a team collaborate with their vocabulary words each week. Teachers on another team integrate their poetry with language arts with math concepts. However, other individuals felt that collaboration was poor among the teams,

stating, “We don’t collaborate together because there isn’t enough time for us to do so” (Team M).

Like Adler, there is also a correlation between the factors of culture and ethnicity, interdisciplinary instruction, and communication and collaboration at Baker. At Baker, the topic of culture and ethnicity was discussed by one team at the Grade 7 and one team at the grade 8 level, while the topic of interdisciplinary instruction was a topic of five of the eight teams. The grade 7 and 8 teams shared positive remarks across the board for their use of culture and ethnicity in their curriculum. Some grade 6 and 7 teams reported that they integrate content areas, such as blending language arts with history. One member of a grade 8 team reported going more in depth with the topic by having Team Discipline Rules, a Study-Buddy system, having students write common headings on paper for all teachers, and team vocabulary words. One team reported that they implement a team portfolio where students show their work and progress as the year continues. Teachers on the grade 8 teams are split with their description of integrating culture and ethnicities into their curriculum. Some teachers on one team show higher a high level of depth of collaboration as they mention their effective collaboration and integration of ethnicity and culture into the curriculum. Other members of the same teams express how they feel they are at lower levels of depth of collaboration by citing how they lack integration and effective communication, and need more collaboration across the curriculum.

Several teams also discussed the location of their classrooms as an aspect of communication and collaboration. Teachers belonging to three different teams mentioned that the ease and frequency of their communication is strongly related to the

location of their classrooms. The teachers whose classrooms were in a row reported that their communication was easier and more frequent because of their proximity to their colleagues. They also commented that communication was not the same with a team member who is located on the other side of campus.

One team at each grade level discussed the topic of service learning. Four-fifths of the teams felt that “Service learning doesn’t exist for us...but we could start it” (Team K). However, one grade 6 team stated, “our team has a service learning project at the end of the year” (Team I). Another teacher stated, “Service learning is an important component that we should integrate at this school” (Team J).

Teachers at Baker independently brought up the subject of cross-teaming, about which teams commonly expressed disapproval. One teacher noted, “There is too much cross-teaming, which makes our collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction more difficult” (Team K).

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. The site administrators at Adler Middle School discussed that teaming is important at their school and that communication and collaboration are important elements of teaming. One administrator noted:

I like the team concept...it is very strong at our school. Teaming allows us to focus on the kids doing well *and* those who are not doing well. This year, the principal looks to improve interdisciplinary instruction by working with the staff to focus on one element across the curriculum...writing. I think that we’re expanding our interdisciplinary learning with writing...but there is still more that can be done.

From an administrative standpoint, the principal continually monitors and looks for areas of improvement, asking himself such questions as, “Do we have the right structure set-up for teaming? Or can we do more?” When looking at the varying degrees of communication and collaboration among staff members, the principal wondered whether more should be done to bring continuity to teaming, asking himself, “Should team meetings be more formalized? Should I assign topics for discussion for all team meetings? Or should I leave it up to the teams to decide?” However, his bottom line as an administrator is: “I take the view that less [administrative involvement] is more. We are all professionals and know what paths to take for our students.”

For the administrators, setting the environment for collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction at school is also important. This principal said that setting the tone “depends on how you look at everything.... Is the glass half full, or half-empty?” “I choose to focus on where we are, where we’re doing, and what we’re doing well. But I don’t lose what we need to improve.” For the learning environment at school, “I feel that as a leader, I need to be positive.”

As the staff member who handles greatest number of discipline issues, the assistant principal stated that he believes race and ethnicity are integrated into the learning process at the school. Very few of the discipline issues that he confronts are based on controversy among the different ethnicities among the student population. Related to this accomplishment, the assistant principal mentioned that the school seems to have developed its own culture, which is unique in a community where the presence of gangs is known.

The assistant principal also commented on how he was aware of and would like to support the teachers' desire to integrate service learning into the curriculum. This administrator noted,

Right now, service learning is a volunteer act that any grade 8 can complete. I think it would be a great concept to make this a requirement that in actuality would be a real learning experience for all of the students at our school.

Site administrators' responses from Baker Middle School. Baker's site administrators discussed all four factors of interdisciplinary learning in the interview process. The administrators also added a new topic in the discussion of this component. According to the principal, establishing a professional learning community (PLC) is a critical factor in implementing these four components. Martin Haberman (2004) describes the concept of PLCs in this manner: "To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results" (p. 65).

Regarding the importance of Haberman's concept at his school, the principal stated, "PLCs are the foundation of what we are doing at [Baker] middle school. It is with this foundation that we integrate all members of our school community in the continued progress of the academic growth of our students." He also shared that interdisciplinary planning is happening at his school. "While we have academic departments, language arts and social studies tend to pair off in many discussion sessions. Math and science teachers too tend to group together."

The site administrators discussed the varying degrees of strength regarding communication and collaboration among teams at Baker. The assistant principal stated,

We have a wide variety of degrees of implementation of interdisciplinary instruction. This link seems to be related to the strength of the team. We will have more room to grow in this area. One strong team with a high degree of interdisciplinary instruction is one of our grade 6 teams.

The assistant principal discussed collaboration and communication among core subject departments, and not just teams, at Baker, stating, “We now have collaboration between departments that we never used to have. After departments collaborate more, then we will work on collaboration with a team.” The teams at one grade level are particularly more collaborative than the teams on the other grade levels. “The sixth grade teams are awesome in this area.”

The principal stated that different degrees of strength of interdisciplinary instruction among different teams.

With some teams, there is a structure of common vocabulary. For example, with one team, they will choose a word regarding distributive property in math that also works with the distribution of items for sale in history. In language arts, the students will find the root of that same word. They will also build the relevancy of the word to their daily lives.

Another example collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction involves teaching about culture and ethnicities. Site administrators discussed how the depth of the use of culture and ethnicity correlates with the degree of interdisciplinary instruction. “When teachers teach subjects across the curriculum using diverse techniques that reflect different cultures and ethnicities, the subject is covered to a higher degree.”

Teams can also integrate interdisciplinary planning with the eighth period intervention time, as the principal noted:

The teachers on many teams support one another across the curriculum. For example, when English and science are issues, the teachers of a team will decide where the students will go during the eighth period intervention class based on the need of the student for more assistance. There is lots of collaboration among teachers on teams. But not all teams are at this level yet. However, changes are very progressive.

Administrators stated that service learning and the link with community service is an important element with regard to student government at Baker Middle School. One administrator noted, "Our leadership advisor has done a great job with our student government. One great project they established 2 years ago is working with our farmer's market. He does such a good job to link student government with community service."

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. Site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School all shared similar results in their representations of the first three factors of this component. Teachers and administrators agreed that there are various degrees of team communication and collaboration ranging from adequate to excellent at their school. Both also briefly discussed teaching about culture and ethnicity at Adler, which is also done to varying degrees. For example, some grade 8 teams integrate culture and ethnicity only on certain holidays, while other teams at the grade 6 and some grade 7 levels integrate culture and ethnicity into all aspects of their curriculum.

Teachers and administrators discussed how interdisciplinary instruction is an important part of the teaching process that varies in degree from team to team. The grade 6 teams reported that they engage in more interdisciplinary instruction than the other grade level teams. Teachers on five of seven teams across the grade levels also discussed the importance of service learning. Many teachers stated that although service learning is a voluntary part of the grade 8 curriculum, it should become a required and more active part of the learning process at Adler Middle School.

The site administrators at Adler Middle School discussed that teaming is important at their school and that communication and collaboration are important elements of teaming. One administrator said, " I like the team concept...it is very strong at our school." However, from an administrative standpoint, the principal continually monitors and looks for areas of improvement. For the administrators, setting the environment for collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction at school is also important. As the staff member who handles greatest number of discipline issues, the assistant principal stated that he believes race and ethnicity are integrated into the learning process at the school. Very few of the discipline issues that he confronts are based on controversy among the different ethnicities among the student population. Related to this accomplishment, the assistant principal mentioned that the school seems to have developed its own culture, which is unique in a community where the presence of gangs is known.

The assistant principal commented on how he was aware of and would like to support the teachers' desire to integrate service learning into the curriculum. This

administrator also noted that service learning is a volunteer act that any grade 8 can complete, but that it would be a great program to open to other grades.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School. All site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School discussed all four factors of the third component. Regarding the interdisciplinary teaching, both the teachers and administrators agreed that communication and collaboration vary in degrees of strength among teams. Both agree that grade 6 teams seem to have the highest degree of communication, collaboration, and integration of content across the curriculum. Both groups also said that teaching about cultures and ethnicity is not an important factor at this school, despite the fact that this school is a multi-ethnic site.

Also, administrators and teachers agreed that there is limited participation in service learning at their school. Different degrees of service learning is offered by different teams at Baker. However, site administrators believe that service learning should be administered by student government. Both feel that enhanced service learning is another improvement that can easily be made at this school site. Site administrators considered the concept of PLCs to be a tool that could increase the professional and academic development of their middle school.

Comparison of Adler and Baker Middle Schools. Adler and Baker share commonalities in the degree to which team communication and collaboration are practiced. The same applies to interdisciplinary instruction and teaching about diverse cultures and ethnicity. The degree of teacher and student involvement in all of these factors ranges from satisfactory to high involvement.

The grade 6 teams at both schools are universally more effective regarding the factors of team communication and collaboration as well as integration of ethnicity and culture into the curriculum; their feedback reflects the highest degree of satisfaction with these factors. However, the grade 7 teams at both schools are equally successful as the grade 6 teams in these areas. The grade 8 teams at both sites are split, with some teachers expressing that they work well and collaborate together and others stating that there is little integration and collaboration with their team. No team seems completely unhappy with its status, but all teams expressed the desire like to improve.

Regarding service learning, five of the seven teams at Adler Middle School discussed the importance of making service learning work and even making it a school requirement. At the present time, the only organizational structure for service learning is for those 8th graders who volunteer to participate. Teams at both schools involve service learning in their curriculum and team activities to different degrees. Many teams expressed their desire to integrate service learning more in their team and curriculum. One teacher said, “We need service learning at this school to integrate school with real life” (Team K).

In conclusion, many similarities exist between Adler and Baker middle schools regarding the third component: interdisciplinary teaching. Both schools report varying degrees of communication, collaboration, and integration of culture and ethnicity, noting that the highest degree of implementation of these factors occurs in the grade 6 and 7 teams, with grade 8 teams split in their degrees of participation. Site administrators expressed similar sentiments. The one significance difference between the schools in this area is that Adler prominently integrates service learning into the learning process.

Teachers at all team levels expressed a desire to involve service learning into the school wide curriculum. Teachers at Baker Middle School feel that service learning is not a part of their school at this time but would like to integrate this component into their instructional process.

| Credentialed Staff | | |
|---|---|--|
| Response to 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching | | |
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Communication & collaboration | Positive comments from all teams at all grade levels. Degrees of communication vary widely from team to team. Grade 6 has teams with most communication. | Positive comments from all teams at all grade levels. Degrees of communication vary widely from team to team. Grade 6 has teams with most communication. |
| Culture and ethnicity | This topic was discussed by one team from each grade level and is associated with the components of communication and collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction. There are varying degrees of integrating culture and ethnicity into instruction from team to team with the strongest at Grade 6 and the least strong at Grade 8. | This topic was discussed by one team from the 7th and one from the Grade 8 levels and is associated with the components of communication and collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction. There are varying degrees of integrating culture and ethnicity into instruction from team to team. |
| Interdisciplinary instruction | Discussed by all teams across all grade levels. Degrees of interdisciplinary instruction vary widely from team to team. Grade 6 has teams with most of such instruction as everyone teachers English and everyone teachers 2 other core subjects. At Grade 7 and 8, there is some, but little, interdisciplinary instruction on teams. Degree varies by teams. This factor is related with the above two factors. | Discussed by all teams across all grade levels. Degrees of interdisciplinary instruction vary widely from team to team. Grade 6 has teams with most of such instruction. At Grade 7 and 8, there is some, but little, interdisciplinary instruction on teams. Degree varies by teams. This factor is related with the above two factors. Very difficult with too much cross-teaming of students! |
| Service learning | Service learning is voluntary for the Grade 8. Majority of teams would like this to be integrated school wide. Feel this links instruction with the real world. | Service Learning not a part of the school. Only one team integrates service learning into their instructional process. It is more a Leadership Class activity. |
| Too much cross-teaming | A new factor added to discussion. Cross-teaming of students in the classroom hinders collaboration across the curriculum. Discussed by all teams across all grade levels. | Cross-teaming of students in the classroom hinders collaboration across the curriculum. |
| Words in red were subjects added to factors during discussion. | ORANGE background signifies that the majority of responses were different. | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 25. Factors of "Component 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching" discussed by teachers at both school sites

| Site Administrators | | | Response to 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> | | | |
| Communication & collaboration | Communication and collaboration among teams varies from team to team. Grade 6 teams appear to communicate & collaborate the most. Administrators also see how teaming can improve. | Communication and collaboration among teams varies widely from team to team. Grade 6 teams appear to communicate & collaborate the most. Administrators also see how teaming can improve. | | | |
| Culture & ethnicity | Students of all cultures & ethnicities get along extremely well at this school. | Students of all cultures & ethnicities get along extremely well at this school, a noticeable improvement from previous years. | | | |
| Interdisciplinary instruction | Degrees of communication vary widely from team to team. Grade 6 has teams with most communication. This factor is related with the above 2 factors. | Degrees of communication vary widely from team to team. This factor is related with the above 2 factors and with service learning. It is also linked with the new subject described by Baker administrators, that is PLC. | | | |
| Service Learning | AP would like to integrate service learning more with the curriculum. | Service learning is done primarily by the leadership (student government) class. | | | |
| PLC | | Establishment of PLC is the foundation of making changes at Baker MS. | | | |
| Words in red were subjects added to factors during discussion. | ORANGE background signifies that the majority of responses were different. | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. | | | |

Figure 26. Factors of "Component 3: Interdisciplinary Teaching" discussed by administrators at both school sites

Component 4: Classroom instructional practices. Through the review of literature, the most common elements that are part of classroom instruction practices (and thus served as the prompts for this component) include the following: formats of lesson and instructional practices, student engagement, use of technology, block scheduling, organizational skills, looping, and intervention. For this component, the time for discussion was limited to 6 minutes with a time of 2 minutes added for quick-write at the end of discussion, while some from Baker submitted their thoughts on paper or via the survey website established for this research.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. The majority of the teams discussed six different factors during the discussion on this component. Of all of the teams, six of the seven groups lauded the use of technology is at Adler. One teacher from Team B stated, “We have great use in this school of our mobile laptops, ELMOs [digital projection equipment], and SmartBoards!” Technology use has become so prevalent that a few teachers said they are not using technology, more specifically the mobile laptops, as much this year as they have in the past because “more people are using what we have, so the sign-up log for use of the laptops fills up right away” (Team B). Another teacher also mentioned how the laptops are showing their 2 years of use, stating, “The laptops don’t stay energized as long” (Team D). With more technology use, more teachers are getting used to higher quality service and are dissatisfied with poorer service. One teacher stated, “With so many people using laptops, oftentimes the Internet connection is extremely slow. I just don’t use laptops for certain types of projects because of the lack of Internet service” (Team E). Several teachers expressed some form of the following sentiment: “With the use of more parts of technology, we need more help and training” (Team F). This topic will be discussed more in depth with the component 6: professional development. However, teachers universally agreed that “The use of technology at this school is great!” (Team E). Adler teachers noted that technology support, which is available at the school, is another important component that allows them to successfully use technology. One teacher from Team C noted, “We have an extensive tech staff that supports teachers for those who use any elements of technology at this school.”

The topic of student engagement arose during the discussion of technology in the classroom. Two grade 6 teams and one Grade 7 team briefly mentioned how they feel

students are more engaged in the learning process the more that technology—such as laptop computers, the Internet, and SmartBoards—is integrated into the instructional process.

Block scheduling is another factor of classroom instructional practice that every team discussed. Adler Middle School uses block scheduling for two days of the week: Wednesday and Thursday. All eight periods meet for a regular schedule on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. Over half of the members on six of the seven teams replied that block scheduling is fine as is. However, despite the desire of the majority of staff members wishing to keep block scheduling as it, no math teacher responded with this support. Some teachers even stated that they “hate it” (Team G)! Other means of scheduling were also discussed. Three individual teachers on different teams even brought up a new idea for scheduling: rotating schedules. This idea is based on the schedule advancing one period each day so that by the end of the week, school would begin with the seventh or eighth period class. “This rotating schedule would give us the chance to see kids at different times throughout the day. Having the same kids every day right after lunch can be difficult” (Team A)!

Organizational skills was a third factor discussed by five teams in primarily the grade 6 and 7 groups. However, organizational skills are taught and reviewed by teams to different degrees. All three teams at the grade 6 level mentioned the importance of organizational skills and how they are taught, but the depth of teaching such skills varies from team to team. The grade 7 and 8 level teams were split on their opinions about whether organizational skills are important and are taught. Half of the teams in grade 7 and 8 cover organizational skills regularly. One teacher from Team F stated, “On our

team, the students use a unit log. All work is collected at the end of each unit.”

However, other teams reported that they have no set time to review such skills as Cornell Notes or organizing notebooks and backpacks. These teachers made comments such as these: “We don’t cover it as much at this middle school. Too often, we say we do, but are we really doing it? Very few check it” (Team G). One teacher reminded the discussion group that the counselors typically provide support for organizational skills, stating, “The counseling office does binder checks on kids who are behind academically. Many times the kids are behind because of their lack of organization” (Team E). Another teacher shared the thought that reinforcing organizational skills “could be better. It is a constant battle, but it’s gotten better over the years” (Team F). Another teacher saw the strength of organizational skills as providing evidence “that teachers at our school expect our students to be college bound” (Team D).

The topic of looping was discussed by six of the seven teams, but it was brought to discussion because most teachers were not sure of the meaning of the word. The researcher explained that looping occurs when teachers follow their team of students from one year to the next. The grade 7 and 8 teachers are the instructors at the secondary level. The response of slightly over half of grade 7 and 8 teachers was “I hate it!”, thought it is not practiced at this school. One teacher from Team E said, “I think the kids should go on and experience a new teacher and new methods of instruction.” However, two-thirds of the grade 6 teams and slightly under half of the grade 7 and 8 teachers were open to the topic. While most teachers were adamant in opposing the concept of looping, a few teachers did say that “this is an interesting concept. I’d like to give it a try” (Team B). One teacher even suggested looping students through all three grades. “With

looping, it makes instructional time more effective, particularly during the second year” (Team B). Another teacher stated, “I’m a big advocate of looping. It cuts out so much time spent on getting to know the kids and the kids getting to know the teachers. Looping creates a family environment” (Team E).

The topic of intervention was also very briefly discussed, primarily by the grade 7 and 8 teams. Intervention involves providing support to students whose grades have fallen below the 2.0 grade point average (GPA). At Adler Middle School, it is primarily the administrators and counselors who handle such duties. There is little if any team structure to work with these students. Yet teachers across in all grade levels made positive comments about how such students meet regularly with an adult throughout the year. One grade 7 team and one grade 8 team commented that some steps are needed to help students who are below a 2.0 GPA. One teacher stated, “We need to help these kids before they fall too far out of the learning loop.”

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. During the interview time devoted to this topic, the majority of the teams at Baker Middle School covered five of the topic areas, along with one additional factor of academic success. Five of the eight teams discussed technology, and all offered positive remarks about its use in the classroom. Teachers from each team discussed the extensive use of technology at Baker Middle School. One teacher noted, “We have laptop carts, the tech lab, ELMO, and SmartBoards to use...and we use them all the time” (Team J). However, respondents also discussed challenges regarding the use of technology at Baker. One teacher shared, “The technology can be great at this school, but on some days there are big problems with the wireless system. It can get so bad that we can’t use the laptops” (Team L). One

teacher stated this commonly expressed sentiment: “We have a great system of technology that few schools have” (Team I).

Block scheduling was another topic discussed by all teams. Five of the eight teams across grade levels shared positive remarks about this topic. One teacher from Team H stated, “I like block scheduling.” Baker Middle School currently has block scheduling on only two days of the week, but many teachers expressed a desire to extend the block schedule. One teacher from Team H noted, “I love block scheduling. I think we should extend it to 4 days a week.” The math teachers at Baker enjoyed block scheduling. One math teacher stated, “For math, I like block scheduling...It gives kids class time to start their homework so I can check it” (Team K). Another stated, “As a math teacher, I would like to extend block scheduling to 4 days a week. It gives me more class time to teach and check for understanding at the same time” (Team N). Three teams—one in grade 6 and the two in grade 8—expressed diverse opinions regarding block scheduling; one member of each team expressed dissatisfaction with block scheduling for a variety of reasons. One was a math teacher who wanted to see students every day and one objected because there was no preparation time for certain teams on the block days when students were on campus from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

All teams discussed the topic of organizational skills, reporting that this factor that was implemented at different degrees of depth by different teams. One teacher noted, “Our kids organize their binders, backpacks, et cetera. We try to repeat this process all throughout the year” (Team J). Another teacher stated, “We’ve been working with our students in this field all year long!” (Team K). One team noted that “this [organizational skills] is done team by team, but we do need some school-wide

consistency with such things as the planner and other parts of organizational skills to help all of the students succeed!” (Team I). A member of one eighth grade team stated that the process is important, but that “there is a lack of enforcement on our team” (Team L).

Five of the eight teams discussed the topic of looping. Grade 6 and 7 level teams offered positive remarks about this factor, but grade 8 teams did not discuss the looping process. Teachers at Baker are aware of looping as it is being used experimentally at this school. Looping is in its second year at Baker, and the reactions are generally positive. One teacher from Team J noted, “Looping has been really successful academically and personally at this school. I hope it will continue.” Others shared the thought that “Looping provides for better relationships with parents and students” (Team K). Another teacher stated, “With looping, student morale and teacher morale are higher than before” (Team K). Another member of a looping team said that “it makes life easy and kids reach the high expectations that we set” (Team J). Another looping teacher stated, “I believe that looping has improved the test scores of our team of students. We’ll see this year” (Team J). One teacher whose team does not loop stated, “I would really enjoy looping with our students” (Team L).

Teachers at Baker Middle School are experimenting with a new form of school-wide assessment this year. “Every 6 weeks, we have school-wide assessment based on district benchmarks. It is an electronic test. We get results back within 2 days! It is a great system as we plan for the state exam” (Team J). Those that responded to this topic in the interview process—two-thirds of the Grade 6 teams and one-third of the Grade 7 teams—are supportive of this school-wide form of assessment. One teacher has even taken assessment to the next level, implementing “a weekly assessment with 5 to 10

questions. The questions are based on state assessment and how it relates to what I am teaching at the time” (Team N). In addition to the school-wide assessment, one team has added an additional form of assessment based on the state curriculum. “In addition to the traditional form of assessment, we have also established our own portfolio form of assessment” (Team K).

The teams spent the majority of the interview time for this component discussing Baker’s eighth period homeroom intervention class. Six of the eight teams (all grade 6 teams, two grade 7 teams, and one grade 8 team) responded, but only one team shared positive impressions about this topic. Intervention time is intended to provide additional time covering elements of the state assessment where students are lacking. Specific intervention time content is left up to the teams, however. One grade 6 team teacher stated, “Our team is very organized for eighth period intervention. Our team offers two classrooms in the first trimester and CST subtests in the third trimester. The other two classes are full-time language arts review and a GATE class” (Team H). One teacher of a team has volunteered to take the role of reviewer of organization skills for students who need the most help. Teaching organizational skills has also been linked with the eighth period intervention class. “Each week, students who do not yet have good organizational skills go to see the teacher in charge of this program for our team and she helps them review their agendas, binders, and backpacks. This happens every week!” (Team I). However, not all teams are as organized with intervention time. Many teachers expressed the thought that “eighth period can be useful time for kids to catch up on work, but it also a waste of time” (Team N). Several teachers mentioned the idea of moving intervention to the beginning of the day, because “Kids are burned out by the time eighth period hits

the day. This is not a good time to try to review and reinforce important components for the state exam” (Team L). In any case, respondents agreed that new form of intervention is needed. “As a school, we need more structure and consistency with our intervention time. Kids talk about other teams where eighth period is used as homework time. Now kids want to transfer to these ‘easy’ teams” (Team J).

Teachers also briefly discussed positive responses to the opportunities they had to observe student engagement as well as their colleagues’ teaching techniques. This observation of students by teachers was explained in depth by the assistant principal and will be discussed in section presenting Baker site administrators’ responses for this component.

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. In the interview time for this component, the site administrators at Adler Middle School discussed four factors. One factor was instructional practices. One administrator stated that he visits classrooms very often and has noticed one area for possible improvement.

We have lots of great teachers here! We have many different teaching techniques used at this school. One important question we need to continually ask is ‘are we checking for understanding? Did the kid get the lesson?’ This is an important element for teachers to keep in mind.

Site administrators also discussed the use of technology in instruction.

I think we do so much with the use of such things as the SmartBoard, etc. By doing so, we are preparing our kids for college and the future. But, the learning environment at the next site our students attend—high school—may not be use

technology as extensively. This could be more challenging for our students as they move on.

A second administrator, who also visits classes often, reported that teachers have expressed the desire to increase the use of technology in the classroom.

Teaching about learning and organizational skills is the last area the site administrators discussed. Like the teachers, they see this as an area with varying degrees of implementation at Adler.

I think we get a little sloppy, a bit tired, with focusing on this skill. One thing I feel I need to do more is remind people about the areas on which we focus.

Teaching organizational skills is one area.

One administrator who deals with students with below 2.0 GPA also commented on how the school needs to get more clear on the set-up and administration of the intervention process. “Working out a system where we catch those grades that are lowering and help them before they hit the bottom is very important!”

Site administrators’ responses from Baker Middle School. In the interview session for this component (classroom instructional practices), the site administrators at Baker Middle School covered five topics. The principal first commented that there are two important points to this theme that he shares with all teams at his school: “failure is not an option!” and “data matters.” He emphasizes these points by telling teachers, “Show me what you need and I will support you!” This comment explains how administration support of teachers is paramount to classroom instructional practices.

Administrators first discussed formats of lessons, instructional practices, and assessment. The assistant principal stated, “This year, we really did it! Each department

has written a packet of common assessment tests. The test is given two times each trimester. The results are available in SchoolCity within 2 days for teachers to review.” “Some teachers thought they would get good results. If they didn’t, they want to know why.” Teachers also use these test results to alter their teaching techniques. This school-wide system of common assessment established during the 2010-11 school year.

The two factors of student engagement, namely block scheduling and the use of technology, were interlinked in the administrators’ interview discussion. First, the principal gave an example of teaming and shared instructional practices. “Using the shape of a spider is one thing one team of teachers use. All four teachers on a team use the same graphic organizer, but in different ways.” The same applies to math journals across different teams. “After some time, kids write a summary, then edit and take notes. All kids school wide do this, so when we transfer kids, they’re continuing to learn.” The principal also shared,

We have common threads across teams and across departments. It has taken time, but it is beginning to work! Kids are now better prepared in this second year. Now we don’t worry about structures. We can now work on the content.

The assistant principal also shared that teachers are encouraged to observe their colleagues in order to learn about new teaching techniques and ways of facilitating student engagement. On block days, class time is 90 minutes. Teachers work with the assistant principal to schedule a period during which they can bring their class to the cafeteria where they work on homework or other class assignments for half of the block period. During that time that teachers can visit and observe their colleagues in the classroom, learn new teaching techniques, and see how students are engaged in work.

Teacher observation is scheduled continuously throughout the year and does not require any additional funds, making it a cost-effective way to improve classroom instructional practices.

The assistant principal shared thoughts about the use of technology at Baker. “With the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) Grant, we got SmartBoards to use in the classroom. That is enhancing our education through technology, which really helps us.” The principal also commented on the importance of technology and instruction, noting, “There is much more interactive instruction at this school over the last few years. Technology development has helped so much at this school.” The assistant principal described in detail the student projects she saw being implemented with the use of technology, particularly on block days. “Block scheduling was a hard sale for us, but it works! But I do wish that we had more hands-on teaching experiences in the classroom.” One teacher in particular was noted for her use of diverse teaching techniques. “If you get a chance, be sure to visit the classroom of [specific teacher named]. She uses many hands-on activities. On block day, she breaks the class time into clear segments of time. She even has three things going on at the same time, one learning activity using laptop computers. All of this from a math teacher!”

Effective teaming and classroom instructional practices also have a positive impact on discipline. The principal stated,

The kids on one team refuse to allow disruptive kids to stop the learning process in their classrooms. We call this 'robbery.' It means the kids are frustrated with how one student is disruptive around them. The kids yell 'robbery' and the teacher just points to this student who goes to another teacher on that team. When the

student walks to another room, they simply enter and sit down without disrupting the other class.

The site administrators also discussed the factor of looping. The principal stated, “Many of our teachers are very fond of looping. It is difficult for the instructors in that two curriculums must be learned.” The principal concluded by stating,

Looping also develops a feeling of belonging for the kids, even those kids who get in trouble. It develops a sense of ownership. Kids don’t want to let their teams down. It is also a sense of safety and belonging.

The assistant principal stated that looping at Baker

started with our enrollment that produced enough seventh graders for only half of a team and the number of eighth graders for only half a team. So we tried looping; it is very successful! One of the many benefits is that looping doesn’t waste time at the beginning of the year to teach the students their platform for classroom organization. The kids already know what to do! But we do wonder what would have happened if the team didn’t want to loop!

Both site administrators briefly discussed the topic of the eighth period intervention class, and how it is linked to the 6-week assessment. The administrators reported that teachers as a whole like conducting the assessment every 6 weeks. Results of the assessment are used by some teams to set the instructional theme for the intervention class. Teachers, by department, have written the brief assessment for the different core subjects. Administrators felt that the best aspect of this program is that teachers can respond to the results of the assessment in less than 48 hours, knowing what to cover in both their core and intervention classes. Site administrators said that teachers

can decide by team or individually what needs to be covered in the eighth period intervention class. The response from the school-wide assessment is only one factor in determining what should be covered in the eighth period class.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. Site administrators and teachers reviewed three of the same factors in their discussions. These factors were the use of technology, teaching organizational skills, and intervention. Administrators and teachers expressed the thought of how the use of technology has developed extensively at Adler Middle School. Both groups also expressed how they hope to see the use of technology in the instructional process continue.

Both also discussed how teaching organizational skills is in the process at Adler, but can be developed to a more solid focus in the school learning process. From the teacher perspective, the Grade 6 teams implement the instruction of organizational skills the most, while the percentage of participation declines in Grade 7, and more so in Grade 8 teams.

Teachers and site administrators at Adler also both discussed how the intervention process at this school is primarily the job of administrators and counselors. Remarks were only positive as teachers and administrators discussed how it is important to help those students whose GPAs are less than 2.0. It was also discussed how possibly teams should take a more active role in monitoring the students in their group whose GPAs are lower than 2.0.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School. Five topics that were addressed by both teachers and site administrators at Baker Middle

School. These factors include the use of technology, block scheduling, looping, and assessment with intervention.

The use of technology has grown at Baker Middle School. Teachers and site administrators are most are enthusiastic about the use of such equipment as SmartBoards, an important component of modern teaching techniques. Despite the development of technology at their site, teachers hope they can expand on the use of such resources. Teachers and administrators alike reported varying degrees of the use and style of organizational skills, but the grade 6 teams as a whole were deemed to be most structured in their use and teaching style of this important topic for academic success.

Looping is a new concept at Baker Middle School. Though site administrators shared that thought that block scheduling has been accepted school wide, looping is in the test phase and has not yet been accepted by teachers school wide. But those who are involved with looping like it tremendously. Both administrators and teachers agree that looping can save valuable time in the learning process.

The topics of assessment and intervention are intertwined at Baker Middle School. Last year marked the beginning of school-wide assessment on all core topics every 6 weeks. Respondents reported varying degrees of acceptance of this form of assessment, but some teams who appreciate having this knowledge of student understanding have increased their assessment to every 5 weeks. Results for school-wide assessment are returned to the teachers in 1 to 2 days so that teachers can apply the results in the classroom immediately. This aspect of assessment is directly linked with intervention. Teachers who like these frequent forms of assessment use the feedback to help determine what topics to teach in the intervention classes. Some teams also use the

6-week assessment interval to change the list of students enrolled in their intervention classes who are assigned to each teacher so that the students with similar academic needs are in the same classes. Teachers then feel that they can teach an important topic to those who need to learn such skills before taking the exam. Over 90% of the teachers, however, do not like the eighth period intervention time as it currently stands. Teachers would like much more structure to intervene in what the students need to learn. The quick assessment system works, but it can be difficult to determine what to do with 35 students in the intervention class based on the assessment, especially since the needs, and the levels of need, vary greatly from student to student.

Comparison of Adler and Baker Middle Schools. Five of the factors related to component 4 were discussed at the interview sessions at both Adler and Baker middle schools. The staff at both schools expressed satisfaction and pleasure with the use of technology at their schools. Both schools use common technological elements, such as technology labs, carts of laptops that can be reserved, as well as ELMO and SmartBoard devices. However, faculty at both schools also mentioned that as more teachers take part in the use of technology, the system needs improvement. Such areas of improvement include the number of carts available and enhanced speed of wireless Internet access throughout their school.

Block scheduling was another topic discussed at both sites. Over 50% of the teachers at Adler enjoy block scheduling as is: two days a week. However, the math teachers at Adler do not like this schedule at all and prefer the traditional schedule where all classes meet every day of the week. At Baker Middle School, a higher percentage—approximately 63%—of the teachers enjoy block scheduling. Even more believe that

better learning conditions would exist with block scheduling set for four days a week. In contrast with Adler math teachers, the math teachers at Baker overwhelmingly prefer block scheduling for their subject.

Organizational skills were briefly discussed at both school sites. At both Adler and Baker, such skills are left for teams to address. As such, the task of teaching and reviewing organizational skills is done to different degrees of depth depending on the team. Teachers at both sites shared the thought that this task should be organized with school-wide standards and consistency.

Looping is an interesting topic covered by the teachers at both middle schools. At Adler, the concept of looping is new. Grade 6 and 7 teachers expressed the idea of experimenting with this structure, but over 50% of respondents expressed no interest in launching this structure. Baker Middle School is in its second year of experimenting with looping. Teachers who are on the team that is looping expressed that this concept powerfully impacts student learning. They believe it links with parental involvement and reduces time to learn about their students in the second year of instruction. Other Grade 6 and 7 teams at Baker have heard of this experiment and expressed a desire to try it.

Intervention is the final factor discussed at both Adler and Baker middle schools. At Adler, administrators and counselors primarily handle intervention with students below a GPA of 2.0, although staff members are discussing the idea of teachers of each team intervening with the students on their team who have a GPA of 2.0 or lower. At Baker Middle School, teams determine what they will cover during intervention (eighth period homeroom class). The school-wide assessment every 6 weeks can help teachers decide what to cover in the core classes as well as in the intervention classes. However,

different teams utilize the intervention period to different degrees. Teachers reported that some teams use this time for students to catch up on homework or as silent, sustained reading time. Other teams have a very organized structure for intervention, teaching different lessons for different groups of students based on the students' needs. A common thought throughout the interview process was that intervention time should be more organized school-wide with consistencies throughout the program. To do so, teachers commonly expressed that administration should provide more structure for the eighth period intervention class.

Regarding the component of classroom instructional practices, although Adler and Baker middle schools have much in common, they also have many differences. Administrators and teachers agreed on most topics within this component. Staff members at both schools feel that technology and organizational skills are important, but that there are varying degrees of implementation and instruction of these instructional practices at their sites. Teachers at Baker feel that the grade 6 teachers—who were added to this site when the school split—integrate and teach organizational skills the most. The major differences between these two schools involve scheduling, specifically block scheduling and looping.

| Credentialed Staff | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| | | Response to 4: Classroom Instructional Practices |
| Topic | Adler Summary | Baker Summary |
| Technology | 6 of 7 teams had positive remarks on how good tech resources are at Adler. Also, all replied that we could still improve greatly in this area. | 5 of 8 teams had positive remarks on how good tech resources are at Baker. Also, all replied that we could still improve greatly in this area. |
| Student Engagement | Grade 6 teams addressed this topic. All responded that student engagement is greater when technology is used in the instructional process. | |
| Block Scheduling | Just over 50% of those who responded (which was 6 of 7 teams) that Block Schedule is fine as is — 2 days week. However, across the board: Math teachers DON'T like Block Schedule. | Just over 62% of those who responded (which was 6 of 8 teams) that Block Schedule is fine as is and would like to increase it to 4 days of the week. Also, across the board: Math teachers DO like Block Schedule. |
| Organizational Skills | There were positive remarks from all teams, however there are varying degrees of how often and manner (i.e. by person or by team) of how organizational skills are taught. Grade 6 teams across the board most positive and organized. Some say it should be a school-wide topic. | There were positive remarks from all teams, but there are varying degrees of how often and the manner (i.e., by person or by team) of how organizational skills are taught, but there were positive remarks with all teams. All agreed that Grade 6 teams are the most structured. |
| Looping | Grade 6 and 7 teams are interested in discussing the topic. | There are two teams at different grade levels who have tried looping and find that it works! There are other Grade 6 and 7 teams willing to try it. Grade 8 teams didn't discuss topic. |
| Assessment | | This is a program improvement (PI) school. As such, staff implemented assessment of core content every 6 weeks. Teams across all grade levels like this form of assessment as response of testing is immediate! Assessment based on content decided by depts. Some teachers/teams has started weekly assessment. |
| Intervention | Teachers support administrators and counselors who meet with regularly with all kids below a 2.0. There is no other structure that is part of intervening students who are falling academically. | 6 of 8 teams responded...of the 6 responses, 5 were negative. As this is a PI school, a class has been set aside for intervention. There is no school-wide system...it is organized by teams and/or individuals. As a result, 85% of the teams do not like current intervention system and want a more structured intervention process. |
| | ORANGE background signifies that the majority of responses were different. | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 27: Factors of "Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | Response to 4: | Classroom Instructional Practices |
|--|---|--|--|
| Topic | Adler Summary | Baker Summary | |
| Technology | Administrative response was that development of technology has been good and will continue to grow. | Technology development has helped much with school's academic improvement. They will try to increase use of technology in the classroom. | |
| Organizational Skills | Varying degrees of use of organizational skills. Administrators would like this topic discussed at staff meetings. | | |
| Intervention | Currently, intervention process is administrators meet with regularly with all kids below a 2.0 to discuss their academic progress. They would like to do more. | Teachers like 6-week form of assessment. Is popular and works because response time of exam(s) for the entire school is 48 hrs. | |
| Assessment | | Common assessment established school wide on all core topics at the same time during each trimester. Results of assessment returned to teachers in just 48 hrs. They said teachers like assessment due to quick response. | |
| Looping | | Looping is becoming much more successful in raising our state test scores! It has helped with such areas as organizational skills, parent involvement, intervention, et cetera. This saves much time at the beginning of the year! | |
| Lessons/Instructional Practices | Great instructional practices overall. There is great variety in teaching techniques used. Administrators would like to see more "checking for understanding." | Varies greatly by team. Some teams very successful at teaching important topics (i.e., organizational skills) across the curriculum. | |
| | ORANGE background signifies that the majority of responses were different. | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. | |

Figure 28. Factors of "Component 4: Classroom Instructional Practices" discussed by administrators at both school sites

Component 5: School and classroom environment. The most common factors found in the review of literature regarding school and classroom environment included: academic success, relationships among faculty, relationships among parents, teacher relationships with students, extra-curricular activities, student motivation and high goals,

and student choice when it comes to assignments. These topics served as the prompts for this component. For this component, discussion time was limited to 6 minutes with 2 minutes added for a quick-write at the end of discussion. Some teachers submitted written opinions for this topic, either paper or via the website created for this research.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. Six of the seven factors for this component that were discussed by at least one team at Adler Middle School: academic success, relationships among faculty, relationships among parents, relationships with students, extra-curricular activities, and student motivation/high goals.

All teams briefly discussed academic success, which teams defined as raising state test scores. This factor also aligns with student motivation and setting high goals. Respondents stated that everyone is proud of the academic level of this school. One teacher with Team B stated, “We all set high expectations of our students at this school, and it works.” To achieve this, a teacher from Team A reported that “We have various opportunities for academic success.” Teachers agreed that it is important to set high goals for students. “Collegiality is important for academic success...We have that sense at this school” (Team D).

Five of the seven teams, primarily those at the grade 7 and 8 levels, discussed the topics of student motivation and setting high goals. Teachers agreed that they “set high expectations of all at this school” (Team E). One stated, “We have high expectations and goals for our students and the support system is available so that these goals can be achieved” (Team G). Adults at school have given special attention to those students in the lower academic echelon. “The counselors deserve a lot of credit here! They work hard to improve the bottom 10% of the students who lack motivation and self-belief.

Without them, the students could flunk” (Team E). Teachers report that Adler recognizes and acknowledges student success in a variety of ways. “Students are motivated to do well because of the support we have such as the honor roll breakfast, after school activities, perfect attendance, and other rewards” (Team D). Despite all of these attempts at motivating students, teachers felt that “student motivation is still low, and this is an area we would like to improve” (Team A).

Motivation and setting high goals were intertwined with extra-curricular activities in all of the discussions. Teachers discussed how to use extra-curricular activities to help motivate students and set high goals. One teacher from Team C noted, “An extra-curricular activities program is important to maintain student success. We have a great program at this school, but we need more.” Another teacher stated, “We have a great extra-curricular activities program at this middle school!” (Team E). Still another mentioned, “Our system of extra-curricular activities has many varieties of activities both during school hours such as lunch time, and after school. We have sports programs, clubs, art, music, a talent show, and even tutoring programs” (Team F).

In the discussion, a teacher remarked about how to use extra-curricular activities to help motivate students and set high goals. “An extra-curricular activities program is important to maintain student success. We have a great program at this school, but we need more” (Team C). Another stated, “We have a great extra-curricular activities program at this middle school!” (Team E). Still another mentioned, “Our system of extra-curricular activities has many varieties of activities both during school hours such as lunch time, and after school. We have sports programs, clubs, art, music, a talent show, and even tutoring programs” (Team G).

The after-school program implemented at all schools in this district is called RAP, which stands for Realizing Amazing Potential. While most teachers see the positive aspects of RAP, most also believe that the program can improve. “RAP is a great after-school program, but we need to communicate with them more to link the activities with academics” (Team B). Another stated,

RAP is better, but still needs to improve. We need to change it to make it so kids are *chosen* or *invited* to be there. This could change the impact of the program.

Right now, it is a babysitting service for young teenagers. (Team D)

There are also many extra-curricular activities that are organized by the leadership club. Such activities take place at lunchtime and after school and also involve sports, clubs, and activities. One teacher from Team B stated, “Our extra-curricular activities program is different in that it involves adults! Students see teachers out of the classroom. The more kids see teachers like this, the more that the adults can steer kids in the right direction.”

Another teacher shared a thought that was common across grade levels:

The RAP system is great when we link the activities with academics. If a student skips too many homework assignments, they are put on hold with playing in a game. The kid is still on the team, they are just put on hold in taking part in the game until they return back to working hard to succeed academically. This also applies to such programs as band, chorus, flags, and cheerleaders.

Adler teachers in all three grade levels offered positive feedback about relationships among faculty members. (Team E)

One teacher from Team E noted, “There is a strong relationship among faculty members.” Another teacher commented, “Our school is one big successful team! This

team includes not only teachers and students, it also includes secretaries, custodians, and campus security!” (Team B).

Four of the seven teams briefly discussed relationships among school staff and parents; three of the four responses were positive, but all three teams felt that this area needs to improve. One teacher from Team A stated, “We have a good relationship with our parents, but it is something we should work to improve.” Another mentioned, “Parents are part of the team that educates their child” (Team A). Only one comment from a grade 8 team member was overtly negative: “We at this school are able to communicate with the parents, but we just don’t!” (Team G).

Four of the seven teams discussed teachers’ relationships with their students, offering positive comments about this area. These four teams represented all three grade levels. One teacher from Team C commented, “Teacher relationship with students is great!” Another stated, “Our relationship with our students is good as shown by the way that students confide in adults at our school” (Team A). Still another teacher shared, “We have a good relationship with our students. They may forget what they learned, but they *will* remember how they felt in class during their time at this school” (Team D). This positive relationship does not occur during the school year alone; teachers assert that it exists outside of the classroom as well.

I feel that our students are proud to be part of this school. They see us and scream our names from across the yard, and they are not ashamed, almost to the point where other students want to have a similar relationship with the teachers at their school. (Team F)

The bottom line of this positive relationship is related to caring. One teacher summed up their relationships with students thusly: “Teachers at this school really care about their students...Teachers make individual sacrifices to go above and beyond their call of duty” (Team E).

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. Of the seven factors of this component, five were discussed by the teams at Baker. All of the teams expressed positive sentiments about growing closer to the academic API score of 800 which is the number ruled by the state that signifies academic success. However, teachers also recognized how challenging this endeavor has been thus far and will continue to be as their school grows. One teacher from Team H stated, “Success breeds more success, but you have to get the students to do the work. That is the hard part.” Teachers emphasized the importance of recognizing and honoring achievement on the path to success. “At our school, we do need to celebrate success more!” (Team K).

Relationships among faculty members were a topic briefly discussed during the interview process. The statements were for the most part very positive. Four of the eight teams discussed the topic, and all had positive remarks to make about the relationships among faculty members. One teacher from Team I stated, “We have a great faculty relationship at this school.” Another stated, “We have a great faculty! We have co-workers that work well with one another” (Team K). This success is attributed to a common sense of harmony and the work ethic of these professionals. “We have a good cohesion between faculty members” (Team J). One stated, “This is the key...we help each other and commiserate. Our faculty is pretty solid!” (Team I). Teachers noted that they enjoy their relationships beyond school grounds as well. “There are many good

friends among staff who also spend time after school and on weekends. This helps us to work together” (Team H). Teachers who have been at Baker Middle School have seen this relationship improve over the last few years. They attribute this improvement to: (a) time together getting to know one another as team members; and (b) time working together at team, department, and faculty meetings to improve student academic success, as shown by the school’s API score. One teacher from Team L stated, “The relationship among faculty has completely changed. It is so positive!” It is interesting to note that grade 7 and 8 teachers spoke less about positive faculty relationships than grade 6 teachers. It also appears that teams with better relationships among teachers spoke more about their positive relationships with students than those who reported poorer faculty relationships among faculty members on their team.

The topic of relationships among teachers and students was briefly discussed by four of eight teams (three grade 6 teams and one grade 7 team). All of the responses were positive. One teacher stated,

This appears to be my specialty! I just love my job and they [students] know that I have good relationships with parents because they know that I am happy to be with them and be a part of their learning. (Team I)

Teachers reported that school assemblies can help to build these positive relationships. One teacher noted, “We need to have pep rallies or motivational assemblies. Right now, we tend to focus on discipline assemblies, not motivational assemblies” (Team J).

Regarding the topic of faculty-parent relationships, only one Grade 6 team discussed this topic, offering positive remarks. The other seven teams did not talk about this issue.

Setting high goals and motivating students to attain these goals was another factor that was briefly discussed by all of the teams. The remarks down below about the RAP after-school program and the extra-curricular activities during school hours were all very positive, but they were at the same time also constructive on how these programs could improve. The same positive responses followed by constructive feedback apply to student motivation. “There is a community-feeling in the school now that expectations of our students among teachers and administrators are higher. It’s catching on!” (Team J). One team is strong and even sets its own goal. “Our team motto is ‘Striving for excellence’!” (Team K). Another teacher in this team noted, “We as a team work very hard on setting high goals...but the school as a whole could possibly do more in this area!” (Team K). Many teachers correlate motivation and high goals with the after-school program. “Our after-school sports program emphasizes grades and behavior which are great motivators for the students” (Team H). Teachers agreed that setting high goals achieves more than just academic success. “Students are learning respect with the after-school program” (Team J). Universally, all of the teachers and teams expressed the sentiment that motivation and setting goals needs to improve. One teacher from Team K stated, “We need to value and recognize more student success!” Another teacher noted, “Our assemblies are still discipline based. We need to honor success! But, there is a lack of student motivation, so we need more reward assemblies” (Team H).

Most of the discussion time for this component was spent talking about extra-curricular activities and their connection to student motivation. One teacher from Team I stated, “I think extra-curricular activities is one of the most influential elements of academic success.” However, in order to achieve this success, one teacher noted,

A connection between academics and extra-curricular activities is critical.

Students who are failing academically should not be rewarded by being allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities. But this should be done on a weekly or daily basis to keep them motivated. Kids shouldn't just be kicked off a team.

(Team J).

Another teacher stated, "Extra-curricular activities are *huge* for the kids. Our RAP program is has really expanded during the last two years. It can really help with achieving higher state test scores" (Team K). The RAP after-school program is an important component of extra-curricular activities at Baker, and several teachers discussed how much this program has evolved in recent years. Teachers expressed enthusiasm for the program, making comments such as: "RAP is much stronger now than in the past" (Team J). "The after-school RAP program today is awesome!" (Team M). "RAP is an asset to our school community" (Team K). "RAP is very positive!" (Team J). "RAP has changed the tone of the school. Kids used to be wild, undisciplined, and unorganized, but the new RAP is much better. Kids are more excited to come to school" (Team H). "After-school RAP program is great motivation for our students" (Team K). Despite these strengths, teachers also discussed how after-school programs at Baker could be improved. "RAP is not here for homework, so they don't really help the kids who don't do their homework" (Team J). "Our athletes are required to do grade checks. But when they get Ds and Fs, I still see them playing. We need consistency on this policy" (Team H). Most teachers do feel that "We need more extra-curricular activities!" (Team I). Teachers felt that Baker's extended program of extra-curricular after-school activities has profoundly impacted the school's culture. One teacher from Team K noted,

“I think our students are much more engaged with school now that we have an after-school program. After school, kids are taught how important school time is, and that motivates the students.” Teachers emphasized that the most important aspect of after-school programs are their connection to academic success. As one teacher noted, “The RAP after-school program has helped us as a school build student motivation” (Team K).

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. The site administrators at Adler discussed six factors related to school and classroom environment. The first area discussed was academic success or the state API score. The principal has seen this school grow rapidly since it opened five years ago. “We’re basically at school at 50% [passing at acceptable levels]...several years ago, that was unthinkable.” However, Adler’s administrators continue to set higher goals for this school. “I think we’re trying to raise the envelope about academic success.” The vice principal mentioned that one way for teachers to help one another is allow them more time to work together, both as members of a team and members of departments.

The administrators also discussed the relationships among teachers. The principal was very happy with the relationship the teachers have built at his school, but he worries continually about maintaining these good relationships as the stakes for achieving school academic success continue to rise each year. The principal expressed concern that teachers might burn out, noting that their jobs are challenging “because the school year is such a long, hard journey. There are many ups and downs throughout the year. It is difficult for teachers to maintain high levels of consistency.”

The principal was also very happy with the relationships between the teachers and parents at his school. “Our relationship with the parents is very good, despite the

problems that develop every once-in-a-while.” The assistant principal agreed with this sentiment, also noting that teachers have strong relationships with students as well, noting that students feel safe with their teachers.

In the interview process, the principal linked the factor of teachers’ relationships with students with student motivation. One administrator stated that middle school “is all about motivation. I see lots of student motivation around here provided by the teachers.” The administrators noted that teachers’ personalities help to engage students in the learning process. “For the most part, if you teach kids with respect, you’ll win them over and motivate them to learn.” Offering evidence of the positive relationships between teachers and students, administrators noted that Adler graduates often return to the school, either to visit former teachers or to help teachers as part of high school community service projects. The administrators also noted that students at Adler have also developed very good relationships among one another as well.

The principal concluded the discussion of this component with his thoughts about his role as the principal of a middle school and how it relates to the school and classroom environment. “I feel that an administrator is like the conductor of an orchestra...one has to harmonize these many instruments, notes and tones that are playing at the same time.”

Site administrators’ responses from Baker Middle School. The site administrators at Baker Middle School discussed five factors of the school and classroom environment component in their interview session. The first category that the site administrators discussed was academic success and state API scores. Administrators expressed pride in the school’s academic success expressed confidence about predicted improvements in the future. However, the principal emphasized that “failure is not an

option.” Administrators shared that Baker teachers are implementing this same belief with their students, noting,

Many teachers force kids to study and re-take a test so they can succeed. We now have lunchtime tutoring, special tutoring time during intervention class, etc. This is new at this school. So many teachers never used to do this.

The administrators also discussed relationships among various stakeholders at the school. Both the principal and the assistant principal felt that “There is a really good relationship at this school among teachers to teachers, and teachers with students!” The assistant principal also noted, “Teachers have a great relationship with one another. The feeling for faculty with students is also quite good...Teachers have the best relationship with students...the best in the last 10 years!”

Baker Middle School administrators expressed enthusiasm about extra-curricular activities at their school. “[John] is the one who does such a great job with school extra-curricular activities. He is the RAP coordinator. He is always trying great new things. The kids are rally interested in after-school activities!” The administrators stated that they are looking for ways to improve teacher participation in extra-curricular activities, “But we are still lacking teacher involvement with extra-curricular activities. This is such a great way for the kids to get to know the teachers even more...this is something we would like to work on.”

Site administrators stated that growth is needed in the area of student motivation at Baker. The principal stated, “Student motivation is something we really need to work on. I see student momentum declining over the last 4 years. So many kids are complacent and sit quietly, but do nothing.” The assistant principal shared that “A

teacher who has a knack for motivating students is [Ms. Johnson]. She gets kids to show up for so much science work. Why is it that the kids do so much for her? She is good at sparking their enthusiasm.”

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School.

Teachers and site administrators at Adler discussed six common factors for this component: academic success, relationships among faculty, relationships with parents, relationships with students, extra-curricular activities, and student motivation and high goals. Teachers and administrators alike shared overwhelmingly positive comments about these factors.

The first topic was Adler’s high API score of 800. Both administrators and teachers expressed pride for their hard work and reflected on how they will maintain their success; administrators expressed concern that teachers might become burned out in the process. Teachers and administrators also shared positive sentiments about faculty relationships at their school, among each other and with both students and parents. All respondents expressed pride in these positive relationships; some shared that Adler graduates often return to the school for visits or to participate in volunteer work. Linking extra-curricular activities with motivating students is also important to both teachers and site administrators. Teachers and administrators agree that extra-curricular activities held during and after school hours can be very motivating to students, but such activities must be linked with academic standards so that students must do well academically in order to participate in their extra-curricular activities.

Comparison of site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School. Both teachers and site administrators at Baker Middle School addressed the same factors in

their discussion of the school and classroom environment component: academic success, relationships among faculty, relationships with students, extra-curricular activities, and student motivation and high goals.

Both teachers and site administrators expressed confidence that their students can continue to maintain and improve their high API score, extending this growth into high school and college. There was also a consensus among the teachers and administrators regarding the faculty members' relationships with various stakeholders. Both teachers and site administrators expressed the same believe that teachers have good relationships with one another, as well as with their students

Both teachers and site administrators also discussed extra-curricular activities. Both have seen growth in this area, particularly with the development of the RAP after-school program. Both also see extra-curricular activities as a successful tool for student motivation. However, teachers expressed a need to integrate extra-curricular activities more with academic activities, for example, so that earning the privilege to participate on a sports team after school can be an incentive to do well on homework.

Comparison of Adler and Baker Middle Schools. The teams and administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools discussed many common factors of the component of school and classroom environment. One such topic was relationships among teachers. Respondents at both schools felt their teachers maintained close relationships. Three teams at Baker even mentioned how this relationship continues after school and on weekends. Respondents at both schools also felt that their teachers had positive relationships with their students. However, teachers at Baker noted that teacher-student relationships could still be improved.

Teachers at Adler Middle School shared that they view parents as an important part of the team that works to pave the road for student success. While teachers at Adler feel they have successful relationships with parents, they also discussed ways to build and improve this partnership. Parent relationship was not a core topic of discussion by the teams at Baker Middle School as it was discussed by only one of the seven teams. However, the responses of the teachers of the team regarding teacher-parent relationship were positive.

Both schools also emphasized the importance of setting high goals for maintaining and improving API scores and motivating students to achieve this success. Respondents at both Adler and Baker discussed the need to increase their ways of motivating students throughout the year, possibly by recognizing and honoring student success in new and different ways.

The most time spent discussing the factors of the component regarding school and classroom environment was regarding extra-curricular activities. Teachers at both schools realize the importance of how extra-curricular activities can help motivate students to succeed academically. The district RAP program today is considered important and motivational at both schools, especially when compared with previous years. However, teachers at both schools still emphasize the importance of linking such things as participation in sports and clubs after school with grades and doing homework. Teachers recommend working with RAP to build this link between state test scores and extra-curricular activities.

| Credentialed Staff Response to 5: School & Classroom Environment | | |
|---|--|---|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Academic success | There were positive comments by all teams who are proud for where we are academically. We as a school team, both certificated and classified have work together for the academic success of our students | There were positive comments from all teams to say we have made significant academic advancements the last few years. Need to celebrate our success! |
| Relationships Among Faculty | Positive comments from every team through all grade levels were very positive...this relationship includes the classified staff! | Of the 4 of 8 teams that discussed this topic, 100% made positive comments about our faculty relationship is good and has improved significantly over the last few years. One comments said there are more stable relationships with Grade 6 teams than 7th and Grade 8 teams. |
| Relationship with Parents | 3/7 teams responded. 3/4 responses reflected very positive comments, but it can improve as parents become more involved in the academic success of their child. | |
| Relationship with Students | 4/7 teams responded, but 100% of responses reflected very high positive topic in team discussion. Depth of positive relationship does vary from team to team. This good relationship continues as shown by the number of students who return from high school to visit. | 4/8 teams responded. 100% of responses said the relationships vary greatly from team to team. Most say relationship is good. Most express the need to recognize much more often all forms of student success. This is an important means to build a more positive relationship. |
| Extra-curricular Activities | 4/7 teams responded. 100% made comments about how RAP program was mediocre at beginning, but has improved much...and can still improve much. Need system to communicate RAP with teachers and the learning process. Need more extra-curricular activities to link with the academic work of the student. | 4/8 teams responded, but 100% said RAP program has improved greatly the last 2 years. Need more extra-curricular activities as a motivational tool for the students, but we must link activities with academics on a daily or weekly basis. Those not doing HW should be held back. |
| Student Motivation & High Goals | 4/7 teams responded, 100% with positive comments, but 50% also had feedback. Said we set high expectations for all, however student motivation is very low. Need more student motivation (i.e. extra-curricular activities) and link academics with such activities | 7/8 teams responded, 100% with positive feedback, but also 3/7 with critical feedback to say motivating students was started recently and has shown positive results. Need to motivate students and set high goals for all. School assemblies should be about motivation, not discipline. |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 29: Factors of "Component #5: School & Classroom Environment" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | Response to 5: School & Classroom Environment |
|--|--|--|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Academic Success | Entire staff is proud of academic success...is a result of setting high goals for students and excellent relationships among teams and departments. | Staff at Baker is very proud of their significant academic advancement over the last few years and are excited about continuing to real goals. |
| Relationships Among Faculty | Very positive relationships among teachers. Administrators continually think about teacher burn-out. | Relationship among teachers and staff is excellent. |
| Relationship with Parents | Entire staff has established and maintains a very good relationship with the parents. | |
| Relationship with Students | Teachers have a very positive relationships with their students. Administrators link this with their motivating the students in a fun and positive way. Administrators also believe they have a good relationship with students as they are constantly seen around campus. | Relationship among teachers and student is very good. Improves with more extra-curricular activities. |
| Extra-curricular Activities | Student motivation is through the academics with the teachers and the extra-curricular activities out of the classroom. We have made a significant start in this area, but can still improve. | Student motivation is through the academics with the teachers and the extra-curricular activities out of the classroom. We have made a significant start in this area, but can still improve. |
| Student Motivation & High Goals | Middle schools are all about motivating students to learn. We have made a significant start in this area, but still have much more room to expand. | We are setting high goals for our students. Now, student motivation is something we need to really work on. We need to have incentives for teachers who are very good at motivating their students in the classroom and expand it school-wide. |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 30: Factors of "Component #5: School & Classroom Environment" discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked

Once again, the conclusion for the component of School and Classroom Environment is that most people, both teachers and administrators, at both Adler and Baker middle schools agree with their feedback. The similarities are: both feel they have made significant academic improvement the last few years; both feel they have a positive relationship with their students; both agree that they have good extra-curricular activities

programs at their schools, but both also feel they need improvements in linking the programs with academics; both feel they set high expectations for their students, but that motivating students can be difficult and would like to learn more ways to motivate all of their students.

Component 6: Professional development. Through the review of literature, the two most common elements that are part of professional development and thus served as the prompts for this component are purpose and choice. For this component, the time for discussion was limited to six minutes with a time of two minutes added for quick-write at the end of discussion. Some teachers at Baker Middle School submitted text on paper or via the website created for this survey.

Teacher responses from Adler Middle School. Both factors of the component about professional development were discussed at Adler Middle School. There was a universal thought about the purpose and choice regarding professional development at this district and school.

There was little support among the teachers across the board for the purpose of professional development as it is currently being operated. Teachers believe that part of the reason for the operation that they do not support has to do with school finance. “Due to budget cuts, we have fewer opportunities for professional development” (Team G). “It’s said that it’s nonexistent” (Team E).

A common remark throughout all teams was made regarding organization of professional development at the district level. “There is not follow through when the district has their 1-day a month professional development conference. There is no accountability” (Team C). “There is too much planning on the fly. What is needed is

more strategic planning that could chart a better outcome” (Team B). Teachers repeated comments about the need for consistency. “To give teachers helpful tools to use in educating students, we need to stick with projects long enough for it to become a real part of a teacher’s repertoire” (Team D). “Sometimes, district programs are fine, other times, they are not. Sometimes, we just talk about a program, but we do nothing about it. Too often, there is not follow-up” (Team F).

Teachers also provided thoughts on other options for professional development, especially when keeping in mind the lack of finance. “Teachers at a site could have mini-professional development seminar. We can still have professional development without the money” (Team A). “Ask teachers what their strengths and talents are...each teacher could lead different workshops” (Team C). Other benefits could develop with the use of mini-conferences. “Such mini-conferences could also help with staff building a great relationship” (Team D). “Our principal is good at not wasting our time when he can with bad professional development that comes to us” (Team E).

There was also a common theme among teachers regarding the factor of choice and professional development. “There is not choice at our school” (Team F). “We need more chances for teacher input for school site days” (Team G). “Professional development would be beneficial if faculty was allowed to select what suits their needs” (Team E). Teachers also gave examples of what they feel could be useful topics for development at the present time. “We could still use help with the SmartBoard” (Team A). “We would like opportunities to enhance our skills such as the use of videos, etc.” (Team B). Teachers have confidence in their colleagues in sharing their expertise. “There are many things that other teachers do that I could learn” (Team A). Teachers

also shared the thought of having more development by disciplines. “We need to create choice for different disciplines” (Team E).

Time is valuable for all educators. Teachers feel that their development should be in areas that directly relate to their focus. “We would like to have more choices that are pertinent to what is needed” (Team B). “I have to sit through a language arts in-service when I teach another subject...this is frustrating and time consuming” (Team D).

Teacher responses from Baker Middle School. All teams at Baker Middle School also openly discussed the two factors of professional development: purpose and choice.

There is overall dissatisfaction with the current operational system of professional development. “There is no purpose with professional development” (Team L).

“Professional development is a waste of valuable time” (Team N). “This is my fourth year here. I like professional development, but I don’t think we have had the opportunities to improve. We just rehash the same old things over and over” (Team M). Like Adler, the theme of consistency is valued as a need for educational expansion. “I wish that we could follow everything through all the way before we take something else on” (Team K). Oftentimes, many teachers feel that topics chosen for development do not apply to them. “Professional development is usually mandated to do something that I feel doesn’t help me as a teacher” (Team I). Many teachers gave examples of possible topics for professional development. Several topics relate to the system of common assessment that is practiced at Baker Middle School. “Our school is focused on streamlining this year. We constantly meet to review our common assessments that are ministered every 6 weeks. We could easily focus on this area for our school professional development” (Team K).

Throughout all teams, teachers expressed their impression of their involvement in professional development. “We don’t have much choice for other parts of professional development” (Team M). “We’ve never been given any choice for professional development. People haven’t found out what the teachers feel is needed for professional development” (Team L). “We would like to choose our development. We know what we need!” (Team J).

Site administrators’ responses from Adler Middle School. At Adler Middle School, the site administrators briefly discussed the two factors of professional development—purpose and choice.

Said the principal, “I think professional development is run as ‘one-size-fits all’, but it is more important that we make it more meaningful for what the *teachers* want.” In each month, Thursday is a minimum day in this district. On such days, two Thursdays a month are teacher days when teachers can use the time to grade and plan. One Thursday a month is school site day when the principal can plan what the teachers as a group will engage in or perform. One Thursday a month is district professional development day. The principal does perceive the teachers’ sentiments of district professional development. “I believe the teachers see the district p.d. day as forced days...I see people who want to get out.”

The principal also expressed his belief on the factor of teacher choice and the perception of the teachers for learning. “Teachers learn from one another...it is important that we work in this way.” But he also understands the importance of time and not wasting the time of professional educators. “You have to give teachers time...if you take time away from teachers with constant meetings, etc., then it won’t work.”

Site administrators' responses from Baker Middle School. Like the teachers, the site administrators at Baker Middle School discussed both factors of this component.

The principal shared his thought about professional development at this school by stating, “ I think this is one of our weakest areas. To continue to grow, we need to focus on one or two things, not a multitude of things.” But the thought of how development in different areas with different teachers was also shared. “Math teachers would like help with putting writing in the classroom. This is what should be the topic for professional development.”

Regarding the factor of purpose, the assistant principal stated “The principal and I are focused this year to streamline what we as a site already have in place. As a program improvement school, most things that we work on are areas in which we have to work on, but now we focus on teams working on each element in their own way. Also, in streamlining, we are trying to take less time in group meetings and let teachers focus more on how they handle each domain.”

Regarding choice, the site administrators feel that as a program improvement school, they don't have much effort to open the door for choice. But teacher choice in development is nonetheless imperative. Stated the principal, “ Teachers need to be more involved in the process of establishing what learning topics will be implemented, because it is the teachers who know where they need to develop to teach the students. The district should be open and responsive to what the schools need. It shouldn't be top down. Establishing professional development should be with the teachers.”

The principal also shared his belief that development can be about more than content. It can also be about collaboration among content areas. “ Another part of

professional development is an area where I don't believe we do well...collaboration. We could really improve on learning how teachers can help one another." The school is already involving professional development in a way that is easy to plan and economically affordable. "This year, we started very short periods of time when teachers observe other teachers as a form of professional development. Teachers look at data and learn that one teacher was good at teaching an important concept. Several teachers would like to spend 15-30 minutes observing how the teacher instructs this lesson. We take the students from the 2-3 teachers who would like to observe their colleague into the cafeteria where kids have time to work on a group project. It does not involve an entire period of time, so it does not involve substitute teachers. And the teachers who are observed and do the observing do so at their own request. We just started it this year. It has become a way of doing business where teachers can help other teachers, but it doesn't take incredible time or money!"

Findings from administrator and teachers from Adler Middle School. Site administrators and teachers agreed on both factors of professional development. The purpose of district professional development is not conducive to actual sincere advancement in learning elements of instruction. Teachers and administrators commented that too often the professional development plan that has been established by district personnel is set to cover a skill that is not greatly needed by the two middle schools. This district is comprised of seven elementary schools and two middle schools. Also a common thought is that teachers should have more choice in what areas of development are invoked.

Findings from site administrators and teachers from Baker Middle School.

While both teachers and site administrators discussed purpose, the topic was discussed with a different area of focus. Teachers discussed the district form of professional development and how they feel the time is not well structured. Teachers also briefly mentioned how their school this year is streamlining techniques to focus on core topics such as school wide assessment. The spotlight of the site administrators interview focused on staff development related to school goals. Both teachers and site administrators discussed how there has been little area for teacher choice on topics for future professional development.

Findings from Adler and Baker Middle Schools. Teachers at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools overwhelmingly expressed their thought that as the system is currently organized, professional development is time that is not spent wisely. Their comments reflect the thought that teacher choice on areas they feel are important for their development would benefit their own academic enrichment, particularly during this time of lack of funds in the public school system.

The component of Professional Development has a conclusion much like the other components. The teachers at both Adler and Baker agree that professional development at their schools is not productive for working to improve the academic achievement of their schools. Site administrators at both schools concur. This involves many too many sessions that are not followed through to a conclusion. The same agreement also applies when discussing teacher choice for topics for professional development. Teachers feel like they not involved in choosing what are important topics to their development and would like to have more input for such choices.

| Credentialed Staff | | | Response to 6: Professional Development | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Topic | Adler Summary | Baker Summary | | | |
| Purpose | The thoughts about professional development were many and universal: 1. p.d. does not support where we actually need to grow; 2. p.d. is handled by the district...should be by the schools; 3. no accountability for p.d.; 4. too many different p.d. projects with none that follow-through. | The thoughts about professional development were many and universal: 1. p.d. does not support where we actually need to grow; 2. p.d. is handled by the district...should be by the schools; 3. no accountability for p.d.; 4. too many different p.d. projects with none that follow-through. | | | |
| Choice | Teachers currently do not have a choice on what should be part of p.d. We need more teacher input for p.d. | Teachers currently do not have a choice on what should be part of p.d. We need more teacher input for p.d. | | | |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. | | | |

Figure 31. Factors of "Component 6: Professional Development" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | | Response to 6: Professional Development | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Topic | Adler Summary | Baker Summary | | | |
| Purpose | Unfortunately, professional development is "one-size-fits-all"...it is more meaningful to provide what teachers want. When there are district p.d. days, people can be seen wanting to get out. | P.D. is one of our weakest links. We need to focus on one or two things at a time, not a multitude of things. | | | |
| Choice | Teachers learn more from one-another. An important element of p.d. is to provide sessions where teachers teach teachers at our site. It is also important to focus on just a few elements at a time. | As a P.I. School, we know exactly where we need focus, so our choice is less conclusive. However, p.d. should be done more on a school level than a district level. It shouldn't be top down. | | | |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. | | | |

Figure 32: Factors of "Component 6: Professional Development" discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked

Question 7: Leadership and decision making. There are six factors found

through the review of literature for the seventh component. These seven factors are:

faculty decision-making; teacher empowerment; trust; support; vision and mission;

budget. For this component, the time for discussion was limited to eight minutes with a time of two minutes added for quick-write at the end of discussion. Also, many teachers at Baker Middle School submitted their response to the factors using written notes or text sent to a website created for this study.

Teacher response from Adler Middle School. At Adler Middle School, the factors discussed by the teams are categories that directly integrate with one another. At Adler, the five of the six factors that were discussed by teams are: faculty decision-making; teacher empowerment; trust; support; budget. The first two factors—faculty decision-making and teacher empowering—directly relate to one another. The two other important factors discussed are trust and support. The factor of budget was also discussed by two-thirds of the teams. The topic of vision and mission was not discussed. All teams at all grade levels made positive comments about the four main factors discussed during the eight minutes.

Teachers at Adler Middle School felt that they have an influence in the two factors of making decisions and being empowered in what will happen at their school. “Teachers have the ability to influence decision making at this school” “Teachers feel empowered at this school” (Team B). This feeling of power is directly related to the school principal. “The principal respects teachers and takes our input seriously” (Team C). “He is also strong on getting input from the teachers. We feel like we are a part of the decision-making at this school, even if we say things where we disagree” (Team F). The principal also uses different tactics to engage teachers in decision-making. “The principal at every staff meeting throws different techniques out and lets teachers and teams decide on what method they feel is best” (Team C). Part of this sharing of power

involved the leader knowing that there are different ways to reach the same destination. “The principal allows us to choose our own path to get to the same goal. The staff buys into his focus and then we strategize in grade levels or departments to implement his focus” (Team D). Being open to the thoughts of others involved communication and being open. “The faculty is encouraged to make decisions and communicate those decisions to administration” (Team D). “Teachers have a lot of freedom at this school to make decisions and choose strategies” (Team E). Being open to a staff also involves how professionals are served. “The principal and vice principal treat us as professionals. They are always approachable and value our input” (Team G).

Trust was another factor fervently discussed by all teams at all grade levels. “The staff at this school has confidence in the leadership of this school” (Team B). “He trusts teachers on what they are doing in the classroom...he doesn’t question them!” (Team A). Teachers expressed that it is because of trust that one can lead. “The principal leads us and we follow because we trust him” (Team C). Trust also expands in both directions. “Trust is established at this school...we have the most important trust of our administration and they of us” (Team E). “Teachers are respected and trusted” (Team D). There is also a common goal with a principal and teachers. “The principal trusts that we’re professionals working hard for the kids” (Team G).

Teachers across the board by teams and grade levels made positive comments about the topic of support and their site administrators. Many comments are about how teachers see their leader as one who supports them. “He (principal) sets-up what is needed for us to succeed, but he also gives great support” (Team B). “Support is there in so many ways” (Team C). Support can be given in many different ways. Our principal

“...is good at sensing the rhythms of the staff. He knows when to push, and when to hold back” (Team F). “He cancels meetings when they aren’t needed...he is quite intuitive” (Team E). “Our administration is particularly helpful in dealing with parents of difficult children” (Team B). However, a focal point of education professionals is being served. “The principal brings it all back...we’re here for the kids!” (Team A). Support from a leader is not just for what happens in the classroom. “The principal cares about us both professionally and personally!” (Team D). “The principal cares about each and every person at this school as an individual” (Team C).

The topic briefly mentioned by only two teams in their interview session is budget and finance. Teachers’ comments on this subject relate to trust and support and refer to the principal. “I don’t now if we’re a part of the budget process, but the principal gets us all to feel we are a part of it...we’re valuable in the decision-making” (Team C). Another teacher commented, “Our principal is a wizard with the budget. He gets money for us and makes it match the goals of the school” (Team B). This involves the skill of managing funds. “The principal is not wasteful...he is very prudent” (Team A). “The principal scrutinizes the numbers very closely...he monitors them” (Team E). The principal also manages to keep open during these tough economic times. “Our principal doesn’t keep the budget cuts a mystery. He is open and honest with topics, but he also often times finds ways to fund things that are being cut” (Team E).

Teacher response from Baker Middle School. The team interviews at Baker Middle School focused on four of the targets of the seventh component about leadership and decision-making: faculty decision-making; teacher empowerment; trust; support. A

new topic regarding follow-through was added as this was a common point of discussion during the interview sessions at Baker Middle School.

The topics of faculty decision-making and the empowering of teachers are closely related. Regarding both topics, five of the eight teams responded, all with positive comments, but also with constructive feedback. Of the five responses, three were from the Grade 6 teams. Only one was from the Grade 7 and only one from the Grade 8 teams. In fact, there were only two responses from the Grade 7 teams on all of the targets in this component. The reply for lack of discussion on this component from the Grade 7 teachers is because there are too many who are not tenured, so there is the feeling of it being improper to make any comments to this subject.

For the five teams that did respond, the dialogue was both positive and constructive regarding being part of decision-making and empowerment. “I think we have many opportunities for input and the administration tries to be supportive” (Team H). “The administrators are open to new ideas which is great!” (Team I). Such confidence in their leader for involving teachers in the decision-making process can lead to an overall feeling in the school community. “Morale is important...we have success at this school!” (Team K). While all of the teams that responded to this component had positive feedback, there were also a few individuals who replied with opposing views. “There are many decisions being mandated without the voice of the teachers. We are not empowered at all” (Team L). “There is a lot of talk about doing what teachers bring-up, but not much is done” (Team K).

Comments regarding the factors of trust and support were also continuously interrelated in discussion. For these two factors, five of eight teams that responded,

however there was no response from Grade 7 teams for these topics. Trust is another factor that was discussed with positive feedback from 100% of the teams that responded, but also individuals from three of the teams that responded with constructive feedback. “I feel like the principal trusts me!” (Team I). “They [administrators] trust the teachers...they listen to us. But they don’t listen to us enough. However, it is getting better all the time” (Team M). There is also great trust from teacher to teacher. “The staff at this school is very open and I feel like we are a happy family. I trust everyone here, but at other schools, it has been different” (Team J). “I don’t think many teachers at our site trust the guidance of administration” (Team I). “You can’t trust administration to follow through on what was instigated” (Team N). Many of the constructive comments dealt with trust with district administration. “We have very little trust for the district” (Team J). Many comments referred to the feeling that Baker has been given attitude from the district, especially since the sister school Adler opened. Teachers with many years of experience at Baker over the years shared the feeling that their school is like a child not accepted by parents. Now that Adler has opened, the feeling is district gives priority to Baker. “Our lack of trust in the district totally affects our morale and attitude” (Team K).

Support is the target that is also linked with trust during discussion that provided 100% feedback from the responses as well as individual constructive dialogue provided by teachers from Grade 8 teams. “We are very comfortable with our principal and vice principal” (Team N). “There is an open door policy with our principal and v.p....we can go in and talk with them at any time” (Team M). “We have an open door policy with our principal and vice principal” (Team L). Teachers also share how administrators support them in different ways. “I feel supported by administration, both professionally and

personally” (Team J). Administrators can also be supportive in different ways on campus. “We get good support from administration. Administrators help our team with supplies and time for whatever we ask when they can” (Team J). But there was also constructive feedback as part of the dialogue. There were those who felt like the teachers were not getting appropriate support. “There is limited support for teachers. Some feel they are on their own” (Team K).

A topic that was common with all 6 and Grade 8 teams also emerged. The common dynamic is lack of follow-through. These comments were from 100% of the teams that created this as a topic of discussion during their interview session. This topic was discussed by all of the Grade 6 teams and one Grade 8 team. There were expressions of how there is the feeling that their administrators are overloaded with work. “I used to work at a middle school with 1,800 students. We had six administrators. That works out to one administrator for every 300 students. But at our school, we have one administrator for every 450 students. They are overstaffed!” (Team K). As other teachers shared, “I feel supported, but I also feel they are overwhelmed” (Team J). “I sometimes get the feeling that they are like chickens running around with their heads cut off, but only because they are overloaded, not because they aren’t supportive” (Team M). To continue to express this hardship, one teacher remarked, “I see interaction between teachers and administration. I think it is adequate, but I don’t know if they have the time to follow things all the way through” (Team N). It is for these repeated comments under the component of leadership and decision-making that the factor of lack of follow-through by school administration that this factor was added for Baker Middle School.

Site administrators' response from Adler Middle School. Four factors of this seventh component about leadership and decision-making were discussed by the site administrators at Adler Middle School in the interview process. The factors of faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment have been linked together.

The first factor involves with the topic of faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment. The principal explained the importance of teacher empowerment. "If people aren't a part of making decisions, there will not be enough cohesiveness." With this premise, he sees his role as a principal is to "...create a climate where people feel empowered, that they are a part of making decisions. But he does still see his own role in teacher empowerment. "There are still a lot of teachers who want you [the principal] to make the decisions."

Regarding the factor of trust, the principal said "You've got to trust people." And as the principal, this trust means that you "...hire the best people and let them do their things...hire them, and get out of the way!"

Site administrators at Adler also know the importance of their supporting the staff in the teaching process. The support of administration relates to the other factors of leadership and decision-making. The principal supports his staff when he "...gets out of the way." Another part of supporting the teachers is creating "...an environment where people feel empowered."

Site administrators' response from Baker Middle School. In the component of leadership and decision-making, four factors were discussed: faculty decision-making; teacher empowerment; trust; support. Dialogue regarding faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment are linked closely together.

The first two factors of faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment are closely related. Both are important elements of teacher involvement at this school. The principal first shared his belief on how teachers are involved with the important educational factors at Baker Middle School. “ Our trimester maps, instructional strategies, scheduling, looping...the faculty is involved with all of these factors.” But for this to happen, confidence and faith must exist. “There is a great amount of trust. Many experienced teachers were burned from previous administrators, but some great changes have taken place over the last four years.”

The assistant principal shared this same belief. “I think that the teachers who are interested in being empowered are empowered. We let them go with it. We almost never say no!”

The principal shared how these feelings of confidence and trust are now crossing over content areas and grade level among the staff. “ With many extra-curricular activities like our trip to Washington, D.C. for the presidential inauguration, many teachers are working together, teachers who generally wouldn’t have had the opportunity to do so based on teaming and departments. This is one of the many areas where we have a strong faculty at this school.”

In the area of trust and support, site administrators described how this mission could be proposed to teachers by more than the school administrators. “I hope our teachers feel supported. I spend much time working to support the teachers at our school,” said the assistant principal. But at the same time, the assistant principal remarked, “I wish the teachers would support each other a little more. By this, I mean teachers supporting one another from grade level to grade level or department to

department. We feel we already have great support within many teams. This is an area to work on at our school, but it is coming along.”

Findings from site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. The factors among the site administrators regarding leadership at a school are the same common factors that teachers expressed. The dialogue presented the thoughts of teachers being part of the decision-making process and being empowered in the continuous development of their school. Also important is the factor of trust. But trust does work two ways...teachers must trust the administration while administration trusts the faculty. At Adler Middle School, this two-way street of trust is shared by both sides. The same applies to support. Teachers expressed the thoughts that they get support from their site administrators. Site administrators expressed their feeling that there is such a positive, productive staff of teachers at Adler that administrators need only support them and get out of their way when the educators take-off on their journey.

Findings from site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School. Both the teachers and site administrators at Baker Middle School discussed the same topics in their independent interview sessions. The factors of discussion were: faculty decision-making; teacher empowerment; trust; support. The teachers also added a new topic for discussion—lack of follow-through.

Both teachers and administrators discussed the two factors of faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment. Both feel that the teachers at Baker have a foot in this decision-making process. While all teams that participated in this factor had positive remarks, there were several individuals with constructive feedback.

Both teachers and administrators also discussed the factors of trust and support. Site administrators and teachers feel that teachers get some support from the administration, but administrators also hope that support of teachers can grow by teachers supporting themselves by their contact with their colleagues in other grade levels and other departments. Both sides also agree that trust is present, and is a two-way street among teachers and administrators. But, as the principal concluded, “The final lens is what is the best interest for the students? How does what we are doing affect their learning?”

However, while there is trust and support of the administrators by the staff, a common point of discussion by teachers across the Grade 6 and Grade 8 teams is how administration does not seem to have the opportunity to complete many projects that were started. “I sometimes get the feeling that they are like chickens running around with their heads cut off, but only because they are overloaded, not because they aren’t supportive” (Team M).

Findings at Adler and Baker Middle Schools. At both Adler and Baker middle schools, teachers feel that they are part of the decision-making process and empowerment at their own schools. Both faculty and administrators also shared thoughts of trust and support by administrators for their staff. However, teachers at Baker Middle School also feel that their administrators are overwhelmed with work and that a possible cause is improper staffing of administration at their school. As such, they feel that at times their administration unfortunately must act “...like a chicken with its head cut-off,” but confirmed the support of their administrative staff by concluding with the statement “...not because they aren’t supportive” (Team M).

| Credentialed Staff Response to 7: Leadership & Decision-Making | | |
|---|---|--|
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| Faculty Decision-Making | 5 of 7 teams responded, all with positive results. "Teachers have the ability to influence decision-making at this school." The principal is productive on getting input from the teachers. | <i>With teacher empowerment:</i> 5 of 8 teams responded, all 5 with positive input. Several constructive comments. Some comments: "I believe we are part of the decision-making process." Others: Faculty limited in making decisions. |
| Teacher Empowerment | 7 of 7 teams responded, all with positive feedback. "Teachers feel empowered at this school." | <i>With faculty decision-making:</i> 5 of 8 teams responded, all 5 with positive input. Several constructive comments. One response: Principal empowers teachers to begin new projects (i.e. looping). Another response: Administrators overloaded...teachers need to be more involved. |
| Trust | 7 of 7 teams responded, all with positive feedback. Administrators support teachers. "Teachers are respected and trusted" by the administrators. | <i>With support:</i> 6 of 8 teams responded, all 6 with positive input. Several constructive comments. Some responses: Trust is valuable...there is two-way trust. Others: "...They are like chickens running around with their heads cut off...overloaded." As a result, there is little completion to what has been started. |
| Support | 7 of 7 teams responded, all with positive comments: "...he gives us great support." "He cancels meetings when they aren't needed." | <i>With trust:</i> 6 of 8 teams responded, all 6 with positive input. Some comments: "I feel support from administration...they help our team with supplies and time for whatever we ask." Others: There is limited support for teachers... administrators too busy and we are on our own. |
| Budget | Only 2 individual comments from separate teams: The principal asks for feedback regarding school funds. The principal gets money for us and makes it match the goals of the school. Principal and open and honest with monetary topics. | |
| Lack of follow-through | | Response by all Grade 6 and one Grade 8 team. "We tend to start things, but never finish." Follow-through on what we start is very limited! Intentions of administrators are good, but they are overwhelmed. |
| Words in red were subjects added to factors during discussion. | ORANGE background signifies that the majority of responses were different. | |

Figure 33. Factors of "Component 7: Leadership and Decision-Making" discussed by teachers at both school sites as checked

| Site Administrators | | | Response to 7: Leadership & Decision-Making | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Topic | Adler Summary | Baker Summary | | |
| Faculty Decision-Making | Administrators feel they "...create a climate where people feel empowered, that they are part of making decisions." | Teachers are part of the decision-making process that has resulted in new teaching techniques applied over the last 2 years. | | |
| Teacher Empowerment | Administrators feel they empower teachers to make decisions on what is best for the academic growth of the students. | Teachers have been intricately involved in the entire process of new teaching techniques applied over the last 2 years: trimester maps, scheduling, looping, etc. | | |
| Trust | Administrators show their trust in the professionals by hiring them and letting them teach in their own style. Administrators gain trust by empowering teachers. | Trust is a 2-way street as is shown by empowering all in different elements of making decisions. | | |
| Support | Administrators say that Adler has great teachers, so administrators stridently support them and get out of their way. | "I support via looping...I hope to provide an opportunity where members of this great staff who have great skills can support teachers whose skills are have not developed." | | |
| | | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. | |

Figure 34: Factors of "Component 7: Leadership and Decision-Making" discussed by administrators at both school sites as checked.

The final component of Leadership and Decision Making is the one component where differences in the opinions of the teachers of Adler and Baker middle schools were found. The majority of the teachers at Adler Middle School feel they are empowered in the decision-making process at their school. They also feel that their site administrators support them and that the feeling of trust is bilateral. At Baker Middle School, these feelings are the same, but there are also individuals who expressed constructive feedback. As such, the feelings of trust and support by and for the site administrators can also be limited. At Baker, a common thread of a lack of follow-through by administration to start, but not finish, many tasks was the new topic added to this component. The positive remarks at Baker came from all of the 6 and Grade 8 teams that responded to these

prompts, but there were also individuals at every team who shared constructive feedback regarding the same factors. The grade 7 teachers at Baker Middle School did not respond to most questions on this component.

Next three steps to continue improvement of student academic success. The team interview sessions concluded with a reflection on what teams and their teachers believe should be the next three steps that their school takes to continue the academic growth of their students. For this concluding topic, the time for discussion was limited to three minutes with a time of one minute added for quick-write at the end of discussion. Some professionals from Baker Middle School submitted their responses on paper or via the website established for this research. The components listed for each school are the three components with the most selection. They are not placed in order of selection.

Teacher response from Adler Middle School. At Adler Middle School, there were three components that teachers marked as the important steps that need to be taken in the continued academic growth at their school.

One area that received the most attention is parental involvement. It received the most individual votes with the Grade 6 and Grade 8 teams and the second highest count with the Grade 7 teams. “The school needs to teach parents how to support their child’s learning” (Team B). In doing so, we can “...create a home environment where school homework is valued more and monitored more closely” (Team B). To do so, “I think we should hold regular (maybe monthly) meetings with parents to educate them on different topics such as GPA, Study Skills, discipline at home, computer use, adolescent issues, etc.” (Team B). The topics should be about anything that touches the academic life of our students. “We need workshops for parents and students about issues outside the

classroom, but affect the student academic success” (Team E). Many believe that parental involvement should be especially product for kids in the Grade 8 as these students prepare for high school.

A second component that drew much attention is professional development. It received individual votes from the Grade 6 teams and the highest response from the Grade 7 teams. “Professional development with poor economic conditions that schools are in right now should be the creation of teacher interest groups based on teacher input to teach sessions that are important to teachers” (Team C). “We should be able to grow based on interest groups and what they want to learn instead of teaching certain teachers what they already know” (Team D).

The third component that drew the attention of teams for continued academic growth is service learning, which joins with extra-curricular activities. This subject received individual votes from the 6 and Grade 8 teams. “We need to link our content in the classroom with what life in the real world is about” (Team D). “Service learning should be an important part of life. Let’s make community service a requirement for promotion from our middle school” (Team G).

Other topics that drew two or more individual votes include: time for more team articulation; setting school-wide student assessment and benchmarks; staff meetings to collaborate core subjects with the arts, P.E. and resource students.

Teacher response from Baker Middle School. At Baker Middle School, two components and a third topic (which in itself is a factor of a component) is what teams earmarked as areas that the teachers believe should be the next steps taken to continue the academic development of their students.

The first topic that drew the most discussion across the teams at Baker Middle School is a topic discussed earlier...the 8th period intervention class. This topic received individual votes from the Grade 6 and Grade 8 teams. Intervention is a factor of the fourth component titled classroom instructional practices. “We need more consistency school wide for our 8th period intervention class. We can’t waste time in this area!” (Team K). “We need cohesion as a staff, particularly for our students at high academic risk” (Team J). A simple step could move this intervention class from being the last period in the day to “...being the first class of the day, a time when kids can focus more on academics than at the end of the day” (H). An alternative suggestion was about eliminating the 8th period class and extending other periods. Another possibility was to change the intervention time to a topic important to all content topics...reading. Despite these many possibilities to change, the main point of this third topic is to change the current 8th period intervention class.

The second area that teachers voted to mark as one of the next three steps to take to increase academic advancement at their school is parental involvement. This subject received votes only from the Grade 7 teams. “We need to help our teachers improve on helping their kids grow. Empower the parents! We can do this through holding more parent nights, PIQE classes, help them improve language skills, etc.” (Team L). “This will help parents be held more accountable to the development of their own child” (Team N).

The third component that drew team attention was professional development. This topic received individual votes from the Grade 6 and Grade 7 teams. The area of focus in professional development is choice. “Professional development is one of the

most important next steps. To become better teachers, we need to continue to learn” (Team K). “Let’s have teachers train teachers. Teachers can choose the areas in which they would like to develop professionally and colleagues can do the instruction” (Team H). “Teachers need to be given a choice as to what they feel they need to learn” (Team J).

There were additional topics that were raised to be one of the next three steps to continue academic advancement at Baker Middle School. They were three subjects that received the highest individual votes. There were two subjects that tied with votes: work on teaching organizational skills in the classroom; work to motivate students by celebrating success. Both topics were proposed by the Grade 7 teams. The subject that received equal attention, also from the Grade 7 teams, was outlining a school-wide discipline policy.

Site administrators’ response from Adler Middle School. There are two individuals who were interviewed for the site administrators at Adler Middle School: principal, assistant principal. These scholars were interviewed separately. The topics listed are those that were listed by both administrators.

One topic that was mentioned by both administrators was support for the students with a GPA below 2.0. The principal said that to continue academic advancement for the school means to continue the process already established to work with kids who fall through the cracks. “These are the kids with a 2.0 GPA or lower. We’ve been doing much this year helping these kids at all grade levels. This is what we need to extend.”

Another topic that was mentioned by both administrators was team support. Several ways to work with means were mentioned by both: more teams around, give

some people a new, fresh start; enable teachers to sit and discuss academia; find commonalities among teachers; empower teachers. Regarding teams, said the principal “It might be time for change. Maybe we should move some teams around to give people a new, fresh start.”

A third topic mentioned by both site administrators discussed in the interview process involved the factor of extra-curricular activities in the component about classroom instructional practices. Such after-school programs could also be a focus for students with a GPA below 2.0. Said both administrators, “more after-school programs are needed!”

Site administrators’ response from Baker Middle School. The site administrators at Baker Middle School presented three areas that they feel should be the next steps to continue their academic advancement.

One area the two administrators shared on which they should focus at their school is the professional learning community and teaming. He shared how while they have advanced on interdisciplinary instruction across content areas with teaming, parents are also part of the PLC. “PLC is important because it reaches to parents. We need to get them more involved in our school community.”

The second important step to take to continue academic advancement involves professional development. “We really have to change professional development. We need to focus on fewer topics. The topics should be research based. We need to respond to the needs of the teachers and to student learning. But, professional development also needs to be genuine. Also important to keep in mind is that there are many different

paths that can be taken to reach the same destination. This applies both to teaching and learning, to instruction and assessment.”

A third area that both the principal and assistant principal feel is important to continue advancement involves technology. “Today’s students are so comfortable with and use technology all the time! We need to use technology as a means to give students access to the many different content areas to help them continue to learn.”

The assistant principal added an additional facet to continue the academic development of the students. The fourth step involves teacher empowerment. One process of this empowerment involves continually viewing and reviewing the steps they are currently taking, more specifically, the areas of forming their trimester maps and common assessment.

Findings from site administrators and teachers at Adler Middle School. There are no common steps to continue the academic development of Adler Middle School that was mentioned by both teachers and site administrators. Teachers mentioned the areas of: parental involvement; professional development; service learning. Site administrators at Adler mentioned: support of students with a 2.0 GPA; changes with school teams; expand extra-curricular activities.

Findings from site administrators and teachers at Baker Middle School. The teacher and site administrators at Baker Middle School mentioned two of the same topics that they consider important to be the next steps to continue their academic development. A third topic by the teachers could also qualify as part of an administrator’s choice. One choice by the teachers is parental involvement. This was the term used by the teachers, but the site administrators used the acronym PLC and teaming. Development of a

professional learning community and increased teaming at their school would also by design improve parental involvement. The second item that teachers and the administrators chose as an important step to take was to improve professional development. Improving PLC and teaming could also follow with the improvement of what the teachers listed as improvement of the intervention class.

A topic listed by the site administrators along is improvement of the technology system at their school. The administrators contend that integrating technology in the instructional process would be an incentive to get the students more involved in learning.

Findings from Adler and Baker Middle Schools. There are two common finding about what teachers believe should be the next three steps taken to continue student academic growth that link Adler and Baker Middle Schools. One area of focus that teams at both middle schools consider important is parental involvement. In component 2 titled parental involvement, the middle school staffs at both schools present many ways to increase parent involvement for the continued academic growth of their children.

A second common link between both middle schools is component 6 titled professional development. Staff at both schools present feedback on how professional development as is now organized is instead a “waste of time.” Teachers believe that their choice for topics is important for their continued academic development to be productive. In these tough economic times, professional development could be mini sessions conducted by teachers sharing their knowledge about different topics.

The conclusion of the question on what teachers felt should be the next three steps that should be taken at their school to continue the academic growth of their students was also very similar to both Adler and Baker middle schools. Teachers could list any topics

they felt were important, there was not a list from which they were to choose. Two of the three responses at both schools were the same: increase parental involvement and increase teachers be part of the process of professional development.

| Credentialed Staff | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Last Response: Next 3 Steps | | |
| <u>Topic</u> | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> |
| 1 | <u>Parental Involvement</u> To do so, hold parent classes during time convenient for them to cover topics such as: ESL, GPA, student study skills, discipline at home, how to use computers, adolescent issues, etc. 5 in 6; 2 in 7th; 6 in 8th = 13 votes | <u>Intervention Class</u> Improve our 8th period student intervention time! To do so involves more consistency school wide for this intervention class. We need cohesion as a staff. "We can't waste time!" 2 in 6; 0 in 7th; 4 in 8th = 6 votes |
| 2 | <u>Professional Development</u> PD needs to focus on teacher, team, department and school needs. Teachers need to be part of the choice. With poor economic conditions facing the district, teachers could teach teachers on skills to share and spread. 2 in 6; 5 in 7th; 0 in 8th = 7 votes | <u>Parental Involvement</u> We need to help parents help teachers in the learning process. We need to get parents more involved. We need a return of such programs as PIQE. 0 in 6; 5 in 7th; 0 in 8th = 5 votes |
| 3 | <u>Service Learning</u> Service learning should be a part of the learning process and life. We need to link the content we teach with real life experiences. Let's make community service a requirement for promotion from our middle school. 2 in 6; 0 in 7th; 4 in 8th = 6 votes | <u>Professional Development</u> "Let teachers train teachers." Teachers should be able to choose the areas in which they would like to develop professionally. 2 in 6; 2 in 7th; 0 in 8th = 4 votes |
| Other "Next Step" topics: | 1. time for Team articulation (3 votes) 2. student assessment/benchmarks (2 votes) 3. meetings to collaborate core subject classes with arts, P.E. and Special Day Class students (2 votes) | 1. teach organizational skills (3 votes) 1. motivate students by celebrating success (3 votes) 3. outline a school-wide discipline policy (2 votes) |
| | | GREEN background signifies majority of response were the same. |

Figure 35. Areas listed are the topics named by teachers at both sites regarding "Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success"

The thoughts of site administrators at both sites had only one topic in common with what their teachers expressed as important next steps to take to advance their school.

At Adler Middle School, the topic of working with and changing teams could be linked with the selection by the administrators at Baker Middle School, which was to improve their PLC and teaming programs at their school.

| Site Administrator | | Last Response: Next 3 Steps | |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| Topic | <u>Adler Summary</u> | <u>Baker Summary</u> | |
| 1 | <u>Support 2.0 students</u> Track the students with 2.0 GPA...look for ways to monitor and assist them. | <u>PLC and Teaming</u> We need to improve our Professional Learning Community and teaming at our school to advance interdisciplinary instruction. This process will also improve parental involvement. | |
| 2 | <u>Work with Teams</u> Review teams...give teams a fresh start; empower teams; find commonalities among teachers; have conversations with teams that are focused on academia | <u>Professional Development</u> We need to focus on fewer topics and follow each topic all the way through. We need p.d. that is genuine. | |
| 3 | <u>Extra-curricular activities</u> Continue to grow RAP/after-school activities program...possible start a 2.0 club as a boost for students below a 2.0 GPA. and help with student motivation. | <u>Technology</u> The use of technology is integral for student learning today. We need more technological equipment and more means of how to integrate these new applications into the learning environment. | |
| 4 | | <u>Teacher Empowerment</u> Continue and advance teacher involvement with such steps as our trimester maps, our common assessment forms, etc. | |

Figure 36. Areas listed are the topics named by administrators at both sites regarding "Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success"

Summary of Components and Factors

Regarding Component 1 titled school safety and management, the results from the teachers and site administrators at both Adler and Baker middle schools were the same. Both schools feel they currently have a safe environment, however reflections from long-time experienced teachers at Baker Middle School showed how this has been a great improvement compared to the past. Common themes among the factor of discipline at

Adler and Baker state that team discipline is good, but school administration should handle more. However, the Grade 8 teams and administrators at Baker Middle School discussed the needs for more consistencies with team discipline. For the topic of team, results were very good with teaming at both sites and with teachers and administrators, but there are different degrees of feelings of strength with teaming. At both sites, the Grade 6 teams were the most active and complete in working together as teams while the Grade 8 teams at both sites discussed working more independently as teachers on a team rather than as a group of teachers with commonalities in working with their group of students.

The second component of Parental Involvement drew much discussion.

Communication was the first factor with teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker middle schools commenting that communication with parents was good, but needs to improve. Also common among teachers at both sites is that more parental involvement is wanted with the factor of homework. Teachers mentioned how this has already improved with each instructor now having a website, but all at both sites reflected on a program that used to exist and needs to be returned...PIQE. PIQE was session of classes for parents that involved such topics as how to motivate teenagers, working with teenagers through change and growth and organizational planning with homework. Also common among teachers and administrators regarding the factor of working within the school is that parents have been involved in this process, but at Baker the teachers mentioned how this has declined over the last 1-2 years. But administrators at Baker stated that parental involvement has improved over the last few years. Regarding the factor of parents as stakeholders, teachers at both sites agree that parents would become

involved stakeholders if they were given more opportunities to become involved at school. During the discussion of component 2 is when a new factor arose at Baker Middle School and would be mentioned in other components...that is the topic of platooning or looping. This is when the same teachers and students span as a team over 2 years. Teachers that loop mentioned how much this process helps communication with parents and that with improved communication, parents become more involved in the learning process at school and at home.

Interdisciplinary Teaching was the third component. Regarding the factor of communication and collaboration, there was universal agreement among teachers and administrators at both sites. Communication and collaboration had positive comments all around, but mentioned in the comments is that there are different degrees of communication and collaboration from team to team. However, common across the board is that Grade 6 teams are those with the most communication and collaboration. All mentioned that they would like to improve in this area. The results for the factor of culture and ethnicity are the same as communication and collaboration. Comments revealed that there are varying degrees of strength to involve culture and ethnicity into the curriculum with the Grade 6 teams being those who integrate this topic the most into what is taught and how it is taught. Administrators at both sites reflected on the topic as how students of different cultures and ethnicities get along at their schools...and the results were extremely positive. Both schools are worlds of students from different cultures and ethnicities who work well together. The factor of interdisciplinary instruction had the same results as above...there are different degrees of joining the instruction of different curricular topics together from different disciplines. According to

the teachers and administrators at both sites, the teams with the highest degrees of interdisciplinary instruction are 6 and Grade 7s while the reflection of least interdisciplinary instruction came from the Grade 8 teams. The factor of service learning had different results at both sites. Teachers and administrators at Adler Middle School have already involved service learning as a voluntary activity for all Grade 8rs while some teams across grade levels also have individual service learning projects. The result at Baker Middle School is that service learning is done primarily by the Leadership Class, although there is one team that shared the result that they integrate service learning into their instructional process. A new factor was shared by teachers at both sites, that topic being too much cross-teaming. Teachers at both schools repeatedly said that too many students are cross-teamed into many classes, a process that weakens the instructional process of self-discipline and cohesion with teaming. The site administrators at Baker also discussed a new topic that was mentioned with other components. The topic was their creation of a PLC at Baker Middle School.

There were both similarities and differences of opinions on the different subgroups of Classroom Instructional Practices, the fourth component. Regarding technology, the consensus of teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle schools is that there is a significant use of technology in the classroom, but all also agreed that a greater availability of technical equipment would ensure a greater use of technology as part of the educational process. While there was no comment by Baker site administrators, the teachers at both Adler and Baker and the site administrators at Adler had very positive comments about teaching organizational skills in the classroom. All agreed that there were varying degrees of the use and instruction of organizational skills,

but the Grade 6 teams at both schools were said to implement organizational skills the most in their teaching. There were different responses at both schools for the factors of looping and intervention. There is currently no looping at Adler Middle School, but the 6 and Grade 7 teachers at that site would be interested to learn more about the operation of the program. At Baker Middle School, looping is already in place with two teams, both of which tremendously enjoy the program. Other 6 and Grade 7 teams said they were ready to discuss looping while the Grade 8 teams did not discuss this topic. The site administrators at Baker also commented on how much team is saved at the beginning of the year with two teams having the same student-teacher grouping. The factor of intervention also received different responses from the professionals at Adler and Baker schools. At Adler, the definition of intervention is taken as the role of administrators who step in to help students whose GPAs drop below 2.0. Administrators would help students with low GPAs do their homework, read aloud with them and let them know that they were cared and supported at this school. There was support by teachers for the administrators intervening with students with low GPAs. At Baker, the definition of intervention is the 8th period class, the time when different topics are handled by teachers by team or department and in some cases by individual teachers. All teachers and site administrators agreed that they would like an intervention system with more structure and cohesion. There were two factors handled only by teachers at one school. The factor of student engagement was discussed by the Grade 6 teachers at Adler who said that student engagement is good at Adler, particularly with the use of technology. Teachers felt that students were more engaged in the learning process when the use of technical devices such as laptops and the Internet, iPods and iPhones and SmartBoards were used as part of

instruction. At Baker, the subgroup topic of assessment was discussed by teachers and administrators. At Baker, teachers and administrators established a school-wide assessment exam held every six weeks for the core subjects. Six of 8 teams like the frequent assessment exam for its very rapid response of results. Some teachers/teams have even started a common weekly assessment of core topics. Site administrators at both schools commented on how great overall are the instructional practices at their schools.

There were common agreements among factors of the 5th component School and Classroom Environment with the teachers and site administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle School. For the factor of academic success which relates to state API scores, all agreed that they have worked hard to gain their current academic status and are proud of their continually growing API score. All also agreed that they will work hard to continue the academic growth of their students. For the factor of relationships among faculty, the common outcome of both the teachers and administrators at both sites is that there is a very positive relationship among the credentialed and classified staff at both sites. For the factor of relationship among students, once again there were only positive comments from teachers and administrators at both sites about the very good relationships that adults have with the students at their sites. The importance of the next factor, extra-curricular activities, was also a common remark among teachers and administrators at both sites. All agreed that such programs as the after-school RAP program are good, but could get much better by linking curricular with extra-curricular activities. Such links would improve learning and classroom grades and hopefully link with state exams. The same comments also were recorded from both the teachers and administrators at both

sites for the subgroup called student motivation and high goals. All agreed that they sit high goals for their students, but that student motivation can be challenging and must be improved at their sites. The factor of relationship with parents was discussed by the teachers and administrators only at Adler Middle School. The comments were the same...relationships are good, but could and should improve greatly to continue the academic growth of the students.

The sixth component of Professional Development had universal comments from the teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker schools. For the factor of purpose, the response was that the purpose is not directly related to what the teachers at each site feel that they need to continue to grow. Other comments at both sites reflected how there is no accountability for professional development with too many projects and no follow-through. Also commonplace from both sites is that the district handles professional development, but that for development for their site to be truly professional, topics should be selected by each site to match their own needs. The same impression was delivered by the teachers and administrators at both sites for the factor of choice. All agreed that teachers should have more input on what were the needed areas of improvement for each site.

The seventh component of Leadership and Decision-Making is where there are the greatest differences in responses from the professionals at Adler and Baker Middle Schools. For the four factors of faculty decision-making, teacher empowerment, trust and support, all of the teams at Adler responded with only positive comments about how they feel they take part in making decisions at their sites, how they feel empowered. Research shows that these factors all show as important elements in academically

successful middle schools (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005). The instructors feel they are trusted and supported by the site administrators. The teachers at Adler also brought up the topic of budget at their site and how the administrators are very good at asking for teacher feedback while also managing to get the resources that teachers want. Administrators at Adler have the same responses. The site administrators feel that they trust, support and empower teachers and make them part of the decision-making process. At Baker Middle School, 5 to 6 of the 8 teams responded with both positive and negative comments on the same four factors—faculty decision-making, teacher empowerment, trust, support. While initial responses were always positive, they were followed by teacher comments on they feel limited in these four areas. The teacher responses lead to the new factor that was added by the teachers at Baker Middle School, that topic being lack of follow-through. This comment was commonly used during discussion of the other components. Teachers feel that administrators want to make them active participants in decision-making at their site, but that administrators are too over-loaded with what needs to be accomplished at their site and hence there is incomplete follow-through in many areas. Administrators at Baker Middle School feel that they have empowered the teachers into the decision-making process at their school, but that it takes time to do so...and the results are just now beginning to show. Examples of teacher empowerment that administrators said were started by the teachers at their site include the trimester map system and looping. These examples say the administrators are also examples of how they trust and support the staff at their site.

When asked what they believed would be the most important next three steps that should be taken at their sites to continue their academic advancement, the teachers at both

sites also had common responses. Two topics that were listed by the teachers at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools were topics discussed in two components: parental involvement and professional development. Teachers at both sites feel it is imperative to increase parental involvement so that their children will continue to grow. Instructors at both sites hope to see the return of the PIQE program as an important means to increase parental participation in the learning process. Teachers at both sites also discussed the importance of changing professional development so that such training involves what is needed at each individual site. For this to happen, teachers need to have choice in topics for their continued growth. At Adler Middle School, the third important choice for continued growth was service learning. Teachers feel that service learning is a means to integrate all of the curricular elements with the real world. At Baker Middle School, the third area of importance for their growth involved making changes in their intervention class so that there would be more consistency and cohesion school-wide so that their students can grow. The administrator responses at the sites were different than the responses of their teachers. At Adler Middle School, the site administrators chose three areas they believe are imperative to continue the academic growth of their students. One is to continue and expand their programs to help students with below the GPAs of 2.0. A second area important to continue growth is to review and work with teams. This could involve having teams make fresh starts and then empowering these teams to continue their strengths. The third area chosen by administrators at Adler was to continue and expand the extra-curricular activities program and after-school RAP program at their school. Expansion of this program could involve special attention to get students with below a 2.0 GPA involved in the program. Site administrators at

Baker had their own three choices for next important steps to take to continue their growth. One was to improve their PLC and teaming program. One element of this program could be to work with teams to increase their interdisciplinary instruction. A second choice by site administrators at Baker was to improve the professional development program, more specifically to focus on fewer topics and follow-through on what was started. A third topic choice by site administrators was to increase the integration of technology into the teaching process. This would require access to more technology equipment. The site administrators at Baker listed a fourth element important to continue their growth...teacher empowerment. Site administrators would like to continue and advance teacher involvement with such programs as their trimester maps, common assessment and looping and be open for other new and innovative programs to continue the academic advancement of their students.

.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

Problem and purpose. In a small urban school district in 2006, enrollment at this district middle school--comprised of students in grades 7 and 8 had increased to the point that district administration felt it would be best to split the school into two middle schools. When the school split, sixth grade was added to the existing seventh and eighth grade levels. Differences in the demographics of these two schools in such categories as enrollment, student ethnicity, percentage of students that qualify for free/reduced lunch, and percentage of students who qualify for ESL, is less than 10%. After the split, however, differences in the academic scores of these two middle schools became apparent. The middle school that was split, Baker Middle School, had API scores for 2006-10 that ranged from 675 to 776 out of a possible 1,000.

The new school is located only .6 miles away from the original middle school. Its API scores for 2006-2010 that ranged from 715 to 800 points. Academic scholars have sought explanations for why there are academic differences among middle schools with similar demographics. These explanations led to the creation of a Seven Component Model.

The self-survey developed in 1990 by CPRD at the University of Illinois resulted in their creation of list of components important for improvement of the academics of middle schools students. This survey, along with the review of literature, led to the creation of the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life: a compilation of the seven components important for academic instruction at the middle school level.

This study addressed the possible underlying factors that may have led to the differences between the two schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the teachers and administrators at these two middle schools—Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School—regarding seven selected components of school life.

Methodology. The research methodology was a mixed-methods design of archival data, teacher team interviews, and administrator interviews at both schools. The teacher team interview utilized a blend of focus group and survey methodology. The seven components from the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life that were used in this interview process and all of the factors of each component for which there were responses, including any new factors created by the teachers and site administrators during the interview process. Refer to Appendix G for a table of all components and factors that were presented as topics for discussion in the hand-out to teachers and administrators in advance. Added to the table were the factors that teachers and administrators added to the discussion during the interviews.

The study first involved examining archival data, namely the demographics and academic records of both school sites to determine if they were indeed similar sites. The second step utilized a new qualitative research method—the team interview—to effectively examine school site reform issues based on interviews of teams of teachers and administrators at the two sites. The team interview was developed because the unit of organization of faculty at these middle schools was a team of three or more teachers. At both schools, teams included teachers for each core subject that together worked with a group of approximately 150 students.

All teams were interviewed. Also interviewed were the two administrators at both sites. The quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Word and Excel. The researcher and coding teams each individually reviewed the interview transcripts to determine shared and divergent participant responses. Following the independent, the coders met with researcher to reach a consensus on their coded responses of the team and administrator interview data.

Results. The results of the archival data show that Adler and Baker middle schools are similar on six of the seven components. There is also disparity of results on one of the components.

The demographics of Adler and Baker Middle Schools indicate that the student population is similar. The difference in enrollment for the two schools for the 2010-11 school year is only approximately 100 students or 11%. The two schools are within 10% of each other in the following areas: student gender, student ethnicity, teacher ethnicity, percentage of students who are ESL learners, free/reduced lunch, credentialed teachers, ratio of students per credentialed teacher, ratio of students per pupil personnel service staff, ratio of students per computer, ratio of students per administrator, layers of parent education, parent education level teachers and years of education; and teachers and degrees of education.

Regarding the first component, School Safety and Management, the results from the teachers and site administrators at both Adler and Baker middle schools were the same. Participants from both schools feel they currently have a safe environment; however, reflections from experienced teachers at Baker Middle School showed that this is a significant improvement compared to the past. Common themes regarding of

discipline at Adler and Baker state that team discipline is accepted, but school administration should handle more. The 8th grade teams and administrators at Baker Middle School discussed the need for more consistency with team discipline.

The second component of Parental Involvement drew much discussion. Teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker middle schools commented that communication to the parents was frequent, but not as frequent as needed for transparent understanding by parents. Common among teachers at both sites was the sentiment that more parental involvement with homework is needed. Teachers mentioned how this has already improved with each instructor now having a web site, but all participants at both sites reflected on a program that used to exist and needs to be revived: Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). PIQE was a series of classes for parents that included such topics as how to motivate teenagers, working with teenagers through change and growth, and organizational planning with homework. Teachers and administrators both noted that parents have been involved in the process of working within the school, but at Baker the teachers mentioned that this has declined over the last 1-2 years. Administrators at Baker, however, stated that parental involvement has improved over the last few years. Regarding the factor of parents as stakeholders, teachers at both sites agreed that parents would become stronger stakeholders if they were given more opportunities to become involved at school. During the discussion of component #2, a new factor arose at Baker Middle School, one that would be mentioned in other components: the topic of platooning or looping. This occurs when the same teachers and students span as a team over two years. Teachers that loop mentioned how much this process helps

communication with parents and that with improved communication, parents become more involved in the learning process at school and at home.

Interdisciplinary Teaching was the third component. There was universal agreement among teachers and administrators at both sites that communication and collaboration was positive within teams. However, participants mentioned that there are different degrees of communication and collaboration from team to team. Sixth grade teams seemed to have the most communication and collaboration. All participants mentioned that they would like to improve in this area. The results for the factor of culture and ethnicity were the same as communication and collaboration. Comments revealed that there are varying degrees of strength to involve culture and ethnicity into the curriculum; the 6th grade teams were most successful at integrating this topic. Administrators at both sites reflected on how students of different cultures and ethnicities get along at their schools, and the results were extremely positive. Both schools are comprised of students who come from different cultures and ethnicities. Administrators commented that they observe that students at their school work well together.

Findings on the factor of interdisciplinary instruction had the same results as above; there are different degrees of joining the instruction of different curricular topics together from different disciplines. The first topic is teaming. Both teachers and administrators shared how teachers were very good with teaming at both sites, but participants expressed different degrees of strength with teaming. At both sites, 6th grade teams were the most involved in working together while the 8th grade teams at both sites discussed inconsistencies.

Another topic is interdisciplinary instruction. Teachers and administrators at both sites reported that 6th and 7th grade teams have the highest degrees of interdisciplinary instruction, whereas 8th grade teams have the least interdisciplinary instruction. Eighth grade teams appear to work within their discipline with students. These teachers possess secondary discipline-specific state credentials..

The factor of service learning had different results at both sites. Teachers and administrators at Adler Middle School have already involved service learning as a voluntary activity for all 8th graders while some teams across grade levels also have individual service learning projects. The result at Baker Middle School is that service learning is done primarily by the Leadership Class, although one team shared that they integrate service learning into their instructional process. Teachers at both sites expressed concern about a new factor: too much cross-teaming. Teachers at both schools repeatedly said that too many students are cross-teamed into many classes, a process that weakens the instructional process of self-discipline and cohesion with teaming. The site administrators at Baker also discussed a new topic that was mentioned with other components. The administrators at Baker stated that the school is creating a Professional Learning Community (PLC). This is a specific model of collaboration.

There were both similarities and differences of opinions on the different subgroups of Classroom Instructional Practices, the fourth component. Regarding technology, the consensus of teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools is that there is great use of technology in the classroom, but all also agreed that a greater availability of technical equipment would ensure a greater use of technology as part of the educational process. While there was no comment by Baker site

administrators, the teachers at both Adler and Baker and the site administrators at Adler had very positive comments about teaching organizational skills in the classroom. All agreed that there were varying degrees of the use and instruction of organizational skills, but the 6th grade teams at both schools were said to implement organizational skills the most in their teaching. There were different responses at both schools regarding the factors of looping and intervention. There is currently no looping at Adler Middle School, but the 6th and 7th grade teachers at that site stated that they would be interested to learn more about the operation of the program. At Baker Middle School, looping is already in place with two teams, both of which tremendously enjoy the program. Other 6th and 7th grade teams said they were ready to discuss looping, while the 8th grade teams did not discuss this topic. The site administrators at Baker also commented on how much time is saved at the beginning of the year with two teams having the same student-teacher grouping. The factor of intervention also received different responses from the professionals at Adler and Baker schools. At Adler, the definition of intervention is taken as the role of administrators who step in to help students whose GPAs drop below 2.0. Teachers at Adler offered great support for the administrators intervening with students with low GPAs. At Baker, intervention occurs during the 8th period class, a time when different topics are handled by teachers, by team, or department. All teachers and site administrators agreed that they would like an intervention system with more structure and cohesion. Two factors were handled only by teachers at one school. The factor of student engagement was discussed by the 6th grade teachers at Adler who said that student engagement is good at Adler, particularly with the use of technology. At Baker, the subtopic of assessment was discussed by teachers and administrators. At Baker, teachers

and administrators established a school-wide assessment exam held every six weeks for core subjects. Six of 8 teams liked the frequent assessment exam for its very rapid response of results. Some teachers/teams have even started a common weekly assessment of core topics. Site administrators at both schools shared their pride on the overall quality instructional practices at their schools.

Teachers and site administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle School had common agreements regarding factors of the fifth component, School and Classroom Environment. For the factor of academic success, all agreed that they have worked hard to gain their current academic status and are proud of their success. Participants also agreed that they will work hard to continue the academic growth of their students. For the factor of relationships among faculty, the common perception of the teachers and administrators at both sites is that there is a very positive relationship among the credentialed and classified staff at both sites. Regarding the factor of relationships among students, teachers and administrators at both sites offered positive comments about the relationships that adults have with the students at their sites. The importance of the next factor, extra-curricular activities, was commonly expressed among teachers and administrators at both sites. All agreed that such programs as the after-school Realizing Amazing Potential (RAP) program are good, but could get much better by linking curricular with extra-curricular activities. The same comments also were recorded from both the teachers and administrators at both sites for the subgroup called student motivation and high goals. All agreed that they set high goals for their students, but that student motivation can be challenging and must be improved at their sites. Only the teachers and administrators at Adler Middle School discussed the factor of relationships

with parents, stating that the relationships are good, but could and should improve greatly to continue students' academic growth.

The sixth component, Professional Development, was an area of serious concern from teachers and administrators at both schools. Teachers at both sites feel that the purpose of professional development is not directly related to what they feel they need to continue to grow. Other comments at both sites reflected on how there is no accountability for professional development, too many projects and no follow-up support. Participants at both sites also noted that the district handles professional development. However, they indicated that in order for development for their site to be truly professional, topics should be selected by each site to match their own needs. The teachers and administrators at both sites felt the same way regarding the factor of choice. All agreed that teachers should have more input on the needed areas of improvement for each site.

The seventh component, Leadership and Decision-Making, generated the greatest differences in responses from the professionals at Adler and Baker Middle Schools. For the four factors of faculty decision-making, teacher empowerment, trust, and support, all of the teams at Adler responded with only positive comments about how they take part in making decisions at their sites and how they feel empowered. The instructors feel they are trusted and supported by the site administrators. The teachers at Adler also brought up the topic of budget at their site and how the administrators are very good at asking for teacher feedback while also managing to get the resources that teachers want. Administrators at Adler offered similar responses. The site administrators feel that they trust, support, and empower teachers and make them part of the decision-making process.

At Baker Middle School, 6 of the 8 teams responded with both positive and negative comments on the same four factors: faculty decision-making, teacher empowerment, trust, and support. While initial responses were always positive, they were followed by teacher comments regarding how they feel limited in these four areas. The teacher responses lead to the addition of new factor by the teachers at Baker Middle School: lack of follow-through. This comment was commonly used during their discussion of the other components as well. Teachers feel that administrators want to make them active participants in decision-making at their site, but recognize that administrators are too over-loaded with what needs to be accomplished at their site, resulting in incomplete follow-through in many areas. Administrators at Baker Middle School feel that they have empowered the teachers in the decision-making process at their school, but that it takes time to do so, and the results are just now beginning to show. Examples of teacher empowerment that administrators provided included the trimester map system and looping. These are also examples of how administrators trust and support the staff at their site.

When asked what they believed would be the most important next three steps that should be taken at their sites to continue their academic advancement, the teachers at both sites also had common responses. Two topics that were listed by the teachers at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools were topics discussed in two components: parental involvement and professional development. Teachers at both sites feel it is imperative to increase parental involvement so that their children will continue to grow. Instructors at both sites hope to see the return of the PIQE program as an important means to increase parental participation in the learning process. Teachers at both sites also discussed the

importance of changing professional development so that such training involves what is needed at each individual site. For this to happen, teachers need to a choice of topics for their continued growth. At Adler Middle School, the third important area for continued growth was service learning. Teachers feel that service learning is a means to integrate all curricular elements with the real world. At Baker Middle School, the third important area is follow-through of faculty decision-making by administrators. Teachers at Baker Middle School had a fourth step: making changes to their intervention class so that there would be more consistency and cohesion school-wide.

The administrator responses at the sites were different than the teacher responses. At Adler Middle School, site administrators chose three different areas they believe are imperative to continue the academic growth of their students. One is to continue and expand their programs to helps students the GPAs below 2.0. A second area important to continued growth is to review and work with teams. For example, teachers might regroup into new teams for a fresh start. The third area chosen by administrators at Adler was to continue and expand the extracurricular activities program and after-school RAP program at their school. Expansion of these programs could involvement special attention to get students with below a 2.0 GPA involved in the program. Site administrators at Baker expressed different three important steps to take to continue their school's growth. The first step they noted was to improve their Professional Learning Community (PLC) and teaming program. One element of this program could be to work with teams to increase their interdisciplinary instruction. The second step suggested by site administrators at Baker was to improve the professional development program, more specifically to focus on fewer topics and *follow-through* on what was started. A third step suggested by site

administrators was to increase the integration of technology into the teaching process. This would require access to more technology equipment. The site administrators at Baker listed a fourth element important to continuing their growth: teacher empowerment. Site administrators would like to continue to advance teacher involvement with such programs as their trimester maps, common assessment, and looping as well as be open to other new and innovative programs to continue the academic advancement of their students.

Conclusions

Based on the findings from the archival data, team interviews and site administrator interviews, the following conclusions have been drawn.

Conclusion #1: After five years, life in the two schools appears more similar than different. Faculty and administrators reported similarities in the components of School Safety and Management, Parental Involvement, Interdisciplinary Teaching, Classroom Instructional Practices, School and Classroom Environment, Professional Development and in their list of the next three steps that should be taken to continue their academic advancement.

School safety and management. Studies of successful middle schools across the United States over the last 50 years have shown that teachers must feel safe in order to teach adequately, and students must feel safe in order to learn and grow academically. This research study of two middle schools confirms this trend. Within the component of School Safety and Management, faculty teams and site administrators at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools shared the feeling of having a safe environment at the school. This was a common feeling across the board at Adler, which is in only its fifth year of

existence; however, that was not the case at Baker Middle School. Teachers at Baker who have been there for more than five years described how both adults and students often times did not feel safe at that school due to its excess of student violence in the past. However, those same teachers shared that they feel very safe today. The environment outside the classroom is also important in developing a safe campus. Teams at both schools acknowledged the importance of their campus security at their schools. At both sites, teachers commented on how these adults deal with school safety in an appropriate manner for the middle school students.

In the review of literature, school safety was divided into two parts: the environment inside the classroom, and the environment outside the classroom. Studies show that the most safe and caring learning environments exist at middle schools that have effective and functional classroom learning environments (Waxman, Garcia & Read, 2008), providing evidence the argument of making middle schools a warmer environment. Part of creating a caring and personalized environment involves creating teams that allow children to have fewer teachers by sharing a set of core instructors. Both Adler and Baker Middle Schools have created a faculty team of curricular organization at their schools.

Discipline of students and a shared discipline policy is foundational to school. All teams at Adler and Baker shared that they handle discipline well at the team level, but noted that more consistency is needed with team discipline and school discipline. Teams also stated that they believed administration should handle more discipline. One 8th grade team at Baker noted how inconsistencies arose within one team of teachers regarding the topic of team discipline. Administrators at Adler and Baker also mentioned

how school discipline policy needs to be made clearer and more consistent with team policies. The teachers and site administrators at Adler and Baker Middle Schools all felt that there is productive team discipline at their sites. While this is common all around, the concept of coherent, clear school discipline generated different responses from the teachers and site administrators. At both schools, site administrators either did not comment on the topic, which indicates it is not a concern, or mentioned that "school discipline policy is pretty clear." However, the teachers at both sites indicated their belief that their school discipline, specifically team discipline, is inconsistent. With different team discipline policies, consequences did not seem consistent. This difference in perception of school discipline could be related to lack of appropriate communication, between teachers and site administrators.

Working with teams involves working with professionals teaching the core disciplines: Language Arts, math, science, and history teachers working together. Interdisciplinary instruction involves a core set of teachers working with one group of students. This process gets the students more involved in their learning and reduces the need for teacher-directed discipline in the classroom (Manning & Bucher, as cited in Duerr, 2008). Thus, teachers have a greater chance to promote academic achievement and promote positive student-discipline self-practices (Strahan & Layell, 2006).

All team teachers and administrators also noted that teamwork is productive, but that there are varying degrees of team management skills. All the upper grade levels agreed that sixth grade teams are the most involved in working together at both schools. These teachers support the importance of teamwork, which is a core group of teachers working with a core group of students. The eighth grade level teams and administrators

shared their belief that the most inconsistencies among team members appeared within 8th grade teams. These teachers are not adhering to the most common element of teamwork which is four teachers having the same preparation period as well, enabling teachers to meet and discuss their shared 150 students (Midgley et al., 1992; Mills & Pollack 1993).

This concern of communication was mentioned throughout many team interviews at both schools. Both share the thought that communication has improved and is better than before, but both feel that communication needs to improve.

Communication is a prime responsibility of school leaders. It is the job of every school principal to lead the change process for the academic growth of students. Leading communication among teachers, classified staff, students, and parents is one of the 21 behavior skills of a school leader (Marzano et al., 2005). Leaders must remember the importance of clear and continued communication between all stakeholders involved in the change process (Fullan, 2001). Good communication is imperative for school success (Fullan, 2003; Goodlad, 1975). Various means of communication are excellent, but educators are also reminded that communication is a two-way street: that ideas need to flow from school to home, and from home to school. (Rogers & Farson, 1957 as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Zaretsky, 2004 as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010).

Table 7

Overall Summary of Component #1: School Safety and Management

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is safe as mentioned by all teams • Team discipline is good as mentioned by one team at each grade level • School discipline needs to be consistent as mentioned by at least one team at each grade level • Communication has improved, but still needs improvement mentioned by all teams |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is safe • School discipline system is good...need to work with teachers and team discipline • Communication has improved, but still needs improvement • Use of teams very good |

Parental involvement. Across the U.S., middle school teachers have noticed a disturbing trend; parents give time and attention to their children's learning when they children are in elementary school, but not in middle school. Parental involvement should be maintained, not dropped at middle school (Shumow, Smith, & Smith, 2009). Teams from Adler and Baker Middle Schools had common concerns for the parental involvement factors of communication, homework, parents working at school, and stakeholders. The teams at Baker also discussed parent involvement in other components such as Teaming and Interdisciplinary Instruction and Classroom Instructional Practices. They remarked how looping/platooning would improve parent engagement because they had the same child more than one year. Administrators and teacher teams from both sites responded for the factors of communication and helping at school, while the administrative team at Baker Middle School discussed the topic of parent conferences.

Teams and administrators at both sites concur that communication with parents is performed, but should be improved. Teachers shared that communication with parents is good, particularly with the development over the last 1-2 years of Partnership for

Academic and Community Excellence (PACE) messages, PowerGrade, and teacher web sites. At Baker, school communication with parents takes place each week using a PACE message, an automated phone call made to all homes. PACE messages are used more sporadically at Adler. However, all also agreed that communication needs to improve so that parents feel welcome and informed regarding their child's academic progress and satisfaction in school. Site administrators at Baker commented on different types of communication by teachers and how these differences in parent contact vary from team to team.

Research has demonstrated how important is communication with respect to academic success. Professionals have found that typically mainstream parents with high socioeconomic status and education are more involved in their children's education than poverty level and minority parents, and parental involvement can be an important component of academic development. However, research also demonstrates that when teachers take clear, deliberate action to involve parents, the socioeconomic status and education level of parents disappear as factors in parents' involvement in their children's education (Benson & Martin, 2003). There are many factors in school communication. Teacher-student, teacher-parent, and principal-parent talks are all forms of school communication important for academic success (Fullan, 2003; Goodlad, 1975). Parents in lower SES brackets often feel frustrated being involved in school because of lack of communication skills and a natural tension between teachers and parents based on different perspectives (Benson & Martin, 2003).

Teachers at both sites and at all grade levels discussed how they would like to get parents more involved in the homework process. All teams commented how they have

seen improvement of their communication with parents over the last 2 years by use of such techniques as their teacher-school web sites where homework can be listed daily. It was with the discussion of parent communication that teachers and administrators at both sites created for this component a new factor: bringing back the parent education program called PIQE. Some of the topics that parents could learn in their PIQE sessions included how they could get involved with their children's homework. The educators at both sites commented about how PIQE was a great example of helping parents to be part of their children's learning environment. PIQE served as a valuable step in helping parents learn the skills to deal with middle school age students, their homework, and future goals.

Teaming and improved communication with parents at Adler and Baker schools is supported by the findings of Flowers et al. (1999) and Mertens and Flowers (2003). One study involved teaming at 101 schools, the teaming process resulted in teachers having more frequent contact with parents. This in turn led to increased student performance, fewer discipline problems, and more student involvement with homework. In another study, teachers in Michigan who started the teaming process found that it led to more parental involvement. Teachers on a dedicated team reported more frequent contact with parents to discuss student performance and their homework, and parents felt more comfortable getting involved with school activities. More contact with parents leads to their feeling more a part of their children's learning process at school (Flowers et al., 1999).

Teachers at all grade levels and administrators at both schools commented on how important it is for parents to help at school. Parent support involved such activities as making copies, helping in the classroom, supervising the grounds, organizing reward

activities, helping with dances, and running the student store. However, teachers at Baker commented on how parent involvement has declined the last 1-2 years. All looked forward to finding ways to help parents feel they are important part of the learning process and increase their involvement at school.

A study of 100 successful and problematic schools has shown that strong parental involvement with the school is one of the essential supports of high quality education (Bryk & Schneider, as cited in Vodicka & Hancock, 2008). For decades, educational researchers have been publicizing the development of partnerships between schools, families, and communities as a key way of increasing student achievement (Hiatt-Michael & Hands, 2010). There are many opportunities for parent involvement at school (Benson & Martin, 2003). Such examples include family rewards that recognize student success and achievement, school orientation, parent volunteers (to work in the library, make copies, attend field trips), special family events (fashion show, International Day, mother-daughter day, talent show), awards assemblies, parent education workshops (computer classes, English classes, etc.) and coffee with the principal, to name just a few (Benson & Martin, 2003). All of the above means of communication are excellent, but educators are also reminded that communication is a two-way street: that ideas need to flow from school to home, and from home to school (Rogers & Farson, 1957 as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Zaretsky, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2010).

Two teams from different grade levels at both Adler and Baker responded about parents being stakeholders in their school's community. All four groups said that parents may not be strong stakeholders now, but that they would like them to be strong stakeholders in the future. The instructors at both schools felt that parents would be

steadfast members of the school community if they became more involved in school activities both on and off site. Teachers understand that this means they, as professionals, need to offer more opportunities for parents to become involved in the community.

Research regarding parental involvement in schools has been conducted consistently over the past 30 years. The United States National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reports that in 72% of schools with low concentration of poverty, most or all parents attend school open house. The number is dramatically different for school with a high concentration of high poverty where only 28% of parents attend open houses (Benson & Martin, 2003). Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that collaborating with parents who are stakeholders in their schools was a core reason for their success (Whitehouse, 2009). Research over a 7-year study of 45 public schools in Buffalo showed that when teachers take a clear, deliberate action to have the parents become stakeholders in their school, academic advancement continues. This was a key factor in increasing the academic success at these schools (Benson & Martin, 2003). However, building a foundation for parental involvement can take time. One principal at a school with a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch took four years to increase parental involvement in a monthly parent breakfast. But over these four years, the attendance changed from 4 parents a month to over 40 parents a month attending the breakfast (Montgomery, 2008). With parents helping out more at school, they also have the opportunity to better understand how middle schools operate (Clark & Clark, 2003). In the process, parents learned more about adolescents, teachers and teaching, and classroom learning environments. Parents

then felt comfortable to shadow their children to learn more about classroom activities and assignments.

Table 8

Overall Summary of Component #2: Parental Involvement

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is positive...is used in the classroom...but can still improve as mentioned by all teams • Want more parental involvement with homework as mentioned by all teams • Would like to bring back PIQE as mentioned by all teams |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is positive...is used in the classroom...but can still improve • Want more parental involvement with homework • Would like to bring back PIQE |

Teaming and interdisciplinary teaching. Both middle schools had faculties that were organized into interdisciplinary teams. The teams were assigned groups of students and work to direct the curriculum and instruction of their group of students. The faculty on these teams represented diverse groups in individuals by age, discipline taught, ethnicity, and gender. The teams at both schools described situations in which students from other teams worked with their team of students, termed cross-teaming. In addition, Baker was beginning to implement the Professional Learning Community concept.

Teams and administration at both schools had only positive comments to make about communication and collaboration among the teams at their schools. All four groups also commented on how there are varying degrees of communication and collaboration among the teams at their site, but the teams and administrators at both schools commented that the 6th grade teams at their schools practice communication and collaboration to the highest degree. Teachers at both schools mentioned that it is important to integrate school curriculum with the past and present lives of the students.

Teaming is a bit different for 6th grade than 7th and 8th grade teams at both sites. Such differences are understandable since 6th grade is part of the primary credential and 7th and 8th grade instructors possess the secondary credential. Within the 6th grade teams, all teachers are certified to teach English because they possess the elementary credential not the secondary single subject credential. In 6th grade teams, each teacher instructs in two subject areas. For example, it is common for the 6th grade math teacher to also be the science teacher for that team. All four groups also commented that although they are proud of their teams and the process of teaming, they are looking for ways to improve. The teams at both schools were concerned that too much cross-teaming of students makes teaching a greater challenge because students may have different prior experiences or instruction. Team collaboration is important, even if the first steps of collaboration begin with low degrees of sharing. As time goes on, all teachers will learn to work hard together which will then maintain and expand their collaboration (Flowers et al., 1999). Collaboration will result in a knowledge-centered environment that team teachers will build by connecting inquiry, collaboration, and real-world experiences (Strahan & Layell, 2006).

A comment emphasized by teams and administrators at both schools is that the 6th grade teams seem to be strongest in working together. This could be due to the fact that sixth grade teachers have primary credentials and can teach all subjects. That is why all of the 6th grade team teachers teach English, but each team decides who will teach the other core subjects of math, science, and history. The 7th and 8th grade teachers possess a secondary credential and as a result teach only one subject each. This makes integrating

the curriculum, linking it with the present time, and aligning it with a student's life even more challenging.

These findings support studies that show that communication and collaboration among teams is very important for academic success (Fullan, 2003; Goodlad, 1975). Sometimes, the form of communication among team members regarding their 150 students may be more powerful than the content that is being taught (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). However, the communication and collaboration is not between team members only; it is also among team members and school administrators such as the practice of PLC (Cuban, 1998, 2001, 2007; Fullan, 2003). Since some teams were more than at-school colleagues, they represented the George and Alexanders's (as cited by Wilson, 2007, p. 2) relationship among team members to a marriage: "when it is working well, it is beautiful, and when it is not, it can be horrific". Both schools had energetic teams working diligently to maintain good communication and collaboration following the advice of Flowers et al. (1999).

Both are proud of their multi-ethnic schools and how well students and teachers of many different ethnic groups work together for a common cause: the academic success of each and every student. The factor of culture and ethnicity was discussed by one team from each grade level at Adler and one team from each of the 7th and 8th grade levels at Baker Middle School, as well as the administrators at both sites. Participants discussed the wide variety of degrees, means, and methods to join culture and ethnicity with the curriculum. Some teams reported that they integrate the topic by having a lesson plan or activity one day a month while other teams integrate culture and ethnicity into all aspects and domains of the interdisciplinary curriculum. Site administrators at both schools

define the topic more as student ethnicity in modern life. With these varying degrees of integrating student and school culture and ethnicity, students will become more involved in their learning and hence also become independent, confident individuals who 'learn how to learn' and develop lifelong learning skills (Manning & Bucher, as cited in Duerr, 2008).

The practice at Adler and Baker middle schools of integrating student and community culture into the learning process is supported by the literature. From the professional side, teachers and their knowledge of different learning and motivational strategies of their diverse school population are important components of academic success (Anderman et al., 1998; Bardach, 2008; Boller, 2008; Strahan, 2003). As reported by the teachers, integrating cultures is part and parcel of their daily instruction, supporting George's (2010) work. Team members demonstrate different degrees of awareness, acceptance, and participation of various cultures. The findings of these different levels of team integration of culture varied from teams that integrated culture each day while other teams integrated culture as few as one day each month. The importance of higher degrees of integration is shown by Strahan and Layell's (2006) article, "Connecting Caring and Action Through Responsive Teaching: How One Team Accomplished Success in a Struggling Middle School." They reported that respect for students' language and cultures as one of several key factors for academically successful middle schools. Other authors confirm the importance of respect for other cultures and ethnicities (Bardach, 2008). Children who accept and are proud of their culture can then learn about and accept other ways of living. For a school to be closest to integrating

cultural acceptance into their curriculum, the school's community should work hard to attain the 6th or top level of the cultural proficiency continuum (Lindsay et al., 2005).

The factor of interdisciplinary instruction was discussed by all teams at Adler and 5 of 8 teams at Baker Middle School, as well by site administrators at both schools. All participants shared the impression that interdisciplinary instruction is linked with team communication and collaboration. There are varying degrees of communication and collaboration to which content is taught in an interdisciplinary manner. Once again, all of the teams and site administrators participating in this topic discussion noted that 6th grade teams had the highest degree of interdisciplinary instruction. Site administrators voiced the concern that they would like this area to improve. For example, the principal at Adler Middle School started integration of certain techniques like note-taking across teams and grade levels this year. Interdisciplinary instruction grows from the needs and interests of students and their teacher who is guided by the standards and leads to strong student-teacher relationships (George, 2010).

Adler and Baker are multi-ethnic schools that are qualified as low socioeconomic sites. Both schools have improved their API scores across the five years. This study supports Strahan (2008) that showed that interdisciplinary means of instruction can be a useful tool to promote academic success, particularly for students in schools that have high percentages of low socioeconomic status and multi-ethnic students. This work noted how interdisciplinary teaching helped students see how subjects come together in everyday life; thus, students became more involved in the learning process. Involved students reduced many of the teachers' discipline concerns. It also means that students can learn how to learn how to learn, fostering lifelong learning skills (Manning &

Bucher, as cited in Duerr, 2008). Larry Cuban (1999) studied a middle school in Georgia where a major focus of their team approach involved interdisciplinary instructional methods. The school in his study had a schedule that included interdisciplinary team meetings five days a week. All of these team meetings led to improvements in students' academic success, particularly in reading and mathematics. The school improvement scores were higher than the average state scores. The teams in this study formerly met weekly or monthly. However, informal meetings are more frequent. One team at Adler communicates with each other several times a day via e-mail. Frequency of team meetings across teams was not included in the data collection of this study.

Table 9

Overall Summary of Component #3: Teaming and Interdisciplinary Teaching

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good teams positive with communication and collaboration...but degrees vary by team as mentioned by all teams at all levels • 6th grade teams highest degrees with communication & collaboration • Interdisciplinary instruction...different degrees of use by teams • Too much cross-teaming as mentioned by all teams • Want more service learning by 2/3 of teams at both schools |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good teams with positive communication and collaboration...but different by degrees • 6th grade teams highest degrees with communication & collaboration • Positive relationship with students of various cultures/ethnicities at this school • Interdisciplinary instruction...different degrees of use by teams...admin. would like to continue improvement |

Classroom instructional practices. The faculty teams at Adler and Baker Middle Schools discussed seven factors of the fourth component of Classroom Instructional Practices and the administrators of the two schools discussed six of the seven factors. Teachers and administrators shared similar perceptions of the factors of technology and organizational skills. Teachers and administrators shared thoughts on how the use of

technology is important for the academic advancement at their schools. Diversity and instruction begins with the use of Block Scheduling at both schools. Regarding the use of a variety of instructional practices, teachers and administrators at Adler and Baker also were proud of the great diversity of instructional techniques used by instructors at the schools. Respondents enthusiastically expressed positive perceptions of the other factors of this component.

The use of a wide variety of techniques of scheduling and instruction at Adler and Baker middle schools is supported by the research of Cuban (2008), Hough et al., (1989), Montgomery (2008), Ozgun-Koca (2008) and Peterson (2001a). According to other studies, a wide variety are important for student academic success (Anderman et al., 1998; Bardach, 2008; Boller, 2008; Strahan, 2003).

The use of technology is an important tool used for instruction at Adler and Baker schools as demonstrated by the response of 90% of the teams and 100% of the site administrators. All participants felt that their use of technology is an important part of instruction at their sites, particularly with the latest additions to technology such as mobile laptops, ELMOs, SmartBoards and teacher web sites. However, teachers at both sites also mentioned that this is an area of growing frustration with such concerns as availability of laptops and strength of Internet access in the classroom. Teachers and administrators are also taking first steps in the 2010-11 year to use data to analyze how their instructional techniques affect the academic advancement of their students.

The use of technology in the classroom is expanding in the 21st century at Adler and Baker is supported by Reigeluth (as cited in Doblar, 2010) who stated that establishing more central and comprehensive roles for the use of technology is pivotal

for schools to become academically successful. There are two key educational uses for technology: by the student to learn, and by the instructor to teach and use data acquired from teaching. Used effectively, technology can improve how schools are run, how teachers teach, and how students learn, particularly when an emphasis is given to processing and analyzing data from instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Though the use of technology alone does not guarantee academic success at middle schools, it is an important factor for schools that do succeed.

All teams at Adler and Baker middle schools addressed the factor of organizational skills. However, teachers and teams at both schools attested to varying degrees of how organizational skills are taught. Some teams reported how they daily teach such organizational skills as structured folders for each subject and establishing a calendar for homework each day. One team shared that they spend one day a month on helping students get organized. All teachers agreed that 6th grade teams at both schools implement the most structured instruction of organizational skills. Learning basic classroom skills such as note taking is also part of the organizational skills that are taught at Adler and Baker middle schools. Middle school students are expected to have acquired organizational skills by this age, but this not be the case and this is why it is important to cover such content at the middle school level (Boller, 2008). Such strategies can be fully integrated to the instruction of the different core subjects across the curriculum (Rhodes et al., 2009).

Getting their students organized with a variety of elements that range from note taking notes to organizing backpacks is supported by literature. Research has revealed that learning the core subject is not the only important element for classroom teachers.

Indeed, it is critical to teach students about specific learning strategies at the middle school level (Hough et al., 1989) before they reach high school and college (Boller, 2008). Some scholars believe that organizational skills should receive the same attention as the core subjects. Important strategies that should be taught and monitored include taking Cornell notes and teaching “think-and-search” reading comprehension strategies (Strahan & Layell, 2006). Even basic skills like organizing binder notebooks, backpacks (McCoy, 2000), and assignment notebooks (Laase, 1996) should be continually taught and reviewed in middle school. Cuban (2009) notes that such skills are helpful at the high school and college. In the 50 academically successful schools that Peterson (2001a) visited in his quest to find common reasons for success, he noted that 52% of these schools had such organizational skills programs beyond the required the state curriculum standards.

Table 10

Overall Summary of Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive use of technology, but would like more as mentioned by all teams • Positive comments about the teaching of organizations skills at all teams, however 6th grade teams at both schools the most organized teaching this strategy |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive use of technology by administrators at both schools • Good use of diverse instructional strategies by administrators at both schools |

School and classroom environment. The teams at both Adler and Baker and administrators at both schools all had common responses for the same five factors: academic success, relationships among faculty, relationships with students, extra-curricular activities, student motivation and high goals. All teams and administrators at

both schools discussed and shared similar sentiments regarding the factor of academic success, expressing pride about the academic advancements they have made the last few years. All teams and administrators also stated that they will work hard to continue to advance their students' state test scores.

Teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools developed positive relationships among their cohorts at their sites. This positive relationship is a key recommendation for developing effective middle schools (Edna McConell Clark Foundation, as cited by the Cooney & Southern Regional Education Board, 1998b). Strahan and Layell's 2006 study of successful middle schools confirmed the importance of positive relationships among faculty members, even if these relationships occur within a team and not the entire school, noting that such relationships can result in more academically productive students.

Three of the seven teams and administrators at Adler Middle School briefly discussed their positive relationships with parents. Fullan (2003) and Goodlad (1975) confirm that good communication can help build strong relationships among teachers and parents both on and off-campus. They also learned that such effective teacher-parent relationships are important for student academic success. To help teachers build strong relationship with parents, Grossnickle (1988) created a list for teachers to use to improve their relationships with parents.

Administrators and four out of seven teams at Adler, as well as administrators and seven out of eight teams at Baker, discussed the factor of extra-curricular activities. All groups discussed their beliefs about how extra-curricular activities provide an important step in learning and the academic growth of their schools. An important ingredient in the

extra-curricular activities program at both schools is the RAP after-school program.

While participants shared that RAP is very positive, they also expressed their belief that RAP needs to be better integrated with the curriculum at the two sites.

The review of literature confirms the academic importance of after-school program started at Adler and Baker middle schools. RAP at the two schools already opens the door to such activities involving sports, health, art, and music, making the school site a fun and safe environment for the children. Mertens and Flowers (2003) confirm how the final win of after-school programs that involve academic advancement for the children of the school can lead to academic development. The RAP program at Adler and Baker has already started many of these processes. Teachers have asked that the program now formally align and reinforce what is being taught in the classroom. The after-school program can then reinforce and support what is being done in the classroom by offering time for homework and tutoring.

Motivating their students is a technique that the administrators and four of seven teams at Adler, as well as administrators and seven of eight teams at Baker would like to expand. While respondents from Adler and Baker offered entirely positive comments about how teachers set high expectations for their students and work to motivate students to learn, they all reported that it is a very challenging process and expressed a desire to learn new ways to interest students in learning. They believe that more extra-curricular activities, both during and after school hours, can help motivate students, but, as previously mentioned, they also believe that it is important to link academics with extra-curricular activities.

Anderman et al. (1998) report how setting high expectations and the desire to learn more about motivating their students motivation has a tremendous influence on learning. The skills of setting high expectations and motivating students, while not state standards regarding content, are crucial for student academic success (Anderman et al., 1998; Bardach, 2008; Boller, 2008; Strahan, 2003). Continuous motivation (Anderman, et al., 1998) is a crucial element of student success. Giving children many opportunities to succeed is also a powerful motivational factor for students at the middle school age. If children believe their reasons for failure are out of their control, they do not have a reason to believe that they can succeed (Anderman et al., 1998). In addition to giving students multiple chances to succeed, setting high goals is also an important part of achieving academic success (Strahan & Layell, 2006).

Table 11

Overall Summary of Component #5: School and Classroom Environment

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set high goals for academic achievement by all teams at both sites • Positive relationship among faculty members by all teams at both sites • Student motivation difficult reported by 4/7 teams at Adler and 7/8 teams at Baker, but... • Positive relationship with students as reported by all teams at both sides • Successful extra-curricular program regarding student involvement...want more as reported by 4/7 teams at Adler and 4/8 teams at Baker • Productive RAP program...needs fine tuning to align with academics as reported by all teams at both sites |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set high goals for academic achievement • Positive relationship among faculty members • Student motivation difficult, but... • Positive relationship with students • Successful extra-curricular program regarding student involvement...want more |

Professional development . All teams and administrators at both sites discussed the sixth component, Professional Development, and its two factors, purpose and choice.

Their responses were universal, sharing that the current system of professional development is not working. With the current system of professional development, the district coordinates one session a month. Additionally, each school site has its own session once a month. Teachers and site administrators believe that there is no follow-through when the district has their once a month professional development conference. Teachers and administrators feel that the teachers at a site should be part of decision-making regarding topics for professional development. Besides having a choice, teachers having a voice would ensure that the professional development they receive is appropriate to their needs and the needs of their students.

Nieto (2000, 2009) verifies how professional development as addressed by the teams and administrators at Adler and Baker schools can affect student academic growth. Adults at both schools want appropriate, high quality professional development that is needed at their sites. Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed that providing quality professional development for the teachers was a core component of their success (Whitehouse, 2009). Teachers must continue to grow so their students can grow as well; this is an essential factor in students' academic success (Bardach, 2008). Professional development creates higher quality teachers, which helps to promote student engagement and achievement in the classroom (Strahan, 2003). As the Adler and Baker teachers believe, much of teacher development does not have to be provided by outsiders. Effective teachers teaching less-effective teachers at the same site has been proven to help schools achieve academic success (Felch et al., 2010).

Table 12

Overall Summary of Component #6: Professional Development

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development program not positive... no follow-through as reported by all at both sites • Need more teacher choice as reported by all at both sites |
| ADMINISTRATORS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development program not positive... no follow-through • Need more teacher choice |

Next three steps to continue academic advancement. During the interview, teachers and site administrators were asked to identify what they believed were the next three steps that their school should take to continue its academic advancement. Despite there not being a list from which to choose to list what teachers and administrators believe should be the next three steps that should be taken at their sites to continue the academic development of their schools, the teachers at two schools overwhelmingly agreed upon two factors: parental involvement and professional development.

Parental involvement received 13 votes from the 7th and 8th grade teams at Adler and five votes from the 7th grade teams at Baker. This vote reflects teachers' desire to bring back programs like PIQE return to their schools. As reported in the team feedback for Component #2: Parental Involvement, professionals can do a great deal to increase this link with the school community. PIQE is a program designed to increase parental involvement in the school by providing a list of programs that teachers can use to increase parental involvement.

Benson and Martin (2003) confirm the positive impact that PIQE and increased parental involvement can have with the academic advancement of middle school

students. Felch et al. (2010) present another example of the positive effects of parental involvement in their research report about Markham Middle School.

The 6th and 7th grade teams at Adler gave seven votes and the 6th and 7th grade teams at Baker gave four votes for professional development as their second common selection as the next three steps that should be taken as their sites to continue the academic advancement of their students. As previously mentioned, the teachers at both sites believe that the current professional development system is a waste of their time. Too often, the session topics are never completed, and teachers have little choice in the topic and means of development in what they feel is important for their continued advancement.

Felch et al. (2010) also present the example of the positive effects of the professional development of teachers at Markham Middle School could also affect the teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools. The means of professional development involved offer at Markham school is also the means of development desired by the teachers at Adler and Baker. It involves teachers having a choice on the means of development. It can also involve teachers teaching other teachers the topic for professional development. At Markham Middle School, the most effective part of this academic advancement is effective teachers and their involvement with the professional development of their colleagues.

Table 13

Overall Summary of the Next 3 Steps to Continue Academic Success

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parental involvement as voted by 13 at Adler and 5 at Baker • Improve professional development as voted by 7 at Adler and 4 at Baker |

Conclusion #2: The two schools are dissimilar in the following factors and component: service learning, block scheduling, looping, intervention; Component #7: Leadership and decision-making. Service learning is a factor of Component #3: Interdisciplinary Teaching. Block scheduling, looping and intervention are factors of Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices. These factors merely reflect different levels of depth in implementing these factors. However, research has shown that leadership at a school (Component #7) is a pivotal factor of school success. The dissimilarities in all of the factors of Component #7 could be a prime reason for differences in the levels of academic success at Adler and Baker.

Service learning. The factor of service learning, also known as community service, is handled in different ways at Adler and Baker middle schools. At Adler Middle School, service learning is a voluntary, school-wide, year-long activity for 8th grade students. Some teams at Adler hold their own service learning projects for their students. Team teachers and administrators at Adler are considering making service learning a school-wide project and possibly a requirement for 8th graders. At Baker Middle School, teachers said that service learning as a whole does not exist at their school. One team at Baker, however, said that they do coordinate one big service task at the end of the year. The assistant principal expressed that service learning at Baker is a project of the leadership class, which is vital in taking part in community projects. Many teachers at Baker would like to start some sort of involvement in the program if it is implemented school-wide at their site.

Service learning is an important curricular topic that can link and integrate the content with the real lives of the student and the community (Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon,

2002). If integrated properly into the curriculum, service learning can be solid technique used to teach the content and not be seen as simply another chore to do (Dietz, as cited in Peterson, 2001a). Service learning can also be another means to integrate the community into the school learning process. Among the 50 successful schools visited on a study of exemplary schools, it was noted that 30% of these schools have formal programs of service learning (Peterson, 2001b).

Table 14

Overall Summary of Differences with Component #3: Teaming & Interdisciplinary Teaching

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School | TEAMS at Baker Middle School |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Learning optional with 8th grade students and some teams as reported by one team per grade level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Learning only an activity of Leadership Class as reported by one team per grade level |

Block scheduling. Six of seven teams at Adler and six of eight teams at Baker participated in the discussion regarding the factor of block scheduling. Over 50% of the respondents at Adler and over 62% of the respondents at Baker commented that they like the current block schedule at their sites. Both sites have block schedule for only two days of each week--Wednesday and Thursday. At Adler Middle School, math teachers responded that they do not like block scheduling, even for only two days a week. However, math teachers at Baker Middle School responded that they do like block scheduling.

Block scheduling has proven to be an important factor for successful middle schools (Hough et al., 1989). However, research shows that it is just as important for schools to developing schedules that fit their learning environment. For example, at a middle school in Louisville, Kentucky, teams are free to create their own schedules based

on their judgment of academic needs. One team developed a schedule with short instructional time for math (Ames & Miller, 1994; Maehr & Midgley, 1996). However, if block scheduling is the type of scheduling used, changes in instruction and assessment must also take place to work with this longer period of instructional time (Cooney & Southern Regional Education Board, 1998a). Research shows that it takes time for block scheduling to be accepted by both faculty and students partly because it can be challenging to begin a complete new way of instruction. In the first year survey of the faculty of a middle school in Minnesota that had begun using the block scheduling method, only a small percentage of the instructors stated that they were satisfied with this new method of the workday. However, one year later, 78% of the teachers indicated in the survey that they were satisfied with block scheduling. Students also took time to embrace this new form of scheduling. In the first year of the survey, 38% of the students said they liked block scheduling. However, one year later, 66% of the students said they enjoyed it. An added bonus of block scheduling was also noticed in this study survey. In the first year of this new scheduling, 68% of the students said they feel they were stressed at school. However, in the second year of block scheduling, only 35% of the students stated that they felt stressed (Peterson, 2001b). Other hybrids of scheduling have also been created across the country. One New York middle school established a six-day cycle where each student met with each class four times a week. Of these four meetings, two would be in 40-minute blocks while the other two meetings would consist of 80-minute blocks (Peterson, 2001b). Such varieties of scheduling results in teachers and students experiencing the teaching and learning of a subject at different times of the day during the week. Six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools agreed

that using flexible scheduling and extended school day activities were core reasons for their success (Whitehouse, 2009).

Looping. Looping is a subject that arose during the discussion of Component #2: Parental Involvement. The 6th and 7th grade teams at both middle schools and the administrators at Baker Middle School addressed the topic of looping as a form of teaming. Looping is the time when a core group of students remain with a single teacher for multiple years. Teams at Adler were against the idea of looping, however the 6th grade teams expressed interest in learning more about the subject of looping, how it works, and the potential results of such a scheduling system. Two teams at Baker are currently experimenting with the system and others at the site have expressed interest. Teachers at Baker said looping also helped involve parents in the educational process for their teams.

Literature by Peterson (2001b) shows that looping at Baker can serve as an instructional tool that leads to the academic advancement of students. Looping helps teachers, students, and parents build a sense of community. This sense of community over an extended period of time can develop the commitment of the teachers involved, the support of the principal, and encouragement and loyalty from the parents.

Intervention. At Adler, the term "intervention" is used to refer to helping students with a GPA of below 2.0. Adler team teachers gave positive support to the administrators and counselors for meeting regularly in an attempt to help these students. At Baker Middle School, the term refers to the homeroom class, also known as intervention class. Intervention was discussed by administrators and six of the eight teams and administrators at Baker, as well as by all teams and administrators at Adler.

At Baker Middle School, the term refers to the homeroom class, also known as intervention class. For schools in Program Improvement (P.I.) status, intervention classes are scheduled to give extended instruction time in areas where students need the most improvement. Five of the six teams at Baker had negative remarks about the current intervention system. Teachers said that there is no structure for the intervention program and as such some teachers and teams would truly teach to help students in areas where they needed the most assistance. Instructors also reported that intervention time for other teachers was merely time for students to complete homework. Teams believed that in order for their intervention program to work, the school would need to implement a clearly structured system with proper placement of students in classes and proper support for instructors. Teachers also said that intervention need to be moved from its current place in the daily schedule, the last period of the day, to some other time, such as first period or in the middle of the day.

In 2010, the Blueprint for Reform discussed four significant reform efforts already in progress. One such effort included improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. Further research regarding leadership and intervention reported that an effective leader builds effective academic interventions that are factors on improving student performance ("Gaining Ground" 2010).

Table 15

Overall Summary of Differences with Component #4: Classroom Instructional Practices

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School | TEAMS at Baker Middle School |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Block Schedule of 2 days a week accepted as is... math teachers <u>DISLIKE</u> Block as reported by all teams • No looping as reported by all, but 6th and 7th grade interested in learning more about the topic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Block Schedule of 2 days a week accepted as is...math teachers <u>LIKE</u> Block as reported by all teams • Yes, looping...6th and 7th grade interested in learning more about the topic • Wants to improve the intervention program as reported by all teams |

Component #7: Leadership and decision-making. Four of the five factors of the seventh component, Leadership and Decision-Making, generated the most varied responses from the teams at Adler and Baker Middle Schools. However, the site administrators at both sites had similar results with their responses. Teams at both schools replied to the following factors: faculty decision-making, teacher empowerment, trust, and support. The teacher responses from the team interviews at Baker Middle School created the new factor of lack of follow-through.

Regarding the factor of faculty decision-making, all of the comments from Adler school were positive remarks about their site administrators. However, though the teachers at Baker stated that their principal leads them and that they follow with trust and that they are a part of the decision-making process at their school, teams across all grade levels expressed concern that the faculty is limited in the decision-making process. Five of the seven teams at Adler and five of the eight teams at Baker responded to the factor of faculty decision-making. Administrators at both sites feel that the teachers are part of making decisions at their schools.

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the impact that teacher decision-making at schools has on greater student academic development. In his journey

around the country looking at academically successful middle schools, Peterson (2001a) found a commonality among leaders and decision-making practices. This commonality is that successful schools all had a strong principal, but one who built trust with his staff in a variety of ways. Such means of building trusts include implementing teachers in establishing a school schedule and in the school's professional development.

Adler teachers shared their belief that teachers have the ability to be empowered in the decision-making at their site, and that the administrators are open to their thoughts and beliefs. The teachers at Baker stated that their principal leads them and that they follow with trust, that they are part of the decision-making process at their school. However, teams across all grade levels expressed concern that the faculty is not truly empowered to a high degree in being part of the decision-making process. All teams at Adler and five of the eight teams at Baker responded to factor of teacher empowerment. Adler teams credit their principal respecting teachers and taking their input seriously. Both administrators treat the staff as professionals. Such comments were followed by other remarks that their administrators do not have appropriate time to follow through on many school projects. Teachers commented that their administrators were overloaded and as a result did not have enough time to work all of the elements it takes for a school to continue to grow academically. The site administrators at Adler and Baker feel that they involve educators in making decisions. The principal at Adler said that his role is to create a climate where people feel empowered and that they are part of making decisions. At Baker, the assistant principal said that the teachers who are interested in being empowered are empowered.

There is mutual trust and support at both sites as well. Teachers feel trust in being able to take on certain tasks in their own way, but to do so the teachers also receive support from the site administrators. However, at Baker Middle School, teachers also feel that site administrators do not follow through with many tasks that are undertaken. This feeling of site administrators at Baker not being able to follow-through with tasks was shared throughout the interview process regarding the other six components of academic development. As a show of this trust and respect, teachers at Adler feel their administrators support them by giving them time to complete their jobs. A common comment about this support from the teachers at Adler is that administrators cancelled meetings when meetings were not imperative. The administrators at Adler stated that they show their trust of their staff by hiring the teachers, then let them go to work on their task. Administrators support their professionals in order to make their job of teaching a little easier. At Baker Middle School, the teams across all grade levels offered comments supporting their administrators, noting that trust is a two way street and that administrators had built a solid road. Other comments reflected how teachers feel administrators support them by helping teams with whatever they ask for. These positive comments were also followed by constructive feedback. Respondents noted that although administrators try to support teams, they often do not complete the work they start. One teacher stated that the administrators are “like chickens running around with their heads cut off...they are overloaded.” Administrators at Baker feel they show their support for teachers by opening for the door for teacher concepts such as looping. Administrators expressed that they will continue to support of their teams in this way.

Literature shows trust and support among teachers and administrators are important factors for strong academic growth. In an article titled “Manage to Keep Teachers Happy!” (Hartzell & Winger, 1989), principals listed skills they consider important for academically successful schools. One important skill they listed was teacher empowerment. In another study, George (2010) stressed that a leader in a school must work with the staff to infuse values into the operation of every middle school program. Among these important values was teacher empowerment. The power of trust among educators is a core requirement for continuous school improvement (George, 2010). At academically successful schools, administrators are exceptional leaders who nurture teacher development through personal support and release time (Sanders, 2006). This was evidenced by replies from teachers at Adler about their administrators. Trust is an aspect of leadership that is not taught at the university (George, 2010). One study found that schools with high levels of trust were three times more likely to improve in reading and mathematics than schools with low trust. Schools with consistently lower levels of trust showed little or no improvement in student achievement. In another study, teachers with high levels of trust in their principal also had higher rates of student achievement, even after controlling for poverty and race (Bryk & Schneider, as cited in Vodicka & Hancock, 2008).

The teams at Baker created a new factor that aligns with the factors of this component of Leadership and Decision-Making: lack of follow-through by administrators. While the teachers at Baker Middle School did offer positive remarks about the trust and support they receive from their site administrators, they also expressed that their site administrators do not follow-through with many tasks that they start. Baker

teachers also offered what they believe is the explanation for this problem, which is the fact that their administrators are understaffed. This comment about lack of administrative staff does correlate with the quantitative data topic of Ratio of Students to Administrators at Baker Middle School, but this ratio has changed drastically over the last five years. The ratio at Baker was 25% higher than the ratio at Adler Middle School in 2006, but has fallen to 8% for the 2010-11 school year.

Felch et al. (2010) wrote about the predicament taking on many tasks at once in their study about school reform. They noticed how new administrators would enter a middle school that qualifies as low SES and try to change this dilemma by making a multitude of changes in a short amount of time. The result would be little change in the academic development of the students at the school. One suggestion to address this dilemma could be for site administrators to "do more by doing less" (Good & McCastlin, 2008).

Table 16

Overall Summary of Differences with Component #7: Leadership and Decision-Making

| TEAMS at Adler Middle School | TEAMS at Baker Middle School |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are a part of decision-making as reported by all • Teachers are empowered as reported by all • Teachers trust administrators as reported by all | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers not a full part of decision-making as reported by 1/2...BUT • Teachers not fully empowered...as reported by all • Teachers not fully supported administrators as reported by all... • ...due to little follow-through by administration as reported by all |

Conclusion #3: Although the two sites were more similar than different, each site developed programs and reforms to meet the needs of its students. This conclusion offers a perfect example of how there is no one formula to enable all middle

schools to become academically successful. At both sites, teachers have found an important link that has helped lead their students to greater academic success: listening to students and involving parents.

For example, the two sixth grade teams at Baker introduced looping in 2008-2009. The teams said they received the principal's support to experiment with looping. The responses from team members were energetic. One member of a team that looped said, "Looping has been really successful academically and personally at this school. I hope it will continue." Another shared the thought that "Looping provides for better relationships with parents and students." Another teacher stated, "With looping, student morale and teacher morale are higher than before." Another member of a looping team said that "it makes life easy and kids reach the high expectations that we set." Looping is in its second year of looping at Baker. One teacher stated: "I believe that looping has improved the test scores of our team of students. We'll see this year."

Peterson (2001b) indicates that schools that use the looping system as a means for instruction have reported various positive results, especially the benefit of building a sense of community among the teachers, parents, and students of the team. Schools that adopt looping are able to discover the ingredients that are paramount for success, including building unwavering support for the teachers, the devotion of the principal and the support from the parents (Peterson, 2001b).

At Adler Middle School, service learning is available to all 8th graders and to some students at the other grades. Those wanting to be involved in the program must see a counselor to sign up and participate. Many 6th and 7th grade teachers expressed a desire to integrate more service learning into the curriculum, expressing sentiments such

as, "We need service learning school wide to give our students a real life experience...it needs to be mandatory." "We need to use interdisciplinary instruction and link what we teach with the real world." A final comment was "I'd love to have students at this school reach out and touch the world. To have them see the impact and power of each individual would be life-changing." One class at Baker, the leadership class, reported using service learning

If Adler would expand and Baker would introduce service learning as suggested by the teachers, research has shown that service learning can both link across the curriculum and integrate the content with the real life of the student (Hatcher-Skeers & Aragon, 2002). Service learning involves students doing work to help in the community. While it does help those in need, service learning also confers an additional advantage in that it promotes the development of positive values in students, as well as bringing staff and students together in cooperative ventures. There are times when these service activities have a connection to an academic subject, while at other times the advisor-advisee homeroom organized the service project. In other words, service learning has the potential to be viewed as more than "fluff" by staff, students, and parents; if it can link life with the curriculum, service learning can be an important instructional tool (Dietz, as cited in Peterson, 2001a). In the 50 successful schools that Peterson (2001b) visited on his trip around the nation visiting exemplary schools, he noted that 30% of these schools have formal programs of service learning.

Baker faculty introduced school-wide assessment that takes place every six weeks, half-way through the trimester system. What makes the program work is a very rapid grading system where teachers get the results back of the assessment within 1-2

days. One teacher noted, "It is a great system as we plan for the state exam." One teacher has even taken assessment to the next step: a quick weekly 5-10 question assessment in her core topic. Another team has taken on another form of assessment that uses a variety of techniques: the portfolio. Research has shown that assessment is an important part of instruction. Just as diverse forms of classroom instruction have proven to be important for academic success in middle schools, so have diverse forms of assessment (Hough et al., 1989).

Conclusion #4: At the new middle school, teachers perceived that the administrators empowered and supported teams to make changes; teachers at the original site perceived that their site administrators did not follow through or support them. At Adler Middle School, teams made positive comments about how they are part of the decision-making process at their school and how they are supported and trusted by their site administrators. At Baker Middle School, teams made positive comments about being empowered in the decision-making process, but followed their comments with how they feel limited in making decisions and being empowered by site administrators because the administrators are overloaded and as a result do not follow-through with everything decided with the teachers.

At Adler Middle School, five of the seven teams made positive comments about how they are part of the decision-making process at their school, and all seven teams responded with positive feedback about being empowered by their site administrators. Teachers on all seven teams also reported on how they are trusted and supported by the site administrators to do their jobs. At Baker Middle School, five of the eight teams first responded to the factors of faculty decision-making and teacher empowerment with

positive comments. But the positive comments from the teams were immediately followed by comments on how administrators at Baker are overloaded.

In consideration of the feedback by 75% of the teams, the new factor of lack of follow-through was added to the component of Leadership and Decision-Making for Baker Middle School. After giving positive comments about the potential for faculty empowerment and decision-making, the teams stated that administrators are not following through on topics discussed with teachers. Teachers on the 7th and 8th grade teams with more than 5 years of experience at Baker school also commented on how they feel the district has understaffed the administrative staff at Baker.

When looking at Figure 3: Student Enrollment for Adler and Baker Middle Schools, the explanation for understaffing of administration begins to make sense. With the splitting of Baker into two schools, both Adler and Baker had two administrators, yet the enrollment in 2006 at Baker included 278 more students than Adler. However, enrollment between the two middle schools has since equalized. In 2010-11, enrollment at Adler was 914 while the enrollment for Baker was 993, a difference of only 79 students. This reduction in the difference of sizes of the schools can also be noticed by looking at Figure 15: Ratio of Students per Administrator. In 2006-07, the one administrator at Baker school had 139 more students than the one administrator at Adler. However, in 2010-11, the ratio reduced to a difference of 40 students.

The study by Cuban (1998) of schools in Georgia explained the importance of the traits of school leaders empowering and teachers in the decision-making process and supporting them with their work. This study determined that constructive, positive school leaders focus attention on what needs to be done to improve student achievement, and

then make sure that it happens. Exceptional leaders find a way to help teachers as well. As part of this concept, the study resolved that principals who are instructional leaders make sure there is uninterrupted learning time in the classroom.

Another trait found in the leaders of academically successful middle schools is intervening and supporting teachers to intervene with those students who need support to succeed (EdSource, 2010). Monitoring and assisting these students also results in improving student performance on district and state benchmarks and tests.

Fullan (2003) and Goodlad, (1975) are only two of many who have shown how communication is another critical trait of an exceptional leader. Teachers at high-performing middle schools report that their principal meets with teachers individually, by grade, and by subject to review CST and benchmark test results. Exceptional principals continually support the teachers and always know what the teachers are doing.

Another important trait of a strong school leader is their collaboration with teachers. It is imperative to remember that a successful leader in today's schools is a leader of collaboration among professionals (Cuban, 1998, 2001, 2007; Fullan, 2003). Principals do not merely give orders. Teacher collaboration involves teacher participation that energizes these professionals to critically analyze the process that can give them ownership among the various colleagues and result in an investment from key stakeholders (Rhodes et al., 2009).

Teachers who experience support from their principals also report a greater willingness to participate in the decision-making process at their schools (Smylie, as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009). The enthusiasm for such participation is nurtured when teachers view their input as having an impact (Pankake & Moller, 2007). Supportive,

collaborative, and mutually respectful principal-teacher relationships affect student academic results (Friedkin & Slater as cited in Rhodes et al., 2009).

Often times, principals new to a school, particularly low-performing schools, step in and make many drastic changes trying to increase academic success. But sometimes, "principals might do more by doing less" (Good & McCaslin, 2008): a trait of a strong leader. In a low-performing school, a principal's time is often spread over too many activities. For program improvement (PI) schools, principals are placed in this position because CSR (Comprehensive School Reform) guidelines *require* principals to coordinate so much at the same time. Leaders should be able to focus on fewer, but more important, tasks when leading a change to increase academic advancement (Good & McCaslin, 2008).

Principals of low-performing schools should make every effort to acquire in-depth, firsthand knowledge regarding teaching techniques and theory about what teachers and students should be doing in the classrooms (Good & McCaslin, 2008). However, today's overloaded principals at low-performing schools spend little time in the classroom (Good & McCaslin, 2008).

Conclusion #5: The team interview was an effective way to gather and analyze data from a large number of faculty partners. At Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 94% of the teachers, counselors and administrators were interviewed in order to ascertain their thoughts about academic development at their school. The information shared by the teachers and administrators at the two sites can be very valuable when comparing the data of the interviews with tasks proven by research to be valuable for the academic advancement of middle schools.

To gather this information, the researcher reviewed the literature regarding academically successful middle schools and created structure of seven components with corresponding factors. Teachers were given a survey packet so they would know the topics of discussion and the amount of time planned for the group interview. Many participants wrote notes in the packet before the interview. The researcher took notes during each interview process. The end of the structured time was set aside for teachers to write their thoughts about each component if they so desired. If teachers wanted to add information at a later date, they could go to a website to anonymously leave any additional information for any or all components. Credentialed staff spent approximately 1-2 hours in the course of a week for the above steps.

Through this process, the researcher acquired vast amounts of valuable data about the thoughts and teachers and administrators regarding teaching and the academic development of students at their school. The data is valuable because it represents participants' direct responses regarding important factors of academic development. Also, as the interview process revealed, administrators may not be aware of all of their teachers' thoughts and feelings. Teachers and administrators at Adler and Baker have already shared their thought that communication between teachers and administrators should improve. Administrators at both sites may not be aware of the data acquired with the team interviews of this study.

It is unusual for schools to set aside such structured time for the process of gathering information about effective educational strategies. However, educators found this information valuable enough to merit their participation in this research. At the end of the interview, most expressed an interest in learning the results for their school. The

methodology used for this study requires little time of the participants and could be a valuable means for school and/or district administrators to acquire valuable data about their schools.

Conclusion #6: The results of the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life aligns with the EdSource 7 Domains of Middle School Success, Bryk's 5 Organizational Features, and the *Los Angeles Times* article summary. Though there are different studies looking at factors for academically successful middle schools, the results of this research study aligns together with these EdSource, Bryk and *Los Angeles Times* studies. This alignment involves the common theme of exemplary teachers who share their knowledge about teaching with colleagues who may not yet possess such skills and for whom adequate time to apply such information is not available. The alignment also involves strong, resourceful, supportive school administrators.

In February, 2010, EdSource published a study exploring the different academic success levels of 303 schools over 30 years of middle school. The research used interviews of teachers, principals and superintendents. The findings state that one domain, Focus on Outcomes, is particularly important for academic growth and that another six domains that were strong, but varied when looking at state API scores. Focus on Outcomes included significant practices that reflected forceful, integrated, comprehensive approaches school wide that were correlated with improved academic outcomes.

The six remaining strong domains varied in their degrees of strength. One dealt with Coherent and Aligned standard-based instruction and coherent curriculum. The second domain addressed district level personnel, leadership by the superintendent, and

total support by district personnel. The third domain involved evaluations and support of instructional personnel. The fourth domain was leadership at the school level: principal leadership and competencies. Early and proactive academic interventions to support students falling behind the test scores encompassed the fifth domain. The last domain was the organization of the school as it dealt with time and instruction. This study showed that leadership for continued academic growth is important not only at the school level, but also at the district level.

The Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life aligns with the EdSource 7 Domains of Middle School Success to find commonalities in the two research methods regarding successful middle schools. Figure 37 presents the results of the Adler and Baker Middle School study based on the interview responses. The table shows in green all of the areas that are identical or similar responses on the interview questions at both Adler and Baker Middle Schools. For the areas and text in orange (professional development, leadership support and intervention), Adler and Baker either individually or together had different results.

In April, 2010, Anthony S. Bryk published studies of two elementary schools in Chicago that, like the schools in this study, were very similar in many ways, but differed in their academic development. Bryk found five essential supports for school improvement. The Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life also align with his five organizational features. Figure 38 presents the results of the Adler and Baker Middle Schools study based on the interview responses and how the results align with both Bryk's organizational features and Neufeld's seven components.

| EdSource's 7 Domains of Middle School Success | alignment with Neufeld's 7 Components | Adler Middle School results from study | Baker Middle School results from study |
|---|--|--|--|
| Focus on Outcomes | <u>Components #2, #3, #4, #5, #7:</u> Parental involvement; Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instruction; School & classroom climate; Leadership & decision-making | School as a whole focuses on positive academic outcome, but all desire more parental involvement; Teaming & instructional practices varies by degrees; accepts school leadership program | School as a whole focuses on positive academic outcome, but all desire more parental involvement; established looping; Teaming & instructional practices varies by degrees; want change to intervention period; school leaders not able to follow-through on work |
| Coherent Instruction | <u>Components #3, #4:</u> Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices | Positive feedback on instruction; Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree | Positive feedback on instruction; Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree |
| Superintendent Leadership | <u>Components #3, #4:</u> Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices | Teachers believe district handles p.d....does not support teachers | Teachers believe district handles p.d....does not support teachers |
| Teacher Competence | <u>Components #3, #4, #6:</u> Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices; Professional development | Positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive | Positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive |
| Principal Leadership | <u>Components #1, #5, #7:</u> School safety; School & classroom climate; Leadership & decision-making | School safe, learning environment; Caring leader; mutual trust; teachers empowered | School safe, learning environment; Teachers feel support through follow-through is inadequate; as a result, do not feel fully empowered |
| Extensive Use of Data | <u>Components #3, #4, #6:</u> Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices; Professional development | Data not a topic of interview! Positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive | Data not a topic of interview! Positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive |
| Academic Intervention | <u>Components #3, #4, #6:</u> Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices; Professional development | Intervention not a topic of interview! Positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive | Intervention period not accepted; positive feedback on instruction; Teaming involvement varies by degree; professional development not supportive |
| | | <i>GREEN signifies component/factors highly supportive.</i> | <i>ORANGE signifies component/factor not supportive as is.</i> |

Figure 37. Aligning "EdSource 7 Domains", "Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools

The most important aspect of these studies is not only which components and factors are being integrated in the Bryk and Neufeld models to improve higher academic achievement. Rather, it is equally important to consider the *degree* to which the components and factors are part of the implementation. For example, the degree of teaming is not a factor of higher academic achievement if teaming is the *only* reform in middle school development. Teaming is important, but only if it is one of several reform factors being implemented (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). Mertens and Flowers noted that higher degrees of teaming effort resulted in higher achievement scores. Bryk's 5 Organizational Features and Neufeld's 7 Components do align as shown in Figure 38.

| Bryk's 5 Organizational Features | alignment with Neufeld's 7 Components | Adler Middle School results from study | Baker Middle School results from study |
|---|---|---|---|
| Coherent, instructional guidance system | Components #3, #4: Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom instructional practices | Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree | Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree |
| Professional capacity | Component #6: Professional development | Not supportive | Not supportive |
| Strong parent-community-school ties | Component #2: Parental involvement | Parental involvement can be improved to previous state and improved | Parental involvement can be improved to previous state and improved |
| Student-centered learning climate | Components #1, #3, #4, #5: School safety; Teaming & interdisciplinary teaching; Classroom & classroom practices | School is safe; Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree | School is safe; Has teaming, but involvement varies by degree |
| Leadership drives change | Component #7: Leadership & Decision-Making | Positive, caring leader; mutual trust; mutual support; teachers empowered | No support/inadequate follow-through; <i>Split Decisions: 1/2 pro-1/2 con on following: teacher empowerment</i> |
| | | <i>GREEN signifies component/factors highly supportive</i> | <i>ORANGE signifies component/factor not supportive as is</i> |

Figure 38. Aligning "Bryk's 5 Organizational Features", "Neufeld's 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools

A study by Felch et al. (2010) also reviewed the academic success of a middle school that had languished for many years. The study looked for reason(s) for this change to academic success. Figure 39 aligns Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life with the Felch, Song and Poindexter study.

The school in the Felch, Song and Poindexter study was Markham Middle School in the Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD]. For the 2009-10 state academic exam, Markham had the fastest rate of student progress among the LAUSD middle schools. Many attempts at academic advancement had been tried over the last 20 years at Markham using many of the components that are also located in the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components. Markham Middle School showed little if any advancement in their academics until the principal applied value-added analysis and placed students with effective teachers.

The principal also enabled the effective teachers to assist and train teachers with lower effectiveness and bring them up to par of academic expectations, a trait also noticed in resilient, academically successful schools across the country (Patterson et al., 2010). Highly qualified teachers were able to coach teachers who were not highly qualified with such topics as classroom management skills, working with parents, and creating daily lessons from the defined curriculum. The point of professional development was for teachers to train teachers to implement important skills (Patterson, et al., 2010, p. 35). The summary in Figure 39 of the study of Markham Middle School shows the similarities that existed between Markham Middle School and Adler and Baker Middle School regarding the power of leaders, the importance of highly qualified

teachers, and professional development time for less qualified teachers to strengthen their skills.

| <i>Los Angeles Times</i> article summary | alignment with Neufeld's 7 Components | Adler Middle School results from study | Baker Middle School results from study |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Over the years, the Markham M.S. implemented all of the components: safe school; parental involvement, teaming; classroom instructional practices, classroom environment; professional development; leadership | <u>Component #1, #2, #5</u> | Adler implemented: safe school; parental involvement, teaming; classroom instructional practices, classroom environment; professional development, leadership | Baker implemented: safe school; parental involvement, teaming; classroom instructional practices, classroom environment; professional development, leadership |
| In the last 2 years, particular application of data analysis of student & teacher success; use of highly effective teachers to work with teachers who are average with the use of professional development; teacher training of instructional practices and proper classroom environment through use of teaming; teacher involvement in leadership & decision-making | <u>Components #3, #4, #6, #7</u> | No use of teacher data; use of teaming and interdisciplinary instruction, classroom instructional practices, leadership and decision-making, and professional development | No use of teacher data; use of teaming and interdisciplinary instruction, classroom instructional practices; teachers feel little follow-through by school leaders which affects administrator support and teacher empowerment; professional development |
| | | <i>ORANGE signifies component/factor not supportive as is</i> | <i>GREEN signifies component/factors highly supportive</i> |

Figure 39. Aligning the *Los Angeles Times* article on Markham Middle School, "Neufeld's 7 Components of School Life", and results from Adler and Baker Middle Schools

Conclusion #7: Positive changes to continue the academic development of the students at the two middle schools are already in progress. This study began by looking at the academic success of one middle school five years ago. Using the data gained through this study, analyzing it with the research and literature regarding academic success, and applying the findings to the more than five years of time that has elapsed explains why one school--Baker Middle School--may have started with low state

test scores, but has been growing rapidly over the years. It also provides the reason for the difference in state test scores when the school was split into two campuses.

In 2003-04, the researcher received an administrative position at Baker Middle School after transferring from a teaching position at a middle school in the adjacent district. He had seen state test scores in the high 700s for the middle school where he had been a teacher. Now, in a school with similar demographics, he saw test scores in the 600s and 700s that were varying up and down. Questions as to why these schools' test scores were so different drew his attention.

Baker Middle School was subsequently split into two schools and the researcher was moved to a teaching position at Adler Middle School. In this new school, he worked with the same classified and certificated staff as well as 1/3 of the same students, but state test scores were over 50 points higher at Adler than Baker during the first two years following the split (See Table 17). Questions as to why these test scores were different drew the researcher's attention. What drew even more attention is that during the first five years of the split of its campus, Baker greatly reduced the difference between the test scores of Adler and Baker to less than 25 points.

Table 17

API Scores and Growth/Decline Points of Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 2001-2010

| State Test Scores | Adler M.S. | Adler +/- Growth | Baker M.S. | Baker +/- Growth |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|------------|------------------|
| 2001-02 | | | 639 | |
| 2002-03 | | | 682 | + 43 |
| 2003-04 | | | 698 | + 16 |
| 2004-05 | | | 723 | + 25 |
| 2005-06 | | | 717 | - 6 |
| 2006-07 | 715 | | 675 | - 42 |
| 2007-08 | 750 | + 35 | 706 | + 30 |
| 2008-09 | 776 | + 21 | 730 | + 24 |
| 2009-10 | 800 | + 24 | 776 | + 46 |

There were other factors that could have affected the differences in scores. One is a change in school administration. A new principal and assistant principal took over the administrative positions at Baker School the year before the school split. As mentioned by Felsh et al. report, little change takes place right away as new administrators take time to learn about the school. The next year, the school would split.

The question of administration at Adler would be different. Adler was switching from being a K-6 elementary school to being a grades 6-9 middle school, but the principal would remain the same. However, the principal had only worked as an elementary school principal, not as a teacher or administrator at a middle school.

When it was decided that Baker would split into two schools, teachers were informed that they could have the option of remaining at Baker or going to the new Adler school. If the requests matched the need for teachers at both sites, teachers' requests would be honored. The researcher returned to the site administrators to ask questions regarding staffing and transfer to the schools.

Summary

The researcher initiated this study of two middle schools (Adler Middle School and Baker Middle School) with varying academic achievement to ascertain what differences in the operation of these schools may have resulted in the difference in academic achievement. The results of this study found more similarities than differences at these two schools. While Baker Middle School has made progress during the last two years, the difference between the API scores of Adler and Baker has diminished during the past academic year. Why might there be so few differences?

One common comment teachers at Baker Middle School reported regarding Component #7: Leadership and Decision-Making was that administration at their school has been overwhelmed with work for a PI school. One teacher noted, "I sometimes get the feeling that they are like chickens running around with their heads cut off, but only because they are overloaded, not because they aren't supportive." Another teacher noted, "I feel supported but I also feel that they are overwhelmed." Looking at data regarding the ratio of students to administrators (Figure 14), one can see the significant differences between Adler and Baker; the ratio of students to administrators was 25% higher at Baker in 2006-07. As the years have gone on, enrollment at Baker has slowly declined while enrollment at Adler has slowly increased, but the number of administrators at both sites—two—has remained the same. From the 2006-07 school year to the 2010-11 school year, the difference between the ratio of students per administrators between Adler and Baker middle schools has declined from 25% to 8%.

Conditions at Baker Middle School have made positive changes in just the last 1-4 years. Regarding safety at Baker, one respondent stated, "I and the kids feel safe at this school. There is no one in the hallway during class time...kids are in class. This is quite different than 5-6 years ago!" The assistant principal attested to how this school has made productive changes over the last few years, stating,

Five plus years ago, I used to feel that we could lose control at any time, but I don't feel that way now. I used to hear from teachers "That's not how we do it at [Baker]." I used to hear that all the time, but I don't hear that now.

Regarding relationships, one respondent stated, "Teachers have the best relationship with students...the best in the last 10 years!" Another person commented,

"Teachers at Baker also explain that this has changed during the last few years. "The relationship among faculty has completely changed! It is so positive!" A site administrator at Baker shared his thought about the positive aspects of relationships among teachers at Baker.

The faculty and site administrators at both schools believe that significant, positive change has taken place during the last few years. One respondent stated, "I think we're doing much better today than just a few years ago." Another noted, "I think we all feel at this school how much progress we have made over the last few years with the academic status of our students."

While internal changes may be taking place at Baker Middle School, why have academic changes not advanced more rapidly? Mertens and Flowers' (2003) study reminds educators that it takes time for change to take place. It shows that schools that have established team teaching and whose teams have increased their degree of partnership over 3 years have the highest achievement scores when compared with other schools that have lower levels of teaming, or drop the teaming program after the first or second year. The study shows that time and perseverance of several reforms are important for schools to increase and maintain achievement scores.

It is reasonable to conclude that the combined impact of more frequent teaming, common planning time, and higher levels of practices will take more than 3 years to dramatically affect student achievement scores, particularly in schools with large populations of low income students. (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 41)

Mertens and Flowers' (2003) research determined that schools with a higher degree of team integration would, for the most part, have higher test results. However, the

degree of teaming is not a factor of higher academic achievement if teaming is the *only* reform in middle school development. Teaming is important, but only if it is one of several reform factors being implemented. Applying several components with high degrees of implementation of various factors within each component is evident in the study of Adler and Baker middle schools. Reaching higher degrees of other components such as professional development and parental involvement would be an important factor in continued academic growth.

The concept of continuing to grow by using factors and components at high degrees of depth could be the story for Adler Middle School and in particular for Baker Middle School. Time—and upcoming state academic exams—will tell.

Recommendations

Based on the six conclusions drawn from this study, as well as faculty and administrator suggestions for next steps, the researcher proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendation #1: Administrators should examine the methods, tone, frequency, and openness of communication among their faculty. Communication is an area of focus that needs improvement at both schools, an area in which teachers and administrators have already seen improvement and desire continued development. At both schools, the teachers noted that school discipline plans needed more consistency, however the site administrators felt how the system was fine. Good communication has already been listed as an important component of school success. Teacher-student, teacher-parent, and school principal-parent communication are all forms of communication important for academic success (Fullan, 2003; Goodlad, 1975).

Communication is the primary means of understanding how the situation is, and how professionals believe the situation should change. Understanding change can be a difficult process for both leaders and members of the community. Change can be understood and perhaps led, but it cannot be controlled. Fullan (2001) notes that “The best way to ‘manage’ change is to allow for it to happen” (p. 33). When change begins, people may feel overwhelmed by the pacesetter’s demands for excellence. Guidelines may be clear in the leader’s head, but oftentimes he or she expects people to know what to do even when expectations are not stated clearly. Leaders must remember the importance of clear and continued communication between all of those involved in the change process.

As leaders of the school community, the principals at Adler and Baker Middle Schools must take the steps necessary for communication to grow. *The Definitive Middle School Guide*, by Imogene Forte and Sandra Schurr, is available to assist principals and teachers who endeavor to embark on this multi-faceted advancement to greater academic success. This book is a collection of relevant information about middle school philosophy and mechanics that have been proven to be successful. The book is organized into modules for use in workshops and in-service programs. It is also divided into sections such as school structures and climate, interdisciplinary teaming and block scheduling, different learning and assessment techniques, and parent communication. Such publications can help schools take critical steps towards advancement, but one should also keep in mind that continued and enthusiastic use of a diverse collection of programs is what leads to success.

Recommendation #2: Faculty should assess their level of collaboration and mutually work to include all members of their team. Well-developed team communication and collaboration has already started at Adler and Baker middle schools, but needs to spread to more teams so academic advancement can continue to grow.

Teaming as a school practice has existed for over 30 years (Reiser & Butzin, 2000). Mertens and Flowers' (2003) study of middle school practices that improve student achievement in high poverty schools explore this feature in depth, examining the degree of teamwork incorporated in the schools' teaming practices. In their study of 121 schools, the scholars noticed quite a range of team involvement. For some schools, a team means simply assigning a group of students to a group of teachers. Other schools have their team of teachers meet weekly. At other schools, team teachers meet daily to discuss their students. This study shows that schools with a higher degree of integration with teams would have higher test results.

Degree of implementation is not the only factor for team communication and collaboration; time is also important. Mertens and Flowers' (2003) study shows that schools that have created team teaching at their sites and have increased the degree of team implementation over 3 years have higher achievement scores when compared to other schools with lower levels of teaming, or schools that drop the teaming program after the first or second year. A primary concern of teachers at both Adler and Baker middle schools is cross-teaming which is students from one team being placed in the class of a teacher of another team. This concern makes it more difficult to establish strong teaming. It is recommended that teachers and site administrators lower cross-teaming of student to allow teachers implement teaming to their highest degrees.

Training teachers to use higher levels of communication and collaboration could be part of the mini professional development conferences. A mini-professional conference is teachers at a site with skills that others desire to learn training their colleagues at their site their skills. Both Adler and Baker respondents expressed the feeling that the 6th grade teams are most productive with communication and collaboration. Mini professional conferences at the both schools could be an affordable way for teachers to be involved with decision-making in addition to improving the degree of impact of their team.

Another important aspect of improving communication and collaboration involves site administrators knowing what and how teachers at their school teach. This would involve more frequent visits to classrooms. One of the important tasks that principals of low-performing schools should implement is acquiring "detailed knowledge of instructional practices and theory and [should] have firsthand knowledge of what teachers and students do in classrooms" (Good & McCaslin, 2008, p. 62).

Felch et al. (2010) study offers another example of the important of teacher quality and integration. Markham Middle School had been ranked #28 out of LAUSD's 100 worst schools. As such, new principals school who tried to start academic improvements were frequently placed at this school, but little time was given for such practices. Two veteran teachers at the school reported the rotation of nine different principals over 20 years. In the last 7 years, principals tried changes in many areas: changing the curriculum, reducing class size, increasing school safety, opening after-school programs. "The one thing they didn't do was improve the teaching--at least, not

until this last year when layoffs swept out many of the school's worst performers and test scores jumped, a Times analysis found" (Felch et al., 2010, pg. 14).

The use of effective teachers is a factor that had not been in place at Markham Middle School. Since 2003, Markham has had dozens of the district's least effective instructors, as measured by the analysis of their students' progress on standardized tests. Many attempts at change were made over the last 15 years, but little time was given to analyze the results of this change before the newly-implemented technique was dropped.

LAUSD began many of the processes that had been successful at Maryville Middle School with one exception—none of their new efforts would be guided by value-added analysis. First, however, teachers grew tired of the many changes that were being implemented. In 2007, Tim Sullivan started as the new principal at Markham Middle School. At the same time, many teachers were tired of the rotating door of the principal's office; as a result of their increasing frustration, many teachers left Markham. The teachers who transferred from Markham to other schools were replaced with teachers that were highly effective in instruction.

During his second year, Sullivan and his new team of teachers re-tried many of the reform efforts that had been attempted throughout the years at Markham. These included components of parental involvement, teaming, and intensive teacher professional development. This time, the results were different—Markham Middle School now had the fastest rate of student progress among the district middle schools for the 2009-10 school year.

Not all of the low-performing teachers were laid off in 2009. Some remained in their position at Markham Middle School. Many who were hired for the positions were in

the close-to-average range of teacher effectiveness, not high performing teachers. How would Markham advance to the fastest rate of student progress?

Professional development at Markham Middle School involved highly effective instructors working with less-effective teachers to increase their teaching skills and their academic relationship with the students. Many of the low-performing teachers who survived the layoffs got significantly better, jumping to near average effectiveness compared to their peers district-wide, by getting continued support from effective teachers through professional development.

Markham Middle School has turned around. Students are now with more highly effective teachers. More teachers are highly effective due to the time for highly effective teachers to communicate and collaborate with teachers not yet successful at the instructional level. Students are still significantly behind their peers statewide, but if they continue their academic advancements and repeat last year's gains for several years running, they have a chance to catch up and meet state standards. The most effective part of this academic advancement is effective teachers who are supported by the other important components. These components include a leader who includes teachers in making decisions regarding such elements as classroom instructional practices, teaming, parent involvement and support of peers with professional development.

Portfolios are a new form of assessment that is growing in popularity. Although there are different types of portfolios, a typical portfolio is a collection of journals, essays, worksheets, videotapes, and posters. In a technique also known as self-assessment, portfolios can reveal if students learned what their teachers taught them (Ames & Miller, 1994; Montgomery, 2008). Six principals from high quality, high-

performing urban middle schools agreed that integrating the curriculum and using various forms of assessment such as portfolios were core reasons for their success (Whitehouse, 2009). Portfolios are also a way to join the content of different academic departments in order to make education more interdisciplinary (Ozgun-Koca, 2008). Future literature we no doubt reveal how important interdisciplinary instruction is for academically successful schools.

Recommendation #3: Administrators and teachers should assess parent involvement opportunities and frequency of two-way communication and then, along with the parents, design effective parent involvement communication and programs. Increased parental involvement in the instruction of their children is in need of development and has already began expansion in the last five years at Adler and Baker middle schools. Research around the nation, particularly at schools in Buffalo, New York, shows how parental involvement and academic success are linked (Benson & Martin, 2003).

Communicating with parents to increase their involvement is the first step in encouraging parents to take part in their child's learning. Parents in lower SES brackets often feel frustrated being involved in school because of lack of communication skills and a natural tension between teachers and parents based on different perspectives (Benson & Martin, 2003). One event is not enough to maintain parental communication. Schools should provide at least one opportunity a month for parents to get acquainted with and maintain a relationship with the school. To draw the highest number of parents to such events, schools create activities that appeal to these adults and schedule such activities at a date and time that are convenient for the parents.

A program that teaches techniques to establish parental involvement has been shown to be an example for schools for imitate (Benson & Martin, 2003). This program would be a very positive start for Adler and Baker in order to improve communication with parents. This would also help build a solid foundation for the continued involvement of parents in the learning process. There are other options to consider that increase parental involvement. In his review of 50 academically successful schools across the country, Peterson (2001b) learned that over 50% of the schools in the study implemented off-campus retreat and field trips. What is important is that teachers take clear, deliberate action to involve parents; as a result, SES status and ethnicity of parents will disappear as a factor in parents' willingness to be involved.

Enhanced parental involvement does improve academic achievement. At six very successful schools in Buffalo, New York, 33% parents participated in school activities. It is important to note that 85% of the children at these schools qualify for free or reduced lunch. Teachers at these schools had followed a 7-step progress to get parents involved in their children's education. The teachers had made deliberate actions to involve parents throughout the school year in the education of their children. Such actions were classes to help parents learn about dealing with teens, academic award ceremonies, and discussion sessions with the principal that was held on evenings and weekends. Increased parental involvement was a key factor in increasing the state test scores at these schools.

But building a foundation for parental involvement can take time. One principal at a school with a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch started a foundation for parental involvement by having a monthly parent breakfast. In

2002, when he started this monthly activity, only four parents attended the breakfast. By 2006, 40 parents attended each month (Montgomery, 2008).

One program that grew over its two years of existence at Adler and Baker middle schools was PIQE. Teachers and administrators at both Adler and Baker said that would like for the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) program to return. Teachers at all grade levels discussed how a link with the school was more vibrant when PIQE was in place. The purpose of PIQE is to enhance students' educational achievement and reduce the dropout rate of minority children by building increased parental involvement in their children's educational process at home and by forging a working partnership for the school. Several of the topics for the PIQE sessions included: Adolescence: A Time of Change and Growth; How to Motivate Teenagers to Read; Obstacles that Get in the Way of School Success; The Road to the University; A Teenagers Social World; and How to Support our Teenagers Ability to Learn.

One teacher from Team F at Baker Middle School noted, "We could use PIQE back because parents could support and training on working with their kids and math." Another teacher from Team G at Baker Middle School discussed how parents could also use help with "how to deal with their kids in the teens." While the English language could be a barrier to parental involvement, "offering such classes as English for parents could be great help for parents" (Team E at Addams Middle School). Since PIQE is no longer offered, teachers stated that "we see fewer parents this year volunteering at school than we used to see" (Team C at Adler Middle School). One teacher from Team A at Adler Middle School noted, "How can we fix this problem?" Yet another teacher from Team E stated, "We need more parental workshops, at times that are good for parents!" One

teacher from Team A summarized the staff's feelings thusly: "PIQE was great...we need it back!"

A study of 45 Buffalo Public Schools in New York reported the power of the transition of schools with a high percentage of families in the low SES bracket from low parental involvement to high parental involvement. Over a 7-year period, six successful middle schools all drew high percentages of parental involvement in activities and programs. This 7-year process involved team teachers being more active with parents with a variety of activities.

One activity that the six successful middle schools in Buffalo, New York, started to help increase their state test scores entailed one-to-one communication between teachers and parents. This involved teachers making phone calls to keep parents informed of their children's status. Teachers and staff also planned parental activities that appealed to the parents' individual need and interests. Teachers and school staff encouraged parents to get involved in the new events that were planned. Parents were recognized for their accomplishments and were encouraged to maintain their involvement. Such activities led to the development of a pervasive school culture that created a positive, warm environment where parents felt welcomed. To maintain parent involvement, activities were planned for at least one time a month. Such activities could also provide parents with information designed to promote learning at home. The more events that were planned, the more opportunities parents had to get involved with the growth of their children.

New publications are available to help site administrators learn more about how to increase parental involvement in their school. Edited by Dr. Diana B. Hiatt-Michael,

Promising Practices to Support Family Involvement in School is a book that can be supportive to administrators. Article titles for this publication include Family Involvement Policy, Research and Practice, Communication Practices that Bridge Home with School, Parental Involvement at Home, Parent Engagement at School, Parent Engagement in School Decision-Making and Governance, and Educating Teachers and School Leaders for School-Family Partnerships.

Teams and administrators at both schools have taken first steps to increase communication with parents, but there are many other avenues that can be taken to increase parental involvement in the learning process. Furthermore, parents want to be more involved, as they have commented at so many parent conferences, but they need direct guidance on how to get involved with their growing and maturing child's education. This is where the teachers and administrators at schools can take a few simple steps to help parents get more involved with their child in middle school.

Recommendation #4: Administrators should involve teachers in decision-making and in the design of professional development. Teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools want and need more involvement in professional development at their sites in order to share their skills and increase their students' academic development. As mentioned in recommendations #2 and #3, professional development can be a key component in expanding other factors to help teachers learn and grow so that their students can do the same.

Scholars have noted the importance of professional development for teachers and their students to grow academically. Professional development has existed for over 30 years (Reiser & Butzin, 2000). However, there are different degrees of the

implementation of professional development (Nieto, 2000, 2009). A study asking six principals from high quality, high-performing urban middle schools their thoughts about professional development yielded their belief that quality professional development for the teachers was a core reason for their success (Whitehouse, 2009).

Too often, professional development is a program chosen by a principal to implement an instructional strategy that they feel is important. However, the teachers' voice may not be heard in this choice. Everyone has to participate in professional development, but "too often teachers find their professional development is both inadequate and irrelevant" (Nieto, 2009, p. 10). Teacher choice is important to expand professional development so that teachers look forward to learning and growing. Nieto notes,

Probably the most significant action school districts can take in changing the nature of professional development is to provide meaningful and engaging programs that respect the intelligence and good will of teachers and help them grow in terms of knowledge, awareness, and practice. Such professional development is characterized by teachers' ability to select the topics they want to learn more about and the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues. (p. 10)

Teacher choice in professional development could be an important factor at Adler and Baker Middle Schools to help them expand their students' academic development.

Recommendation #5: Team interviews should be added as a methodology to collect and assess data from working groups such as teams. At Adler and Baker Middle Schools, 94% of the teachers, counselors, and administrators were interviewed to

acquire their thoughts about academic development at their school. The researcher gathered a large amount of valuable data about the teachers' and administrators; thoughts regarding teaching and the academic development of students at their school through this process.

Studies of the staffs of middle schools looking for possible factors of academic success have happened over the decades. One example of interviews that looks at the academic success and failure of middle schools around the country is the Center for Prevention, Research, and Development (CPRD) of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. This institution developed their School Improvement Self-Study survey that is a set of reliable and valid interviews for middle school students, parents, teachers, and principals. The self-survey was developed in 1990 by CPRD at the University of Illinois. This self-survey is based on the foundation of theory, research, and practice that has been conducted at over 1,000 schools in 25 states. The institution provides data from the results of the survey to assess the levels of instructional practices, team practices, parent involvement, professional development topics, and so forth, so that school personnel can set goals and implement an action plan.

Recommendation #6: Administrators should enhance the after-school activities program and involve teachers and in the alignment of the after-school program with the academic curriculum. Children get to know one another through out-of-school activities, also informally called after-school activities. An after-school program funded by the federal government called Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs (Mertens & Flowers, 2003) also involves academic reinforcement instruction. Program leaders are in contact with teachers to learn what is being covered in

the classroom. After-school programs can reinforce and support what is being done in the classroom by offering time for homework and tutoring of any topic in the after school program. After-school programs can also open the door to such activities as sports, health, art, and music, not only making the school site a fun and safe environment for children, but also promoting academic advancement. A study of this program reveals “modest, but statistically significant improvements, in math achievement after 1 year compared with students in a regular after-school program” (Mertens & Flowers, 2003, p. 42).

The after-school program that the teachers at both Adler and Baker would like expanded is called RAP (Realizing Amazing Potential). Most teachers see the positive aspects of RAP and believe that it can improve further. One teacher noted, "RAP is a great after-school program, but we need to communicate with them more to link the activities with academics." Another respondent stated,

RAP is better, but still needs to improve. We need to change it to make it so kids are *chosen* or *invited* to be there. This could change the tube of the program. Right now, it is a babysitting service for young teenagers.

At Baker Middle School, a teacher said "Our extra-curricular activities program is different in that it involves adults! Students see teachers out of the classroom. The more kids see teachers like this, the more that the adults can steer kids in the right direction." Another teacher shared a thought that other teachers across grade levels also expressed:

The RAP system is great when we link the activities with academics. If a student skips too many homework assignments, they are put on hold with playing in a game. The kid is still on the team...they are just put on hold in taking part in the

game until they return back to working hard to succeed academically. This also applies to such programs as band, chorus, flags and cheerleaders.

Recommendation #7: Administrators and teachers should collaboratively assess the current intervention program and decide what changes, if any, should be made to optimize the level of assistance and review given to students in areas academic areas of need. At Baker Middle School, six of the eight teams responded with comments about the school intervention period; 90% of responses discussed drastic changes to the current intervention program. As it is currently structured now, teachers of each homeroom decide how they want to intervene with their 35 students to raise low test scores and help the students grow. A complaint by teachers across the board is that there is no structure regarding student placement in homerooms, so students with low test scores in math can be joined with those with high test scores. The same applies to other core test subjects. Teachers would like more structure with the intervention program. As a middle school that has been in PI for over five years, the subject of intervention is understandably important for all stakeholders.

At Adler Middle School, teachers are happy with how the process has been handled thus far. At the present time, administrators and counselors meet with students with low academic scores to give them direction regarding skills that can help them improve their grades. As this school is now, the placement of being a program improvement (P.I.) school is not yet a topic.

Research has described the importance of schools intervening with students who need a boost to continue their academic growth. Leaders of academically successful middle schools ensure that common planning time is available for subject area teachers to

meet with intervention teachers to coordinate instruction. Common planning time allows teachers to share their knowledge about the progress of the children they share in their team.

Recommendation #8: Future research looking for reasons for the academic growth of low-performing middle schools towards academic success should use the results of this and other research studies. The result of the research by Felch et al. (2010) discussed one source of data that has become important to education--value-added data. Teachers and administrators receive a plethora of data regarding each student's performance on state exams. Now is the time to look at data regarding the teachers. Value-added data provides information about students of the teachers and how the students have performed academically on state exams. Teachers and their instructional abilities can be crucial factors of student academic success. Classroom instructional techniques such as linking the past with the present, interdisciplinary instruction, and continually teaching and reinforcing organizational skills are important factors of academic success. Value-added data will provide information on the different levels of success of how teachers implement these factors in the classroom. In the Felch, Song and Poindexter study, they refer to teachers whose students performed well academically as high-performing teachers. Teachers whose students did not advance academically at acceptable levels are labeled low-performing teachers.

Felch et al. (2010) published a second factor of student academic success at Markham Middle School. This result is the placement of high-performing teachers with low-performing teachers. At Markham Middle School, many teachers were transferred to work at other schools due to the low academic advancement of the students of Markham

school. At Adler and Baker middle schools, teachers had a choice on staying at Baker after the school was split in two, or moving to the new Adler middle school. Additional questions for future studies could be: What were teachers' reasons for making their choices regarding movement? Do teachers want to remain at a low-performing middle school and try and keep things the same? Do teachers want to transfer to a different middle school to have a chance to make changes in the learning environment?

Another question to consider for future studies of academically successful middle schools involves teacher experience based on level of education and number of years teaching. The series of newspaper articles by Felch et al. (2010) about school reform discussed the importance of experienced teachers working along with teachers with fewer years of experience. The concept of teacher experience was analyzed in this research regarding Adler and Baker middle schools. Initial data for this study involved asking the teachers at Adler and Baker for their number of years of teaching experience (Figure 19). After learning about the number of teachers who left Adler and Baker since Baker split into two schools, the overall numbers regarding teachers and years of experience have changed. Figure 40 displays two charts, one posting the years of teaching experience of the staffs at Adler and Baker schools in 2006, and one looking at the teaching experience of the staffs of Adler and Baker schools in 2010. When looking at Figure 40, one can see that Adler had the greatest number of teachers in the 6-10 years of experience category, while 24% of Baker's staff had 16-20 years of experience. However, this figure is based on the year 2010-11. Compare these data to the data from the year 2006. In 2006 Adler still had the greatest number of teachers in the 6-10 years of experience category, while the highest percentage of teachers at Baker had 21+ years of experience. Comparing these

two tables shows how the faculty at Baker has changed in five years. Dialogue with the current administrator regarding the years of experience drew attention to this topic. In the 5 years since the transition, two teachers have left Adler, while at Baker, nine educators have left the school, seven have retired and two have moved to take other teaching positions. The seven retirees had spent many years at Baker: a total of over 162 years for the seven teachers. All seven had chosen to remain at Baker and not move to Adler. This would indicate significant changes on the chart of years of in education of teachers at Adler and Baker middle schools over the last five years. As a result of this data, future studies should consider review the years of teaching experience of a staff.

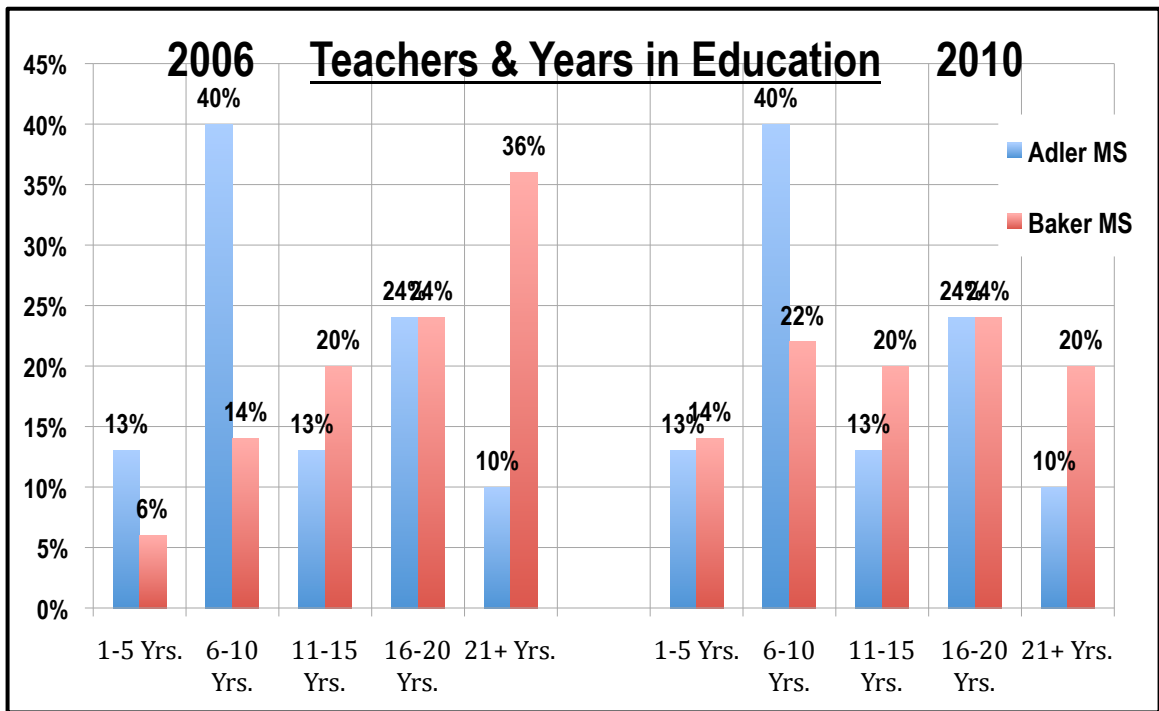


Figure 40. Teachers and years in education from Adler and Baker Middle Schools in 2006 and 2010

Another point discovered by Felch et al. (2010) is that it takes time for reform to happen. Changes do not take place over night. The same data on time has been shared by

Jim Collins. In 2001, Collins presented criteria for leaders to improve their skills in his book titled *Good to Great*. In the journey from good to great, it is essential to define the path and means to get to the destination. Such design does not happen overnight. On average, it takes four years for good-to-great companies to crystallize their concepts of development. Time seems to be a factor when looking at the academic advancement of the students at Adler and Baker middle schools. Both Adler and Baker schools are in Collins' "good" stage. Five years after Baker school split, the professionals at both sites have had time to define their path and means to achieve the results desired. Both are good schools as shown by the API points they have gained in the last three years, but both schools can still be great! They have just started to find the steps for advancement that work at their schools; now they need to fine tune these steps and take the essential elements in a more advanced direction.

Collins relates the movement of academic success to traveling with a group of people on a large bus. When the bus is at a standstill it is the leader's job to get it going, but first, they must to decide where they are going, who is going, and how they are going to get there. The average leader announces to those on the bus where the bus is going, but Collins declares that to go from good to great, one first starts with who is getting on the bus. Then those on the bus decide as a group the "where" and the "how." At a school, this entails the principal getting exemplary teachers to work together as a group for the benefit of their students.

Other studies have resulted in the creation of a set of criteria that relates to middle school academic success, a set of criteria that can be used for future research. In 2010 Anthony S. Bryk conducted a study about two elementary schools in the Chicago School

District. Although the schools were two miles apart, they were similar demographically. In the 1990s, both schools began many interventions to increase student achievement. One school moved ahead impressively while the second school made few improvements. Bryk's study set out to learn the differences among the interventions. In his research, Bryk identified five organizational features of the school that made significant academic advancement. These features interact with life inside and outside the classroom. One organizational feature provides a coherent instructional guidance system. This system articulates the "what and how" of instruction so that all stakeholders working in small teams or groups can work consistently together.

The creation of a set of factors of middle school academic success was also created for this study. Studies of academic success in education over the years have always emphasized the importance of leaders. As such the researcher designed the Neufeld Model of the 7 Components of School Life with the components and targets important for academic success linked together and overseen by a leader who empowers teachers in making decisions. But after the EdSource, Bryk, and Felch et al. studies along with the many research studies over the years have also explained the importance of exemplary teachers, the researcher has modified the Model of 7 Components (see Figure 40). The modified model takes one of the important elements—the Classroom Instructional Practices Component—and interlays it between the Leadership and Decision-Making Components and the other important five interlinked components. This new model shows the primary importance of a good leader along with exemplary teachers that gain academic success by interlinking the other five components. This is a model that can also be used for future research on factors of academic success for middle schools.

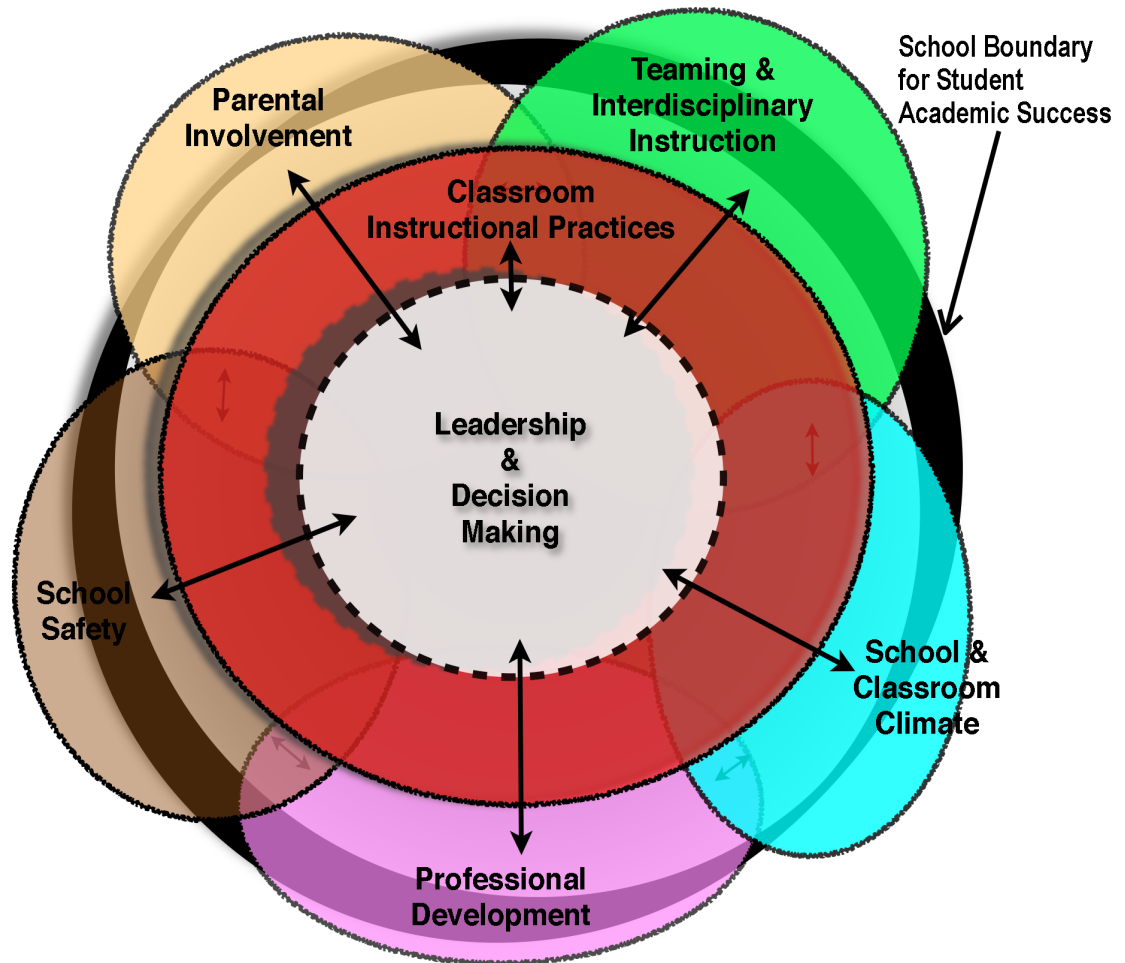


Figure 41. Modified graphic of "Neufeld Model of 7 Components of School Life"

REFERENCES

- American College Test. (n.d.). *Education acronyms*. Retrieved from ncrepublicschools.org/acronyms
- Ames, N.L. & Miller, E. (1994). *Changing middle school: How to make schools work for young adolescents*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Anderman, L. H., Midgley, C., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (1998). *Motivation and middle school students. ERIC digest*. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois.
- Bardach, R. H. (2008). *Leading schools with emotional intelligence: A study of the degree of association between middle school principal emotional intelligence and school success*. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED499642.pdf>
- Becker, M., & Bebout, K. (2007). *Will Rogers Middle School*. [PowerPoint presentation]. California League of Middle Schools Educational Conference, Anaheim, CA.
- Benson, F. & Martin, S. (January 01, 2003). Organizing successful parent involvement in urban schools. *Child Study Journal*, 33(31), 277-304. Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/external_link_main_contentframe.jhtml?_DARGS=/hww/results/results_common.jhtml.44

- Boller, B. (2008). Teaching organizational skills in middle school: Moving toward independence. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(4), 169-171. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/ehost/detail?sid=4ff2e302-dc71-45de-bca15c54e5834e31%40sessionmgr10&vid=1&hid=15&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=31395461>
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2002). *Reframing the path to school leadership: A guide for teachers and principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press.
- Bryk, A. S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(7), 23-30.
- California Department of Education. (1993). *Implementation of middle grade reforms in California public schools, 1988-89 through 1992-93*. Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit, California State Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271.
- California Department of Education. (1999). *English-language development standards for California public schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/englangdevstnd.pdf#search=English%20Language%20Learner%20definition&view=FitH&pagemode=none>
- California Department of Education. (2009). *School district data 2004-09*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D07%26reportNumber%3D16>

California Department of Education. (2010). *APR glossary*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ay/>

California Department of Education. (2011a). *Accountability progress reporting*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/>

California Department of Education. (2011b). *Adequate yearly progress*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/glossary06b.asp>

California Department of Education. (2011c). *CST released test questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/css05rtq.asp>

California Department of Education. (2011d). *Resources on IEPs for Children with Disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/se/>

California Department of Education. (n.d.a.). *Dataquest*. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

California Department of Education. (n.d.b). *Dataquest: Academic Performance Index (API) report*. Retrieved from <http://api.cde.ca.gov/reports/API/APISearchName.asp?TheYear=&cTopic=API&cLevel=School&cName=addams&cCounty=&cTimeFrame=S>

Clark, S. N., & Clark, D. C. (2003). The middle school achievement project: Involving parents and community in school improvement. *Middle School Journal*, 34(3), 12-19.

Collins, J.C., & Ingram Digital. (2001). *Good to great: [why some companies make the leap-- and others don't]*. New York, NY: Harper Audio.

Component. (n.d.). Retrieved from dictionary.die.net

Cooney, S., & Southern Regional Educational Board. (1998a). *Improving teaching in the middle grades: Higher standards for students aren't enough*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

Cooney, S., & Southern Regional Educational Board. (1998b). *Raising the bar in the middle grades: Readiness for success*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

Copeland, T., Davis, K., Foley, B., Morley, B., & Nyman, K. (2001). *Improving middle school students' academic success through motivational strategies*.

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED455463.pdf>

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuban, L. (1998). How schools change reforms: Redefining reform success and failure.

Teachers College Record, 99(3), 453-77. Retrieved from

http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/getResults.jhtml?_D_ARGS=/hww/results/results_common.jhtml.35

Cuban, L. (1999). *How scholars trumped teachers: Change without reform in university curriculum, teaching, and research, 1890-1990*. NY: Teachers College Press.

- Cuban, L. (2001). *How can I fix it?: Finding solutions and managing dilemmas: an educator's road map*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Cuban, L. (2004). Leading in tough times - Meeting challenges in urban schools - In these urban schools, leaders raise expectations and challenge the status quo. *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.e.a, Vol (ISS)*. Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/external_link_main_contentframe.jhtml?_DARGS=/hww/results/results_common.jhtml.44
- Cuban, L. (2007). No more magical thinking: leading from top or bottom. *The School Administrator, 64(3)*, 6. Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/results_single_fulltext.jhtml;hwwilsonid=XF0I3YYI1POG1QA3DILCFGOADUNGIIV0
- Cuban, L. (2008). The perennial reform: Fixing school time. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90(4)*, 250-250.
- Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). The flat earth and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. *Educational Research, 36(6)*, 318-334. Retrieved from http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3606/09edr07_318-334.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Depth. (n.d.) *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from dictionary.reference.com

Doblar, D. (2010). Ten schools and school districts to get excited about. *Educational Horizons*, 87(2), 116-127. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ826482.pdf>

Duerr, L. L. (2008). Interdisciplinary instruction. *Educational Horizons*, 86(3), 173-180.

Ed-Data. (2011). *Alameda Community Learning Center School: School profile, fiscal year 2009-2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D07%26reportNumber%3D16>

EdSource. (2010). Gaining ground in the middle grades: Why some schools do better. *Education Digest*, 76(2), 14-18.

Elmore, R. F. (2000). Building a new structure for school leadership. *American Educator*, 23(4), 6.

Epstein, M. H. (1995). Homework problems: A comparison of students identified as behaviorally disordered with nonhandicapped students [Electronic version]. *Preventing School Failure*, 40(1), 1-9.

Felch, J., Song, J., & Poindexter, S. (2010, December 22). School reforms often overlook the instructions. *Los Angeles Times*, pp. A1, A14-A15.

Flowers, N., Mertens, S. B., & Mulhull, P. F. (1999). The impact of teaming: Five research-based outcomes. Research on middle school renewal. *Middle School Journal*, 31(2), 57-60.

Flowers, N., Mertens, S. B., & Mulhall, P. F. (2000). What makes interdisciplinary teams effective? Research on middle school renewal. *Middle School Journal*, 31(4), 53-56.

The Forgotten Middle. (2009). *Education digest: Essential readings condensed for quick review*, 74(9), 37-41.

Freiberg, H. J. (1999). *School climate: Measuring improving, and sustaining healthy learning environments*. London, England: Falmer Press.

Freiberg, K. L. (2003). *Educating exceptional children 03/04*. Guilford, Conn: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 16-20.

Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Toronto, Canada: Ontario Principals' Council.

Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better. (2010). *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review*, 76(2), 14-18.

- George, P. S. (2010). Renewing the middle school: the lesson of Hansel and Gretel for middle schools. *Middle School Journal*, 41(3), 49-51.
- Good, T. L. & McCaslin, M. (2008). What we learned about research on school reform: Considerations for practice and policy. *Teachers college record*, 110(11), 2475-2495.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1975). *The dynamics of educational change: Toward responsive schools*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1992). On taking school reform seriously. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(3), 232-38.
- Goodlad, J. I. (November 01, 1996). Sustaining and extending educational renewal. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(3), 228-34. Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/results_single_fulltext.jhtml;hwwilsonid=XF0I3YYI1POG1QA3DILCFGOADUNGIIV0
- Goodlad, J. I. (1999). Flow, eros, and ethos in educational renewal. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(8), 571-78.
- Goodlad, J. I. (2002). Kudzu, rabbits, and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(1), 16-23.
- Grossnickle, D. R. (1981). Dress for success: An issue for educators? *Clearing House*, 54(5), 230-31.

- Grossnickle, D. R. (1988). Achievement motivation skill training: Assisting unmotivated students. *NASSP Bulletin*, 72(504), 24-27.
- Haberman, R. (2004). Can star teachers create learning communities? *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 61(8), 52-56.
- Hartzell, G. N., Williams, R. C., & Nelson, K. T. (1995). *New voices in the field: The work lives of first-year assistant principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press.
- Hartzell, G., & Winger, M. (1989). Manage to keep teachers happy! *The School Administrator*, Vol. 46(10), 22-29.
- Hatcher-Skeers, M., & Aragon, E. (2002). Combining active learning with service learning: A student-driven demonstration project. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 79(4), 462-64.
- Heck, R. H., & Marcoulides, G. A. (1990). Examining contextual differences in the development of instructional leadership and school achievement. *Urban Review*, 22(4), 247-65.
- Hiatt-Michael, D. B. (2010). Communication practices that bridge home with school. In D. B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising practices to support family involvement in schools* (pp. 25-55). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Hiatt-Michael, D. B., & Hands, C. M. (2010). Family involvement, policy, research and practice. In D. B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising practices to support family involvement in schools* (pp. 1-8). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Hough, D. L., University of California, Riverside & California Educational Research Cooperative. (1989). *Middle level education in California: A survey of programs and organization*.

Jackson, A., Davis, G. A., Abeel, M., Dordonaro, A., & Carnegie Corp of, NY. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Kester, D. L. (1989). *Bridging the gap: A sheltered approach to language acquisition and academic success in the six middle schools of Torrance unified school district. First evaluation report (1988-1989)*. Downey, Calif.: Los Angeles County Office of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED324973.pdf>.

Kleiner, B., Nolin, M. J., Chapman, C., National Center for, E. S., & Westat, Inc. (2004). *Before- and after-school care, programs, and activities of children in kindergarten through eighth grade: 2001. Statistical analysis report. NCES 2004-008*. Rockville, MD: National Center for Education Statistics.

Laase, L. (1996). Study skills. Tools to help kids take responsibility for their learning. *Instructor*, 106(1), 96-97.

LaRocque, M. (2007). Closing the achievement gap: The experience of a middle school. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 80(4), 157-161.

Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K., & Terrell, R. (2005). *Cultural proficiency*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Madden, N. A., Johns Hopkins University., & United States. (1989). *Success for all: First-year effects of a comprehensive plan for reforming urban education*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, John Hopkins University. SuccessForAll.pdf

Maehr, M. L., & Midgley, C. (1996). *Transforming school cultures. Lives in context series*. Contemporary Psychology, 42(9), 824.

Marzano, R. J. (April 01, 1991). Fostering thinking across the curriculum through knowledge restructuring. *Journal of Reading*, 34(7), 518-25.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works from research to results*. Alexandria, VA.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McCoy, K. M. (2000). Helping middle school students overcome common dysfunctional behaviors which impede academic success. *Middle School Journal*, 31(4), 42-46.

Mertens, S. B., & Flowers, N. (2003). Middle school practices improve student achievement in high poverty schools. *Middle School Journal*, 35(1), 33-43.

- Midgley, C., Maehr, M. L., National Center for, S. L., & Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor School of Education. (1992). *A theory-based approach to restructuring middle level schools*. National Center for School Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1208 W. Springfield, Urbana, IL 61801. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED359669.pdf>
- Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. (1992). The transition to middle level schools: Making it a good experience for all students. *Middle School Journal*, 24(2), 5-14.
- Mills, R., & Pollack, J. (1993). Collaboration and teacher change in the middle school. *Clearing House*, 66(5), 302-304. Retrieved from ERIC database. <http://www.tandfonline.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/doi/abs/10.1080/00098655.1993.9955999>
- Mintrop, H., Trujillo, T., & University of California, Los Angeles, Center for the Study of Evaluation. (2007). *School improvement under test-driven accountability: A comparison of high- and low-performing middle schools in California*. (CSE report no. 717.) National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).
- Montgomery, J. R. (2008). *Involving parents at school*. Online Submission. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/ehost/detail?sid=8f915bb4-fc9a-491a-bcd2-547fb5a93c17%40sessionmgr4&vid=2&hid=24&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=12525369>

Moos, R. H. (1979). *Evaluating educational environments*. San Francisco: CA. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

National Center for Education Statistics, & United States. (1998). *Indicators of school crime and safety*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.

Nichols, J. D. (2002). The impact of looping and non-looping classroom environments on parental attitudes. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 26(1), 23-41.

Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3rd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Nieto, S. (2009). From surviving to thriving. *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 8-13.

Ozgun-Koca, S. (2008). Ninth grade students studying the movement of fish to learn about linear relationships: The use of video-based analysis software in mathematics classrooms. *Mathematics Educator*, 18(1), 15-25.

Pankake, A., & Moller, G. (2007). What the teacher leader needs from the principal. *Journal of Staff Development*, 28(1), 32-34. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Patterson, J., Patterson, J., Collins, L. (2010, December 22). Bouncing back!: How your school can succeed in the face of adversity. *Eye on Education, Inc.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Payne, R. K. (2005). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: Aha! Process.

Peterson, D. W. (2001a). Handling parent complaints: "Say what you do, then do what you say." *Camping Magazine*, 74(1), 39-41.

Peterson, D. W. (2001b). *On the road: In search of excellence in middle level education*. ED451930.pdf. Retrieved from http://www.worldcat.org/title/on-the-road-in-search-of-excellence-in-middle-level-education/oclc/425308760&referer=brief_results.

Pyle, P. (2001). *Celebrating 50 years secondary education in Malanda: 1949-1999*. Malanda, Qld.: Malanda High School Parents & Citizens Association.

Redding, S. & Keleher, J. B. (2010). Evaluating parent programs. In D.B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising practices to support family involvement in schools* (pp.151-170). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Reiser, R. A., & Butzin, S. M. (2000). Using teaming, active learning, and technology to improve instruction. *Middle School Journal*, 32(2), 21-29.

Rhodes, J. E., Camic, P. M., Milburn, M., & Lowe, S. R. (2009). Improving middle school climate through teacher-centered change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(6), 711-724.

Rogers, C. R., & Farson, R. E. (1957). *Active listening*. Chicago, IL: Industrial Relations Center of The University of Chicago.

Roney, K., Brown, K. M., & Anfara, V. A., Jr. (2004). Middle-level reform in high- and low-performing middle schools: A question of implementation? *Clearing House*, 77(4), 153.

Rourke, J., & Hartzman, M. (2008a). Caring for the future. *Principal Leadership*, 8(10), 24-27.

Rourke, J., & Hartzman, M. (2008b). A change of direction. *Principal Leadership*, 8(10), 8-11.

Sanders, M. (2006). Missteps in team leadership: The experiences of six novice teachers in three urban middle schools. *Urban Education*, 41(3), 277-304.

Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership: Creating culture, community, and personal meaning in our schools. The Jossey-Bass education series*. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Shumow, L., Smith, T. J., & Smith, M. C. (2009). Academic and behavior characteristics of young adolescents in self-care. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 29(2), 233-257.

Sizer, T. R. (1999). No two are quite alike. *Educational Leadership*, 57(1), 6-11.

Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/results_single_fulltext.jhtml;hwwilsonid=TCVXQMGXIVBGVQA3DILCFGOADUNGIIV0

Sizer, T. R., & Sizer, N. F. (1999). Grappling. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(3), 184-90.

Retrieved from http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com.lib.pepperdine.edu/hww/results/results_single_fulltext.jhtml;hwwilsonid=XF0I3YYI1POG1QA3DILCFGOADUNG IIV0

Smylie, M. A. (1992). Teacher participation in school decision making: Assessing willingness to participate. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 14(1), 53-67.

Socioeconomic Status. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from dictionary.reference.com

Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA. (1997). Case study: Hoke County High School, Raeford, North Carolina. *Southern Regional Education Board*. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED462562.pdf>

Strahan, D. (2003). General patterns and particular pictures: Lessons learned from reports from "Beating the Odds" schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 18(4), 296-305. Retrieved from ERIC database. [GenPatterns&ParticPics.pdf](#)

Strahan, D. (2008). Successful teachers develop academic momentum with reluctant students. *Middle School Journal*, 39(5), 4-12. Retrieved from ERIC database. [EJ793540.pdf](#).

Strahan, D. B., & Layell, K. (2006). Connecting caring and action through responsive teaching: How one team accomplished success in a struggling middle school. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79(3), 147-153.

Trimble, S., & Peterson, G. (2000). *Multiple team structures and student learning in a high risk middle school*. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Turner, J. C., & Meyer, D. K. (1995). Motivating students to learn: Lessons from a fifth grade math class. *Middle School Journal*, 27(1), 18-25.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Education. Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development. (2010). *A blueprint for reform : The reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (2007). *School Improvement Self Study* [Pamphlet]. Champaign, IL.

Vodicka, D. & Hancock, C. (March 21, 2008). *How to build trust at a school site*. [PowerPoint presentation on GetCivic.org]

Wallace Foundation. (2007). *Education leadership: A bridge to school reform*. New York, NY: Wallace Foundation.

Wallace, J. J. (2007). Effects of interdisciplinary teaching team configuration upon the social bonding of middle school students. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 30(5), 1-18.

- Waxman, H. C., Garcia, A., & Read, L. L. (2008). Classroom learning environment & student motivational differences between exemplary, recognized, & acceptable urban middle level schools. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 3(2), 1-21.
- Whitehouse, S. (2009). Six strategies to help young adolescents at the tipping point in urban middle schools. *Middle School Journal*, 40(5), 18-21.
- Willis, J. (2007). Challenging gifted middle school students. *Principal Leadership*, 8(4), 38-42.
- Wilson, J. L. (2007). Virtual teaming: Placing preservice middle level teachers on interdisciplinary teams. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 31(3), 1-15.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Acceptance of Program from Principal of Adler Middle School



[REDACTED]
A California Distinguished School

[REDACTED]
December 18, 2009

Dear Mr. Neufeld:

I have read your request to interview the teachers and administrators at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Middle Schools. I know that this is part of your dissertation for your degree in Educational Leadership and Academic Policy (ELAP) through Pepperdine University.

You have informed me that your dissertation focuses on identifying possible factors of academic development for urban middle schools. The two middle schools in [REDACTED] match the two criteria that are common factors of academic progress: communities with a high percentage of families in the low socioeconomic status rank; student body that is comprised primarily of minority students. Your request is to interview 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers to ask them what they think are important factors for the academic status of our two middle schools. The questions that you will ask the teachers and the principals of the two middle schools in [REDACTED] are based on the literature that you reviewed that name key components of middle school academic growth. I am aware that your interviews will be anonymous and confidential.

You do have approval to interview teachers at my school. Please be sure to consult with me before asking teachers and setting dates and times for your brief interviews.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B

Letter of Acceptance of Program from Principal of Baker Middle School



January 15, 2010

Dear Mr. Neufeld:

I have read your request to interview the teachers and administrators at [redacted] and [redacted] Middle Schools. I know that this is part of your dissertation for your degree in Educational Leadership and Academic Policy (ELAP) through Pepperdine University.

You have informed me that your dissertation focuses on identifying possible factors of academic development for urban middle schools. The two middle schools in [redacted] both contain the demographics that are common factors of academic progress: communities with a high percentage of families in the low socioeconomic status rank; student body that is comprised primarily of minority students. Your request is to survey and interview 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers to ask them what they think are important factors for the academic status of our two middle schools. The questions that you will ask the teachers and the principals of the two middle schools in [redacted] are based on the literature that you reviewed that name key components of middle school academic growth. I am aware that your interviews will be anonymous and confidential.

You do have approval to interview teachers at my school. Please be sure to consult with me before asking teachers and setting dates and times for your brief interviews.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

APPENDIX C

Schedule for the Interview Process

Schedule for Team Interviews at Two Middle Schools

In this district, school is out at 12:50 p.m. on Thursdays. Teachers have different assignments for which to use the two hours time from 1 – 3 p.m. Per my discussion with the principals, my Team interviews are scheduled for both school time and teacher time based on previously scheduled activities.

This schedule is based on the March IRB notification date and calendar dates for both middle schools.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Team</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| <u><i>At Middle School #1</i></u> | | | |
| Thursday, March 18 | 1-2 pm | MS #1 | 6 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., March 18 | 2-3 pm | MS #1 | 6 th Grade Team #2 |
| Thurs., March 25 | 1-2 pm | MS #1 | 7 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., March 25 | 2-3 pm | MS #1 | 7 th Grade Team #2 |
| Thurs., April 1 | 1-2 pm | MS #1 | 8 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., April 1 | 2-3 pm | MS #1 | 8 th Grade Team #2 |
| <u><i>At Middle School #2</i></u> | | | |
| Thursday, April 15 | 1-2 pm | MS #2 | 6 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., April 15 | 2-3 pm | MS #2 | 6 th Grade Team #2 |
| Thurs., April 22 | 1-2 pm | MS #2 | 7 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., April 22 | 2-3 pm | MS #2 | 7 th Grade Team #2 |
| Thurs., April 29 | 1-2 pm | MS #2 | 8 th Grade Team #1 |
| Thurs., April 29 | 2-3 pm | MS #2 | 8 th Grade Team #2 |

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol Form

FACTORS FOR SCHOOL ACADEMIC SUCCESS

I. WELCOME

Hello. I'm Doug Neufeld. I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University pursuing work on my dissertation about factors for the academic success of middle schools.

I would like to thank you for spending some of your valuable time to be here today. I really appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts about your school with me. The information you give will be used to formulate the next steps for the continued academic advancement of the children at your school.

Before we get started, we are going to distribute and read a participant release form. This provides information about what we will be doing today in the discussion group. It also gives you a chance to decide if you want to take part in today's group or not.

[Researcher will distribute participant release forms. He will then read the form aloud and have participants read along. Next, he will request that participants complete the bottom part of the form based on their decision to take part or not. To those participants who choose not to take part, he will thank them for coming.]

Everything we will discuss will be considered confidential. This means that I will use the information from our conversations in a report, but there will not be any names used and no one will know specifically who said what. We also ask you to respect this confidentiality to assure that everything that is said in this room stays in this room. This means you should not share other people's comments outside of the group. I encourage you to be as honest as possible, but respectful of the feelings of others.

Today, I would like to ask you about your experiences with at your middle school. We plan to be here for approximately 1 hour.

II. GROUP AGREEMENTS

Now I would like to go over a few agreements to guide our conversation.

- Please talk one at a time and speak up as much as possible. This will make it easier for us to hear each other.
- Please respect one another's opinions. There will be a range of opinions and experiences on any of the topics, and we do not expect everyone to agree with one another. We do, however, ask that everybody show respect when others are talking.
- Because we only have 1 hour, we may have to shorten the discussion and move on to another question.
- Feel free to respond to each other about these topics, not just answer my questions. This will help us have a good discussion about each topic.
- Are there any other agreements we should include to help guide our discussion today?

III. INTRODUCTIONS

Please give your first name and tells us where you have taught.

IV. QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe school safety at your school, including its influence and degree as a factor for success. How has school safety been over the years? How has it *changed* over the years?
2. How would you describe classroom instructional practices that occur in your classroom. Include such means as scheduling (i.e. Block Scheduling, looping, etc.), connecting the content with real life experiences, the use of alternative forms of instruction (i.e. cooperative learning), the use of alternative forms of assessment (i.e. subject and multiple subject portfolios in both paper and electronic means), teaching and assessing organizations skills (i.e. backpack organization, assignment notebooks, 3-ring binders, Cornell Notes, etc.), and the importance of school and society culture.
3. How would you describe interdisciplinary teaching of the curriculum in your Team such as breadth and depth of Teaming at your school, the integration of classroom instruction with Teaming, the involvement of elective classes, and the sorting and labeling of students.
4. How would you describe the school and classroom climate at your school, including such elements as student motivation, setting goals, continued chances for failing students to succeed, and setting expectations for your students.
5. How would you describe the importance of professional development, including the subjects of how and by whom professional development is chosen as well as sharing what you think should be next for professional development.
6. How would you describe the importance, types and degrees of parental involvement at your school.
7. How would you describe the degree and the factors of leadership and decision-making and how this influences your level of success? Discuss trust in leadership at your school and diverse methods of decision-making.

V. CLOSING

8. What do you think are the next 3 steps of development that should be taken at your school to continue the academic growth of your students?

V. WRAP-UP

Would anyone like to share any other comments on this issue?

APPENDIX E

Participant Consent Form

██████████ Elementary School District
Middle School Teacher/Principal Survey and Interview Consent Form

Project Title: *Factors for Middle School Academic Success.*

I authorize Doug Neufeld, M.Ed., a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, to include me in the dissertation titled: *Comparison of Two Urban Middle Schools: A Study of Factors Affecting Student Achievement.* I understand my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will require me to complete a survey and interview that is designed to occupy approximately 45 minutes of my time.

I have been asked to participate in this study because I am part of the credentialed staff of the two middle schools and have information that is useful to this study. I will be asked to complete a survey and participate in an interview regarding possible factors for the placing of middle school academic levels. I understand that I will be audiotaped if I decide to participate in this study. The tapes will be used for research purposes only. The tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed after a period of 5 years.

I understand that there are no obvious risks of participating in this study. I also understand that there is no direct benefit from my participation, but there may be benefits for the academic development of middle schools. I understand that I have the right to refuse participation. Moreover, if I become uncomfortable at any time during the survey or interview, I can discontinue my participation and the results will not be used in the study. I also have the right to refuse to answer any question. I understand that none of the information gathered from participation will be released to others without my permission, or as required by California and Federal law. I understand that I will not be compensated, financial or otherwise, for participating in this study.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding the study procedures, I can contact Doug Neufeld, M.Ed. at ██████████, via telephone ██████████, or via email (doug.neufeld@pepperdine.edu) for answers. If I have further questions, I may contact Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael at Pepperdine University (310/568-5600). If I have further questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Douglas Leigh, Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional School (GPS) IRB Review Board for Pepperdine University at (310) 568-5600.

I have received a copy of this informed consent form that I have read and understand its contents. Also, I understand to my satisfaction the information in this consent form regarding my participation in the research project. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to participate in the research as described herein.

Participant's Signature

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX F

Preliminary Survey Questions

Team _____
 Interview Time _____
 Date _____
 Location _____

TO: Teachers by Teams/Dept. at _____ M.S.
 FROM: Doug Neufeld
 Re: **Team Interview for Dissertation**

I would like to thank you in advance for participating in my dissertation. I also thank _____ for allowing me to ask you and the entire credentialled staff at _____ to participate in this research. I have worked at three other middle schools over the last 13 years. I have seen _____ grow tremendously over the last 3 years setting a high standard for middle schools comprised of students in a low socio-economic status and high minority standing. This has drawn my focus on this study to research the reasons for this academic success at schools that usually do not meet their goals. This is where *your* involvement in this research and sharing your thoughts related to this topic could be the first steps to inform other schools around the state and country with similar demographics what are important steps that lead to academic success.

I also know how valuable your time is as a teacher. That is why I thought that a good time to ask for your participation in this 60 minute Team interview would be after the 2nd trimester grades were submitted. This would be when we all have a little bit of free time as the 3rd trimester begins. Part of this research involves analyzing the results based on TEAMS, so I would like to interview each Team during your prep. period for this group conference.

Again, knowing the value of your time, I do not expect you to do any writing. However, I will give you a packet of sheets that informs you what our interview session will discuss. **You do not have to write on that packet in advance** if you so desire! **BUT, if you do, that would be great!** Simply bring the sheet with you to the interview time. You will notice that for each topic, there is a set amount of time that will be used to discuss this question. By sticking with these limits, the interview time will NOT EXCEED 60 MINUTES! There will be a time for QuickWrite at the end of each discussion session. If you come to the interview session with some notes written on your paper, the interview session could be even shorter than the allotted time. (In the packet I will give you this week, there is also the first page which asks for demographic information about you as a teacher in the _____ ESD.)

6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
 Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:
 (6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 minutes)

To say **THANKS** for attending the interview session next week, at the session I will provide some treats for you to snack on, so please come to the room on the east part of the circle a few minutes early! For all of the sessions, I will have a wide variety of fresh fruits--strawberries, bananas, melons, etc. I will also have some baked items available--muffins, cookies, rugalás, etc., I will have some Starbucks iced coffee and some bottled water.

THANKS AGAIN in advance!

THANKS for allowing me to ask you some questions about our middle school! Below are the topics for our discussion. Feel free to jot down some notes on points you would like to bring up during our discussion. Also, I look forward to hearing your sincere thoughts. All discussion will remain confidential!

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS: Information About You and your Career

Team: _____

Grade: _____

Please provide some information about your background. *All information that you provide is CONFIDENTIAL!*

2. What subject(s) do you teach? Language Arts Math Science History P.E. elective
3. Gender: Female Male
4. What is your ethnic background? (Feel free to mark more than one box.)
 African American Asian Hispanic White/EuroAmerican
5. How long have you taught in the education system?
 1-5 yrs. 6-10 yrs. 11-15 yrs. 16-20 yrs. 20+ yrs.
6. Have you always taught at a middle school throughout your career?
 Yes No
7. How long, if at all, have you taught or are teaching at [redacted] ?
 Since it opened as a middle school Since _____ (yr.)
8. How long, if at all, have you taught or are teaching at [redacted] ?
 Since it opened as a middle school Since _____ (yr.)
9. What degree(s) do you have?
 Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctoral Degree

Team Interview QUICK REMINDER

Team _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: Room _____

If possible, please complete questions #1-9 on this "PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS" page. No other writing is required unless you would like to jot down some notes regarding the prompts before the Team interview. THANKS for participating!

APPENDIX G

Team Interview Packet

Team Interview Topics

Thank you in advance for your willingness to spend one Team meeting discussing 7 components that focus on school reform for student academic success. Our one hour discussion will focus on the following 7 categories with approximate time allocation for each category. I have identified some prompts under each question, but these are not to control our discussion. Following each category, we will have a brief opportunity to do a quick-write of your thoughts in this category. For your responses, please consider your time since 2006 when the district was now comprised of two middle schools.

1. **SCHOOL SAFETY & MANAGEMENT** *Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:* (3 min. + 1 min. QuickWrite = 4 minutes)

concern at your site:

Team discipline policy:

school discipline policy:

school safety features:

enforcement of policies:

(6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 minutes)

2. **PARENTS** Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:

communication:

homework:

working within the school:

conferences:

stakeholders:

6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 minutes)

Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:

3. **INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING**

Teams...communication & collaboration:

teaching about cultures and ethnicities:

interdisciplinary instruction:

Service Learning:

(

4. **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES** *Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:* (6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 min)

formats of lessons / instructional practices:

student engagement:

assessment:

use of technology:

Block Scheduling:

teaching about learning/organization skills (Cornell Notes, Agenda, backpacks, assignment notebooks, etc.):

looping:

intervention

5. **SCHOOL & CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT** (6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 min.)

Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:

SCHOOL & CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

academic success

relationship among faculty:

relationships with parents:

relationships with students:

extra-curricular activities:

student motivation & high goals:

student choice on work:

6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(6 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 8 minutes)

Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:

purpose:

choice:

7. LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING

(8 min. + 2 min. QuickWrite = 10 min)

Prompts to consider as part of our discussion:

faculty decision-making:

teacher empowerment:

trust

support:

vision & mission:

budget

8. What do you think are the next 3 steps we need to take to improve our student academic success?

(3 min. + 1 min. QuickWrite = 4 minutes)

APPENDIX H

Web Site for Interview Survey Questions

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for ROGERS Middle School



Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

1. Directions for this survey.

About this survey...

Thanks for participating in the interview process. Following this page are the 7 components I have established in my research that are important components of school academic advancement. Following the 7 pages of components is the final page asking what you think are the next three steps that need to be taken at your school to continue your academic development.

Within the 7 components are factors that comprise each component. YOU DO NOT NEED TO RESPOND TO EVERY FACTOR. MERELY LOOK AT THE FACTORS AND MAKE A COMMENT ON WHAT YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT AREAS WHERE YOUR TEAM AND/OR SCHOOL IS STRONG OR AREAS WHERE YOU FEEL PARTICULAR ADVANCEMENT IS NEEDED.

If you begin this survey, but do not have time to finish and want to return to this site, if you use the same computer, you can return to the spot where you left off. Use the same computer to go to "MrNeufeld.com" and scroll down to the icon for this survey and Rogers Middle School. Once you have completed the survey, you cannot return.

Thank you again for taking time to share your valuable information. For taking time to share information, your name will be entered for the drawing of a \$100 gift certificate for Best Buys.

Thank you again for helping me continue completion of my dissertation to earn my degree.

Doug Neufeld

*1. Name

*2. Of what TEAM are you a member?:

- Harvard
- Ohio State
- UC Berkeley
- Cornell
- Georgetown
- Stanford
- U of Georgia
- Yale

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School



Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

2. Component #1: SCHOOL SAFETY & MANAGEMENT

There are 5 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

3. concern at your site

4. Team discipline policy

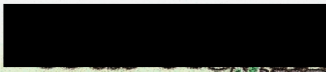
5. school discipline policy

6. school safety features

7. enforcement of policies

Prev Next

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

3. Component #2: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

There are 5 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

8. communication

9. homework

10. working within the school

11. parent conferences

12. parents as stakeholders in the school

Prev

Next

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School



██████████
MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School

4. Component #3: INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING

There are 4 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

13. Teams...with communication and collaboration

14. teachers teach about cultures and ethnicities

15. interdisciplinary instruction

16. Service Learning...also known as Community Service

Prev

Next

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School



Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School

5. Component #4: CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

There are 8 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

17. formats of lessons / instructional practices

18. student engagement

19. assessment

20. use of technology

21. Block Scheduling

22. teach organizational skills (i.e. Cornell Notes, use of Agenda, review student backpacks, use of assignment notebooks, etc.)

23. looping (teachers with same group of students for 2 years)

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

24. intervention

Prev

Next

Powered by **SurveyMonkey**
Create your own [free online survey](#) now!

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

6. Component #5: SCHOOL & CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

There are 7 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

25. academic success

26. relationship among faculty

27. your relationship with parents

28. your relationship with students

29. extra-curricular activities

30. student motivation and setting high goals

31. student choice on their work

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for [REDACTED] Middle School

7. Component #6: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There are 2 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

32. purpose of development sessions

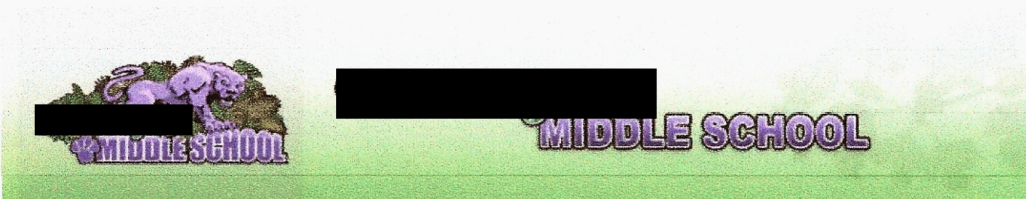
33. your CHOICE on development sessions

Prev

Next

Powered by SurveyMonkey
Create your own [free online survey](#) now!

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for █████ Middle School



Interview Survey Questions for █████ Middle School

8. Component #7: LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING

There are 6 factors below. Please look at each factor and make any comments on those you feel are important as a strength or a weakness in the advancement of your TEAM and/or your SCHOOL overall.

34. faculty decision-making

35. teacher empowerment

36. trust

37. support

38. vision and mission statement

39. budget

Prev Next

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School

9. What do you think are the NEXT 3 STEPS we need to improve academic suss

40. Step #1

41. Step #2

42. Step #3

Prev

Next

[SURVEY PREVIEW MODE] Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School



████████████████████
MIDDLE SCHOOL

Interview Survey Questions for ██████ Middle School

10. THANKS!

Thank you so much for participating in this survey for my dissertation. Your name will be entered in the pool of participants to receive the prize available. One person will win a \$100 gift certificate for Best Buys! ALL individuals who participate in this survey will also receive a small token of my appreciation for helping me conduct this research.

Prev

Done

Powered by SurveyMonkey
Create your own [free online survey](#) now!

APPENDIX I

Directions for Coders

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you very much for helping me in this coding process. Attached is a compiled transcription of the responses one team of teachers submitted on their Team Interview form. Altogether in this study, 18-20 Team Interviews will be completed and transcribed in a similar fashion. These categorized transcriptions by teams will be divided among you upon completion of all team and site administrator interviews.

Project Title:
ANALYSIS OF TWO URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS:
A STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The purpose of this study is to assess and compare two middle schools across seven components of school reform. These components were gleaned from the literature on school reform.

The study involves Team Interviews comprised of two-five teachers and an individual interview with the each site administrator at two middle schools. Each Team is comprised of one teacher from each of the core subjects: Language Arts, math, history, and science. Other teachers who do not attend Team meetings were interviewed by group/department and/or when they were available.

This part of the study is qualitative text by teachers and site administrators categorized into seven components with prompts under each component. These responses were written by each teacher or shared by each site administrator during a Team Interview or an individual principal interview.

The objective of this qualitative study is to answer the following main research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the **teachers** who work at each middle school regarding the following: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and Teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, leadership and the decision-making process?
2. What do the **teachers** at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?
3. What are the perceptions of the **site administrators** who work at each middle school regarding the following at their school: school safety, classroom instructional practices, interdisciplinary teaching and Teams, school and classroom climate, professional development, parental involvement, leadership and the decision-making process?
4. What do the **site administrators** at each school perceive are the next steps they need to take to improve academic success for the students at their school?

CODING

Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.171). Unbiased coders will begin the coding process by highlighting key phrases or statements of the narrative text, “segmenting sentences or paragraphs into categories and labeling these categories with a term, often a term used by the participant” (Creswell, 2003, p. 192).

Tesch (1990, pp.142-145), as cited in Creswell (p.192) provides 8 steps:

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one interview. Go through it, asking yourself “ what was this about?” Do not think about the “substance” but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics and leftovers.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

Some researchers found it useful to color code different categories on transcripts or cut text segments and place them on note cards.

Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. (5-7 for a research study)

Table 10.1 Six Steps for Elaborative Coding Aimed at Refining Old Constructs, Developing New Ones, and Constructing a Theoretical Narrative from Text

MAKING THE TEXT MANAGEABLE

1. Explicitly state your new research concerns, your theoretical constructs, and what you want to develop further.
2. Select the relevant text for further analysis. Do this by reading through the raw text with Step 1 in mind, highlighting relevant text. Select text that is consistent with your old theoretical constructs, as well as text that suggests new ones.

HEARING WHAT WAS SAID

3. Record repeating ideas by grouping together related passages of relevant text. Organize the repeating ideas with respect to old and potentially new theoretical constructs.
4. Organize themes by grouping repeating ideas into coherent categories. As before, the organization of themes should reflect old and potentially new theoretical constructs.

DEVELOPING THEORY

5. Elaborate old theoretical constructs by grouping themes into units consistent with them. Develop any new theoretical constructs by organizing themes into meaningful units.
6. Create a theoretical narrative by retelling the participants' story in terms of both old and new theoretical constructs.

Auerbach, Carl F. *Qualitative Data : An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*.
New York, NY, USA: NYU Press, 2003. p 105.
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pepperdine/Doc?id=10078435&ppg=118>

Copyright © 2003. NYU Press. All rights reserved.