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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, A STUDY OF THE LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODEL AND ITS EFFECT ON THIRD GRADE READING SCORES IN A SUBURBAN, METROPOLITAN SCHOOL SYSTEM, by DOUGLAS A. DAUGHERTY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### A STUDY OF THE LEARNING-FOCUSED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODEL AND ITS EFFECT ON THIRD GRADE READING SCORES IN A SUBURBAN, METROPOLITAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

by  
Douglas A. Daugherty

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Education Act (NCLB). This act calls for a measurable annual increase in student achievement such that students reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic assessments.

A historical review of political involvement with education will add to that statement one more objective of the bill: *to render more U.S. students globally competitive*. Federal funding to state education is tied to the achievement of state standards. To achieve these heightened standards many schools and school systems are adopting whole-school reform models. According to Herman & Stringfield, 1997; Lappan & Houghton, 2003, whole-school reform should address organizational change, staffing, administrative support, curriculum and instruction, supplies and materials, scheduling, and monitoring of student progress and performance; all referred to as central components of the educational process.

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the effectiveness of one specific whole-school reform model, Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP), in a suburban school system for its ability to effect student achievement. The Learning Focused Schools Program was studied through its implementation and use in three suburban elementary schools and compared to three similar elementary schools not using the program.

Data from students' test scores were collected and analyzed for student growth. There were several notable findings in this study. For all the students who participated in the LFSP continuously for a period of 3 years, more children met or exceeded standards than those not exposed to LFS. The results were different when the total population was broken into subgroups. Hispanic students and Multiracial students did not show any statistically significant improvement in any assessed category using the LFSP. More ELL students in the LFS treatment group exceeded standards than their peers who were not exposed to LFS. White students and Students with Disabilities did show statistically significant improvement resulting from the LFSP environment. Black students fared best overall when exposed to the LFS Program and mirrored the results of the "ALL Students" subgroup.

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A Dissertation

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Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Policy Studies  
in  
the Department of Educational Policy Studies  
in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia  
2011



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Dr. Mary Coeli Meyer's dedication, commitment, patience, and belief that this study was not only possible, but full of merit, were a source of strength and motivation. I cannot thank her enough. Her perseverance, wit, breadth of knowledge and perspective were without doubt the biggest factors in completing this study. Without Mary, this would not have come to fruition.

I was privileged to have the support of many colleagues and friends. Even when the pressures of this program made ours a one-sided friendship, their check-ins and pep talks kept me going.

My family, Amy, Ella and Aiden were a constant source of encouragement. Their faith in my ability to succeed never wavered. Failure was not an option. While regrettably not on their timeline, they “knew I could do it.” While I gave my wife many reasons to doubt the completion would ever happen, her understanding was unflagging and her forbearance helped make this dream a reality.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
BOE	Board of Education
CRCT	Criterion Referenced Competency Test
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
ED	Economically Disadvantaged
GPS	Georgia Performance Standards
GPA	Grade Point Average
IES	Institute for Educational Sciences
LFS	Learning Focused Schools
LFSP	Learning Focused Schools Program
K-12	Kindergarten through 12 <sup>th</sup> grades
NAEP	The National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NDEA	National Defense Education Act
SEA	School Education Agencies
SWD	Student(s) With Disabilities
SY	School Year
TIMSS	Trends in International Math and Science Study

## CHAPTER 1

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of one specific whole-school reform model, Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP), in a suburban school system for its ability to effect student achievement in response to recent government mandates under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110). This act calls for a measurable annual increase in student achievement such that students reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic assessments.

Because of NCLB, many school systems have utilized a systems approach for whole school reform in an attempt to increase achievement. A systems approach takes into consideration a variety of variables (curriculum, manpower, instructional technology, organization structure, stakeholders) and identifies relationships and interdependencies. It then involves planning, organizing, managing and assessing these variables such that a self-renewing organization results (Meyer, 2010). In this instance, the focal point was on educational outcomes. Some systems approaches such as, America's Choice and Success for All have been investigated for their ability to reach the improved standards (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1998; Center for Research and Reform in Education, 2005). The Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP) had not been investigated for its ability to improve outcomes. The LFSP is a curriculum delivery system that places an emphasis on material mastery over material coverage. The purpose

of this study was to determine if the Learning Focused Schools Program effects student achievement in select elementary schools in a large suburban school system in Georgia where it was being piloted.

### Background

In 1990, Dr. Max Thompson found many schools were having some minor successes raising achievement by implementing various strategies to improve student outcomes (Thompson, 2006). Thompson found that, although each of the strategies was incrementally useful, three intervening variables kept these strategies from becoming major educative processes. He found that teachers had difficulty knowing when to utilize the strategies, how to plan for them, and how to have students use them most effectively, thereby reducing potential outcomes. Thompson believed these variables arose because the schools were not systematic in their approach or application. Based on this finding, Thompson developed a systems approach, which he called the Learning-Focused Schools Program.

Thompson founded The Learning Focused Schools program in 1993 (Thompson, 2006) in response to evaluation data from The Education Evaluation Consortium and the United States Department of Education. The Education Evaluation Consortium evaluates over 1400 schools each year, looking for outstanding practices in exceptional schools. Based on the practices and strategies that were deemed exceptional in the research conducted by these two agencies, Thompson created a framework for instructional delivery (Thompson, 2006). Later, he incorporated Marzano's research and findings of

1998, into the LFS framework spotlighting categories of instructional strategies that affect student achievement the most. Marzano's nine instructional strategies (Figure 1) serve as the core strategies around which Thompson's instructional framework (LFS) is centered. Figure 1 shows the percentile gain for each instructional strategy as reported in a theory-based meta-analysis of research on instruction.

<i>Strategy Initiator</i>	<i>Categories of Instructional Strategy</i>	<i>Percentile Gain</i>
Teacher Initiated	Reinforcing effort and providing recognition	29
	Setting objectives and providing feedback	23
Student Initiated	Summarizing and note taking	34
	Identifying similarities and differences	45
	Homework and practice	28
	Nonlinguistic representations	27
	Generating and testing hypotheses	23
Student and Teacher Initiated	Cooperative learning	27
	Questions, cues, and advance organizers	22

*Figure 1. Categories of Instructional Strategies That Affect Student Achievement.* Reprinted with permission from The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development copyright © 2003 ASCD. 800.933.2723. All rights reserved.

To properly implement, the Learning Focused Schools Program requires a commitment to incorporate practices that are common in “exemplary” schools as expressed in Marzano’s nine points. Reeves (2000) defined an exemplary school as having over ninety percent of students on free/reduced meals, over ninety percent of students minority, and over ninety percent of students on or above grade level, based on mandated, state, standardized test scores. Institutions meeting this criterion are now termed 90/90/90 schools.

As a systems approach to educational reform, there are four major components of practice addressed by the LFS program. They are:

Planning and Organization

Curriculum

Instruction and Assessment

Leadership

These four components serve as the basis of the Learning Focused Schools Program.

Below, in Figure 2 are the strategies related to the four major components.

<b>Learning-Focused Schools Program Major Components and Strategies</b>			
<b>Planning and Organization</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Instruction and Assessment</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Prioritizing needs for learning</li> <li>• Scheduling</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping</li> <li>• Performance-based</li> <li>• Tied to standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tied to data</li> <li>• Research-based strategies</li> <li>• Formative Assessments</li> <li>• Summative assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal as Instructional Leader</li> <li>• Planning monitored</li> <li>• Timely and direct feedback</li> </ul>

*Figure 2.* Components and strategies of Learning-Focused Schools Program.

According to Thompson, this systematic whole school approach prepares educators to address the demands of the state curriculum, known as the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), in such a manner that it focuses on material mastery over material coverage. The Learning-Focused Schools Program provides schools with a unified system that is organized into a framework designed explicitly for raising student achievement.

The Learning-Focused Schools Program specializes in connecting reading comprehension, writing across the curriculum, accelerating and scaffolding learning, balanced literacy, and differentiated assignments, with the overall goal of raising achievement (Thompson & Thompson, 2000).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) was ratified. Concurrently, Dr. Thompson expanded the implementation of his model. LFSP was first installed in New York during the 1993-1994 school year. Due to the academic

requirements that were included in NCLB, and school districts' need to meet those requirements, district personnel purchased LFSP in almost every state in the United States and other countries including Canada, Japan, South Africa, and several European countries (Thompson, 2006).

As of 2006, LFSP has been installed in over 2000 schools, school systems and educational agencies throughout the nation. Whether LFSP was successful in meeting the desired end results specified by NCLB remained in question and provided the impetus for this study.

With many school systems looking to duplicate the success of what has been described as exemplary 90/90/90 schools, particularly under increased accountability measures, it is crucial that programs reported to increase student achievement are examined for their merit and ability to do so. In an era where school budgets are being closely monitored and the expectation is for student achievement to increase when implementing educational reform initiatives, school systems must wisely choose those programs that have the greatest potential to make a positive, sustainable difference.

### The Problem

Public schools are in an era of change. The school-as-factory metaphor of education that effectively addressed the needs of education in the industrial age will no longer fulfill the needs of schools in the accountability age (Mehlinger, 1996). One of the reasons for this is that the federal government has never been as legislatively involved

as it is in our present day. This makes the educational process considerably more complex. The institution of education must now serve multiple audiences including students, states and the federal government, as well as parents and boards of education. A new direction in education reform is needed and is taking direction from reform efforts that have shifted the focus from material coverage to material mastery (Hancock, 1997). Material coverage is no longer accepted as an adequate measure to ensure that students understand the curriculum that is being taught to them. Students must now show mastery of the content through testing.

The recent wave of education reform efforts can trace its roots to the concern of the Reagan administration over the decline in educational achievement and the concurrent threat of economic decline that would result. Responding to this concern, on August 26, 1981, Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education. As part of the charter for The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) the following charges were stipulated:

1. "To review and synthesize the data and scholarly literature on the quality of learning and teaching in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities, both public and private, with special concern for the educational experience of teen-age youth;
2. To examine and to compare and contrast the curricula, standards, and expectations of the educational systems of several advanced countries with those of the United States;
3. To study a representative sampling of university and college admission standards and lower division course requirements with particular reference to the impact upon the enhancement of quality and the promotion of excellence such standards may have on high school curricula and on expected levels of high school academic achievement;



4. To review and to describe educational programs that are recognized as preparing students who consistently attain higher than average scores in college entrance examinations and who meet with uncommon success the demands placed on them by the nation's colleges and universities;
5. To review the major changes that have occurred in American education as well as events in society during the past quarter century that have significantly affected educational achievement;
6. To hold hearings and to receive testimony and expert advice on efforts that could and should be taken to foster higher levels of quality and academic excellence in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities;
7. To do all other things needed to define the problems of and the barriers to attaining greater levels of excellence in American education; and
8. To report and to make practical recommendations for action to be taken by educators, public officials, governing boards, parents, and others having a vital interest in American education and a capacity to influence it for the better” (“Appendix A: Charter-National Commission on Excellence in Education” ¶ 2).

The National Commission on Excellence in Education assessment of the nation’s educational system yielded a report in April of 1983 entitled *A Nation at Risk*. This report brought to light broad-based inadequacies in the nation’s educational system. Upon its publication, Ronald Reagan said in his speech of August 26, 1983,

Your Commission was asked to assess the quality of teaching and learning in America compared with our own educational tradition and the rising competition from other industrial nations. You’ve taken a long, hard look at America’s educational system and found that quality is lacking, but not because today’s students are any less capable than their predecessors. You’ve found that our educational system is in the grip of a crisis caused by low standards, lack of purpose, ineffective use of resources, and a failure to challenge students to push performance to the boundaries of individual ability – and that is to strive for excellence. Reagan, R. (1983, August). Speech presented in the State Dining Room at the White House, Washington, D.C.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education brought to light many of the inadequacies facing the United States of America in the educational domain. Some of the key findings reported in *A Nation at Risk* include: 23 million adults were deemed functionally illiterate; the country was losing ground academically to its international competitors; colleges had to teach remedial reading and writing; and businesses were having to train new hires in reading and math skills which they presumed were taught in high school/college (National Commission on Excellence, 1983). The scope of *A Nation at Risk* included recommendations that covered content, standards, time spent on the educational process, teaching, leadership, and fiscal support. The report was clear in delineating the expectations of the American people regarding a quality American education.

However, by 1989, few of the recommendations put forth in *A Nation at Risk* had been undertaken. Educational results remained in question. Unhappy with the lack-luster results, the National Governors Association held an education summit wherein they attempted to address the quality of education with a proposed solution, which they called Goals 2000.

The authorization of Goals 2000 was based on recognition of fundamental principles that underlie effective school change: 1) all students can learn; 2) lasting improvements depend on school-based leadership; 3) simultaneous top-down and bottom-up reform is necessary; 4) strategies must be locally developed, comprehensive, and coordinated; and 5) the whole community must be involved in developing strategies for system-wide improvement (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2000, ¶ 12).

The resulting legislation in Goals 2000 concentrated on comprehensive change, school improvement, and achievement for all children. (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 1998).

Five years after the National Governor's Education Summit, Congress passed the Educate America Act of 1994, of which, Goals 2000 was a significant part (USDOE, 1994). As a result, eight national goals were in place and the country was once again prepped for educational reform. These goals were:

1. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.
4. By the year 2000, United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
5. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. By the year 2000, every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
7. By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
8. By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (United States Department of Education Goals 2000, Educate America Act, 1994).

Goals 2000 focused on “improving student learning through a long-term, broad-based effort to promote coherent and coordinated improvements in the system of education throughout the Nation at the State and local levels”(¶ 1). Goals 2000 also initiated the development of national standards for American education in all areas of curriculum (Donovan & Sneider, 1994).

Concurrent with the national Goals 2000, the Georgia Legislature passed House Bill 1187, the “A+ Literacy Act”, in July, 2000 (HB 1187 - A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000) which enacted numerous mandates in an attempt to reform education in the state and prevent Georgia from having some of the lowest national standardized test scores.

Given that this current study is relevant to the state of Georgia, it is propitious to compare the growth or lack thereof, in reading achievement subsequent to Goals 2000 and its’ state counterpart, the A+ Literacy Act. The National Center for Educational Statistics collects test information such that fourth grade reading achievement levels for the state of Georgia in years 1998 and 2009 can be compared to all other states that file test results. The data reveals minimal improvement during this time period in fourth grade reading achievement. In 1998, Georgia ranked 35<sup>th</sup> out of 41 states in fourth grade reading test scores that reached the basic level of achievement. By 2009, Georgia was ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in fourth grade reading scores that reached the basic level of achievement. More significant was the change in scores when we review “proficiency” achievement. In 1998, Georgia ranked 29<sup>th</sup> of those states that measured the achievement of proficiency, by 2009 Georgia ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in fourth grade reading achievement (U.S.

Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences; National Center for Education Statistics; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1998).

The national pattern of reform legislation suggests that public schools were not producing the type of results that federal and state legislatures expected from the educational system. Hess (2004) states, “For decades, American schools have been constantly reforming without ever really changing” (p. 16). After an extensive meta-analysis of educational reforms reported by the fifty states, Rosseli (2005) came to a similar conclusion that reform efforts to date are missing their mark. Lee and Budzisz (2004) further state that the results of past reform efforts are no more than warmed-over versions of education designs that have failed over and over again. This issue of failure is a topic of great debate. The discussion on reform is varied. Temes (2002) argues that failure is neither the fault of the curriculum nor the fashion in which it is delivered. He believes that the only variable is the teacher, stating, “A great teacher is more important than anything else” (p. 14). He further states that the key to successful education is to “focus less on reforming the institutions and more on supporting the individuals who teach” (p. 15).

With a contrasting view, Fullan (2010) believes that reform is necessary yet efforts to date have not worked. He remarks that our latest efforts at reform in Goals 2000 have been unsatisfactory. “No one seems to have noticed that 2000 came and went – except that it was time for another ambitious reform” (p. 22). Nehring (2009) echoes this sentiment in his belief that reforms do not and cannot work because policy focus

seems to be more important than quality teacher focus. Diane Ravitch (2010), educational historian and one time supporter of NCLB, states that reform efforts are no more than fads that distract us from the steadiness of purpose that is needed to improve our schools.

Whether school systems believe reform efforts are needed or not, or whether they believe their reform initiatives are working or not, federal law now dictates that schools focus their efforts on raising student test scores as the primary indication of improvement. This more than suggests that the outcomes espoused in all the reform efforts since 1983 have not yielded the desired end results required by federal and state legislatures and which has been and continues to be underscored by more federal initiatives.

The two most recent reform efforts at the federal level have centered on the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Race to the Top (2009).

The NLCB Act is a public statement on the direction of educational change espoused by congressional leadership as well as by then President George W. Bush. The major goals of NCLB 2001 that are pertinent to this study are:

Emphasis on doing what works based on research

- Teacher training is a high priority.
- Schools “in need of improvement” must spend at least 10% of Title I funds on improving teacher skills.
- All new teachers must pass competency tests in subject areas to be taught

Accountability for results

- Each state can define its own standards, but must test every child annually in grades 3-8, in mathematics and reading, by the school year 2005-2006.
- All schools must show AYP (adequate yearly progress) or else be labeled “in need of improvement” (NCLB, 2001).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that each state create a plan of action, which, over the course of 12 years, will assure all students meet the academic proficiency levels established by the state. Recognizing that achieving this level of competency will take time, each public elementary and secondary school must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) towards reaching this goal as measured by state standardized tests. AYP requires compliance with three measurable factors: participation in state reading and math assessments, minimum standards of academic performance, and measurable goals of an additional indicator. Establishing the baseline starts with the beginning of the third school year of implementing Title I Part A & Title III Part A (NCLB, Title VI, Subpart 4), and according to NCLB, 95% of the children in all subgroups – Black, White, Students with Disabilities, Hispanic in origin, mixed origin and English Language Learners – must meet or exceed proficiency standards within 12 years.

Because funding of education is tied to NCLB, the ramifications of failure to meet AYP are also defined. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2010) specifies such consequences:

-Each school system receiving federal funds must identify any school that fails to make AYP.

-Identification must take place before the beginning of the school year following the failure to make AYP. Within 3 months, an identified school must develop a school improvement plan in consultation with parents, school staff, system, and outside experts.

-If a school fails to make AYP by the end of the first full year after identification, the system must:

- Provide technical assistance
- Make public school choice available
- Make supplemental educational choices available (tutoring).

-If a school fails to make AYP by the end of the second full school year after identification, the school system must:

- Make public school choice available
- Make supplemental services available
- Provide technical assistance
- Identify the school for corrective action and take at least one of the following actions:

- Replace school staff relevant to the failure
- Institute and implement a new curriculum
- Significantly decrease management authority in the school



- Appoint outside experts to advise the school
- Extend school year or school day
- Restructure internal organization of the school.

-If a school fails to make AYP after one full year of corrective action, the school system must:

- Make public school choice available
- Make supplemental services available
- Prepare a plan to restructure the school.

-By the beginning of the next school year, the school system must implement one of the following alternative governance arrangements, consistent with State law:

- Reopen school as a public charter school
- Replace all or most of school staff, including the principal
- Enter into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness to operate the school
- State takeover
- Any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement.

Pertaining to NCLB and specific to Georgia, Georgia's plan calls for a 95% participation rate on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in reading and math. This applies to the school system as well as to each individual school.

Furthermore, within the 95% participation rate are contained the federally identified subgroups.

Sub-grouping refers to the division of a school system's population into specific measurable groups. These groups are pre-determined to be comprised of all students, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan, White, and Multiracial, Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Economically Disadvantaged. The state of Georgia mandates a minimum sub-grouping size of 40 or 10% of the subgroup population, whichever is greater, while the national average is approximately 30 students. Georgia allows school systems to determine their own additional indicators but recommends that student attendance rate be used. On the recommendation set forth by the state, the Valley County (a pseudonym for the school system used in this study) School System's second indicator is student attendance rate. Therefore, each school and qualifying subgroup must achieve a minimum attendance rate of 85% or better for the school year.

The third and final indicator for making AYP is related specifically to academic achievement. A certain percentage of students must meet or exceed Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) within predetermined periods of time to ensure compliance. In Georgia, as in other states, from year to year the AMO is specifically defined in terms of percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on the state Criterion Referenced Competency Test. In the 12-year span that NCLB is to be in effect, this proficiency target grows in increments. For example in the school year, 2008-2009, the AMO was

set at 73.3% proficiency for all third graders in reading. Simply stated, in order to meet the academic achievement indicator of AYP, 73.3% of all third grade students must have met or exceeded standards on the reading portion of the CRCT. Projecting to 2014, the AMO is set for 100% of students meeting or exceeding standards, hence, no child left behind (Briggs, 2009).

Failure to meet any of the aforementioned indicators results in schools in school systems not making AYP. In fact, in the exponential attempt to achieve AYP, if one subgroup fails to meet the AMO the entire school does not make AYP. Consequently, if one school in a system does not make AYP the entire school system does not make AYP. The consequences for schools and systems not making AYP range from allowing students to choose to attend another school within the system to complete loss of federal and state funds and subsequent state take-over.

As recently as 2009 President Barak Obama introduced “Race to the Top”. Race to the Top is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The Obama administration set aside \$4 billion dollars to encourage excellence in education, to improve U.S. standing in the international community, and to further close the achievement gap (USDOE, 2009). “Race to the Top” is a funding challenge issued to the educational community.

Through Race to the Top, states were asked to advance reforms around four specific areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools (2009).

Financial awards attached to Race to the Top go to states that are leading the way with grand but achievable plans for implementing coherent and comprehensive education reform (2009).

In its first year of existence many states, feeling the pressure from their educational unions chose not to participate (Legere, 2010). Race to the Top ties teacher salary to student performance and with nearly 30% of the schools in the United States not making AYP under No Child Left Behind, it can be perceived as a threat for potential salary growth and worse, salary reduction (Legere, 2010). For this reason a number of Greater Metropolitan Boston Area School Districts opted out of the competition as teachers unions would not sign on to the pay-for-performance provisions of the program (Legere, 2010).

Between NCLB and Race to the Top, the school system stands alone on the firing line as the primary implementer of the laws and regulations to improve education, without help from those who have created and passed the laws. The superintendent and the board of education in every school system are accountable for complying with these regulations and producing the results mandated by law. Therein lays the context of a problem for school systems. School systems struggling to make AYP must be able to

identify which research based program(s) can actually bring about the change that current legislation is demanding (NCLB, 2001).

This study investigated the effectiveness of one specific whole-school reform model, Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP), in a suburban school system in the state of Georgia. The subjects of this study were six elementary schools within the Valley County School System; three used LFSP, and three used their standard modus operandi: no identifiable reform program. For the Valley County School System, the specific question is: Does the Learning Focus Schools Program increase student achievement as demanded by current legislation? School system administrators need to know the educational results of LFS. If the LFSP delivered the intended end result, then it will be considered for implementation in all of Valley County's schools.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of one specific whole-school reform model, Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP), in a suburban school system, for its ability to effect student achievement in response to recent government mandates under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110). This act calls for a measurable annual increase in student achievement such that the students reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging Georgia academic achievement standards and Georgia academic assessments. To accomplish this, the investigator assessed the affect of LFS on third grade reading achievement, first, between two similar

groups of three elementary schools within Valley County School System and second, between six identified subgroups within each of aforementioned larger groups. Given the complexity of choosing reform initiatives based on expectations of NCLB, this study focused on identifying whether or not LFS met the demands of AYP and thus qualify as a viable program for consideration by educational leaders. The Learning Focused Schools Program purports to identify actions schools and school systems can build on which it claims will raise achievement.

Data was collected and analyzed quantitatively. Using this method, the study investigated efficacy. Specifically, did LFS deliver what it promised; a sustainable increase in school wide student academic performance?

According to Carlson (1965), school systems are continually looking for new ways to deliver instruction in such a manner that students retain what they are learning. He states, “The adoption of new educational practices, practices which alter the instructional program is the center issue for school systems as they attempt to provide an adequate education for their clients” (p. 2). Thompson (2005), the designer of LFS, says that sustainable academic student growth is the intended outcome of the Learning Focused Schools Program when implemented according to program procedures. With that in mind, the following research questions were addressed in this study.

### Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Was there a significant statistical difference on standardized third grade reading test scores (CRCT) between three treatment elementary schools utilizing the Learning-Focused Program versus three similar elementary schools not using the program?
2. Did LFS significantly affect student reading achievement in any isolated subgroup(s) in the treatment schools?
  - White
  - Black
  - Hispanic
  - Multiracial
  - Students with Disabilities (SWD)
  - English Language Learners (ELL)

#### Method/Design

Quantitative research is defined as "a formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data are utilized to obtain information about the world" (Burns & Grove cited by Cormack, 2000, p. 140).

The quantitative perspective derives from a positivist epistemology, which holds that there is an objective reality that can be expressed numerically. As a consequence, the quantitative perspective emphasizes studies that are experimental in nature; emphasize measurement and search for relationships (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005, p. 40).

This investigation was designed as an ex-post-facto study using archival data. This approach is experimentation in reverse. It requires the researcher to search backward from consequent data for antecedent causes (Leedy, 1997). Using the chi square statistical analysis, the researcher tested the hypothesis that the Learning Focused School Program significantly increased students' third grade reading test scores. Furthermore, using the chi square statistical analysis, the researcher examined if the LFSP significantly increased students' third grade reading test scores in any of six subgroups.

This study was limited to measuring achievement gains for third graders from two populations. One population derived from an LFS environment and one population derived from a traditional environment where LFS had not been undertaken as an instructional delivery model. Both populations must have belonged to a homeroom and both populations had to start their education and reach grade three without interruption or a change in schools. To provide criterion data for analyses, student achievement scores on reading were used. The tests being analyzed were state criterion-referenced, standards-based tests for grade 3.

A detailed account of the methods used in this study including participants, instruments, procedures, and expectations is provided in Chapter 3.

### Significance of the Study

This study attempted to find statistical significance between utilization of the LFS program and students' reading scores and in addition, provided data on the effectiveness



of LFSP on specific subgroups within the target population. Given that schools and school systems must decide on what course of action to take in reaching AYP, the study can facilitate their decision-making, and at the same time contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding whole school reform.

The NCLB legislation (2001) has made it clear that no child is to be left behind in terms of their right to receive and demonstrate an “adequate” public education. School systems are now accountable for ensuring that students are at or above grade level. According to NCLB (2001), all states must have an accountability system in place which annually measures students’ proficiency in reading and mathematics against state standards. Evaluative outcomes must be disaggregated into subgroups consisting of socio-economic level, race, ethnicity, limited English proficiency and disability. Schools and school systems failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) are subject to escalated consequences aimed at getting schools to meeting state standards.

School systems must make sure that when deciding on new ways to deliver instruction in their schools, they are prudent in choosing programs, projects, and initiatives that are going to successfully address the aims and mandates of NCLB. School systems cannot afford to trudge through the reformation process without success and must avoid relying on whole-school reform models that fail when it comes to achievement advances. The Comprehensive School Reform program of 1998 is one such effort that failed to help students and schools bolster their academic achievement (Viadero, 2010). Based on previous failed educational interventions such as the

Comprehensive School Reform program, additional failure would perpetuate the growing belief that “the pace of public school change and improvement is slow, so slow that increasing numbers of serious men and women have begun to doubt that real improvement in the American system of education is likely” (Schlechty, 2001, p. 3).

Current research on school improvement has centered on instructional programs or practices that have been demonstrated empirically to be effective in raising student achievement. Even before the passage of the NCLB Act, Waxman, Huang, Anderson, and Weinstein (1997) recommended the use of scientific research as part of effective school programming to isolate strategies that were proven to increase student achievement. In their study, they reported the presence of positive relationships between learner outcomes and active student learning. Student-teacher interaction and participation in classroom decision-making were cited as factors in student achievement (Mintrom & Vergari, 1997), indicating a strong connection between instructional delivery and student success.

“Administrators often rely on testing information to answer common questions such as which instructional model is best for the school or whether the methodology is producing the desired outcome.” (Worthen, White, Fan, & Sudweeks, 1999, p. 12). These same administrators keep an eye on scores produced by standardized tests and any other relevant measures to help them answer such questions. At the same time, “legislators and other policy makers look to test results for information about educational progress” (Worthen et al., p. 12). The Georgia Department of Education indicated that

two concepts are vital to school success. The first is that student learning must be the focus of all educational efforts and second, the school base must be the place where those efforts are carried out (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). Logically then, school improvement, budget, and instructional decisions must be tailored to support the state's goal of raising student achievement.

The significance of this current study is that it (a) reports on the investigation of a new educational whole-school program, LFS, for its ability to affect student achievement, and (b) provides data regarding the effectiveness of the LFSP on specific subgroups within the target population. This research study adds to previous research findings on whole-school reform models and contributes to the overall body of knowledge surrounding program effectiveness relative to the No Child Left Behind standards. Furthermore, this study is very germane to the Valley County School System which has not made Adequate Yearly Progress since the inception of NCLB.

This study attempted to find statistical significance between utilization of the LFS program and students' reading scores. It compared schools using this program to similar schools not using the program and measured the degree of reading growth between the schools. Lastly, it indicated whether the LFS program is another failed reform initiative as measured by this study, or whether it did indeed demonstrate merit in its attempt to make marked improvement in student outcomes.

As more and more school systems in the nation decide to implement reform programs, it is important for them to wisely consider and select a program that will be

best for optimizing student achievement and at the same time, meet the rigorous demands of the current educational legislation. Failing to meet this requirement will cause schools to be labeled as “in need of improvement”, and as such could subsequently lead to a loss of federal funds for the entire school system (NCLB, 2001). To this end, this study was designed to evaluate one comprehensive program, LFS, which, according to Thompson (2005), is intended to meet the challenges of current legislation and is purported to raise sustained academic achievement for schools employing its practices.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on school reform programs by examining how the LFSP worked in three suburban elementary schools. Very little research has been done on this new program regarding its ability to positively impact students’ academic growth while meeting the demands of federal law. The results of this study can be used to help schools and school systems decide whether or not the LFS program is a viable consideration for reform efforts.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Full implementation of the LFS program was desirable by the schools involved and aimed at raising student achievement.
2. Standardized testing was an accurate measure of student learning.
3. The Learning-Focused Schools framework under review was developed from research-based teaching and learning theories.

4. All third grade students within the target population were exposed to the LFS delivery method.

For the purpose of this study, the following limitations were acknowledged:

1. The population for this study was limited to students and teachers in six schools in a large, suburban, metropolitan school system.
2. Sample size was limited to 663 students.
3. Although similar in demographics and past student achievement, the six schools involved in this study inherently had uncontrolled variables related to their specific school culture, assuming a unique school culture exists in each participating school.
4. There were variances between teacher styles and their respective abilities to deliver LFS based instruction.
5. Likert-style survey questions used to gauge learning environments within participating schools were formulated by the researcher and have not been validated.

Controversy surrounding the appropriateness of the assessment vehicle should not be ignored in evaluating the results of this study. Some critics declare that standardized testing is not an appropriate measure of student achievement and say it is superficial, biased, and irrelevant to the goals of education. Ravitch (2010) states, “The rise or fall of test scores became the critical value in judging students, teachers, principals, and schools.

Missing is any reference to what students should learn” (p.15). In some educational circles, the debate rages about whether standardized tests, such as the CRCT, are inherently biased against certain student groups. Worthen et al. concluded, “Care should be taken not to attribute the biases in our society to the instruments that report their cumulative effects” (1999, p. 35). Suggesting that curriculum bias and curriculum relevance are synonymous, state testing officials point to the fact that Georgia educators review and approve each test item to ensure relevancy to the mandated curriculum (Domaleski, as cited in Jamieson & English, 2005). “A good evaluation system will reflect the diversity of student learning and achievement” (Stronger Accountability, 2005 p.1).

Standardized procedures as outlined in the LFSP implementation protocols, specifically administrative walk-throughs and observation along with checklists detailed the level and type of LFS implementation in the elementary schools within the system over the period of study. This made up the protocol for charting LFSP practice, and for quantifying the level of teacher compliance with the LFSP framework. Due to the narrow scope of this study and its focus on instructional method, no consideration was given to ways in which non-instructional factors may impact student achievement and performance on standardized assessment mechanisms.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study. These definitions are provided to help with an understanding of the terms used within the body of the text.

1. 90/90/90 Exemplary Schools: 90%+ students are on free and/or reduced meals, 90%+ students are minority, and 90%+ students are on or above grade level (Reeves, 2000).
2. Achievement Model: A method of measuring how well students have mastered the knowledge and skills being assessed categorically, i.e., not evident, proficient or exceeds.
3. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): The NCLB requirement of the state for elementary schools to meet standards in three areas: test participation (for both mathematics and reading/English language arts), academic performance (for both mathematics and reading/English language arts), and student attendance rate.
4. Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): A series of annual target performance goals set by the state to determine academic achievement in reading and math as measured on state-developed standardized tests (2004 Adequate Yearly Progress Overview Report). The NCLB Act requires school education agencies (SEA) to specify their AMO “to ensure that all groups of students disaggregated by poverty, race and ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency data reach proficiency in reading and math” (No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference, 2002, p. 4). Table 1 stipulates the AMO for Georgia.

Table 1.

*Expectations for Growth in Student Achievement: Target Goals (in percent)*

School Year	AMO in reading for AYP calculation
2002-2003	60.0
2003-2004	60.0
2004-2005	66.7
2005-2006	66.7
2006-2007	66.7
2013-2014	100.0

*Note.* From *Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook* (p. 23), by The State of Georgia Department of Education, 2005, Atlanta, GA: Georgia Department of Education. Copyright 2005 by the Georgia Department of Education. Adapted with permission.

5. Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT): The state of Georgia’s assessment tool “designed to measure how well students acquire, learn, and accomplish the knowledge and skills set forth by Georgia’s content standards. (Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, 2005). Criterion-referenced tests are curriculum-based and measure student knowledge against specific content standards.
6. Elementary Schools: Schools that serve students in grades Kindergarten through 5. Students typically range in age from 5 to 11 years of age. All elementary schools in Valley County School System provide instruction in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and offer exposure to technology.
7. English Language Learner (ELL): A national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient. This term is often preferred over limited-English-



proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits (USDOE, 2000).

8. Growth Model: A method for measuring the amount of academic progress each student makes between two points in time.
9. Hispanic: Students of Latino descent with ancestry from Mexico, Spain, South America, Central America, Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (USDOE, 2002).
10. Learning-Focused Schools (LFS): A student-oriented model that focuses on learning and achievement for all students, and on implementing exemplary teaching practices (Thompson & Thompson, 2000).
11. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation: The 2001 education reform plan signed into law by President George W. Bush. This law embodies four principles: stronger accountability for results; expanded flexibility and local control; expanded options for parents; and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.
12. Professional Development Training: Opportunities for teacher training provided by individual schools and systems as a component of school improvement efforts. The training gives teachers and staffs the skills and knowledge necessary for performance of their assigned duties. Professional development provides the formal training needed to both maintain certification and attain highly qualified

status (per NCLB criteria) and to enhance teaching skills with research-demonstrated strategies.

13. School Culture: The environment, social milieu, philosophies, and customs that make up and characterize a school (Fullan, 1992).
14. Students With Disabilities (SWD): Students determined to: (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or (2) have a record of such an impairment; or (3) be regarded as having such an impairment (USDOE, 2011).
15. Subgroup: For purposes of determining AYP, student achievement data must be reported with respect to 10 sub-grouping factors: all students, six race/ethnic categories (Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, White, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native American/Alaskan), economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency (2003-2004 Annual Report Card, 2004).

### Overview of Study

The Valley County School System is located in a large metropolitan area in the state of Georgia. It is the 26th largest school system in the nation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest within the state. There are 113 schools in the system with a total enrollment of 112,000 students. The county is divided into six areas, each having an area assistant superintendent that oversees the operations of all the schools in their particular area. Each area superintendent reports to the superintendent of the school system. It is the

responsibility of the superintendent and each area superintendent to decide which new curriculum initiatives or reform models are employed within each area. They decided to implement the Learning Focused School Program in various schools throughout the county at the start of the 2004-2005 school year. The total installation was anticipated to take three years and over that time would be implemented in several schools. This study evaluated the level of success achieved by the schools under examination within the Valley County School System.

At an enormous cost to the county and with the newest legislation calling for sustainable student success where “failure is not an option” (Blankenstein, 2004, p. 6), it is crucial that this program, and others chosen for reform efforts within school systems are closely and carefully scrutinized for their quality and compatibility in ensuring success for students (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

### Summary

Chapter 1 contains an introduction and problem statement that establishes the background for studying the Learning Focused Schools Program and its compatibility for use as an educational reform program for elementary schools in the Valley County Public School System. A statement of purpose is included that offers specific research questions to examine the complexities of studying the LFS program and its impact on student achievement, teaching methods and building leadership. The conclusion of Chapter 1 focuses on the significance of the study, including assumptions and limitations of the

study, and definitions of terms relevant to this study. It emphasizes the need for careful and deliberate scrutiny of the LFS program and its presumed role as a reform effort in helping Valley County meet the requirements of new federal and state legislation.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, covering what the research states related to what strong and sustainable reform efforts possess in order to make a marked difference for schools and school systems. Chapter 3 details the design of the study. Information regarding the population and sample, instruments used, and the procedures for data collection and analysis are included. Results of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 summarizes the study, emphasizing the significant findings. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations for the future are provided.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

For years the need for educational reform has been widely publicized in books, speeches, documentaries, and in the news. In fact, “Stemming from dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence in American education, the reform wave was born in a climate of politics” (Henson, 2003, p. 14). And yet, there has been minimal to no change in student achievement; poor achievers have remained poor achievers (Meier et al., 2004). Rebell and Wolff (2008) opined that despite lofty goals and purposes, actual progress towards improving student achievement in the United States has been minimal since 2002. According to Karen Black (2002), we as a country have done much spending and reforming without the desired effect. Measurable subject matter acquisition has not happened. This failure to achieve results has been identified at many levels; communities, employers, higher educational institutions, and most recently, by the federal government. With federal recognition of educational deficiency have come stronger repercussions. The historic passage of No Child Left Behind (2001) holds schools and school systems accountable for their achievement outcomes. Under NCLB every child must receive an “adequate” education. Adequate education is defined by NCLB as the ability to pass state and federal tests at specific grade levels.

As Black (2002) pointed out, there has been much money spent and little to show for the reform efforts attempted over the years. Is the Learning Focused School reform initiative one such effort that will be a passing “educational fad” or will research show that LFS is a bonafide reform initiative that yields a significant increase in achievement results that are dependable and sustainable?

There is a large body of literature on the nature of sustainable reform efforts and this provides a basis for the present study. This chapter will explain the search process in reviewing that literature and then examine both the theoretical literature and empirical findings in the field of educational reform.

#### Literature of School Reform: Political Context

Over the past five decades, the United States has seen significant challenges to its global, economic, intellectual and competitive edge. Politics have been one driver of reform, whatever the quality. The national focus has been split between maintaining the competitive edge internationally and equal opportunity for all Americans.

Historically, the idea of equal opportunity per the Constitution was limited to White male citizens. As far back as 1896, segregated schools were the norm in many of the United States. In 1896 there were forty-five states in the Union. By 1965 there were 50 states, of which, forty states had Jim Crow laws (United States Department of the Interior, 2006). These were state and local laws enacted between 1876 and 1965 that regulated the lives of anyone who was not White, that is, Black, Mexicans, Mulatto,

Mongolian, Japanese, Malays, Native Americans, etc., but, on the whole, most of the states laws were related to Blacks. The Jim Crow laws mandated de jure racial segregation in all public facilities, with a supposedly separate but equal status for Black Americans (Department of the Interior); this was applied to many educational facilities. In 1954 the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (Oyez Project), rendered a decision that said separate schools were intrinsically unequal, and created a sense of inferiority in Black children. The Brown decision overturned the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* wherein the separate but equal doctrine was established (Oyez Project).

Four years later, international competition took the spotlight. In 1958, Congress passed that National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in response to the Soviet Union launching Sputnik, the first artificial satellite. The purpose of NDEA was to insure the citizens of the United States that there would be enough high level scientists to compete with the Soviet Union in the space race (National Defense Education Act, 1958). Among the beneficiaries of federal dollars were elementary and secondary schools. These recipients were charged with improving math, science and foreign language training. The thought behind learning a foreign language and understanding the culture of a country was that they go hand in hand with the end result of global peace.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, federal emphasis moved between equal rights and global competitiveness. In 1963, President Kennedy, in his Radio and Television

Speech to the American Public on Civil Rights, spoke at length on the inequality of American education for people of color.

The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one-seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is 7 years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much Kennedy, J.F. (1963, June). *Radio and television report to the American people on civil rights*. Speech presented at the White House, Washington, D.C.

Under Kennedy's administration, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was introduced in order to close the educational gap between Blacks and Whites. Title VI prohibits discrimination in any agency receiving federal funds and this included the public education system. The intent of Title VI was to provide a good and qualitative education for all students including Black students (United States Department of Justice).

Expanding on educational civil rights, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965) launched a comprehensive set of programs. After the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the Presidency. As a former schoolteacher, he recognized the adverse impact that poverty had on school children and his "War on Poverty" not only carried the Kennedy administration's commitment to equality of education but also provided significant funding for education. Reiterating what we have seen thus far regarding the history of education in America, Johnson, upon signing the bill said:



For too long, political acrimony held up our progress. For too long, children suffered while jarring interests caused stalemates in the efforts to improve our schools. Since 1946 Congress tried repeatedly, and failed repeatedly, to enact measures for elementary and secondary education. Johnson, L.B. (1965, April). Remarks made in Johnson City, TX.

ESEA provided funds for professional development, educational materials, parental involvement, and specifically stipulated that there will be no federal curriculum (ESEA, 1965). Since 1965, ESEA has been renewed every five years and was recently reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Until 1969 there had been no unified evaluation method for measuring outcome improvements. This changed in 1969 when the Department of Education established The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), euphemistically titled the “Nations Report Card”. Its mission was to test achievement levels of 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students throughout the United States in mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. These were considered to be pivotal grades for academic performance. The primary aim of NAEP is to “collect and report information on student performance at the national, state, and local levels, making assessment an integral part of our nation’s evaluation of the condition and progress of education” (National Assessment of Education Progress, n.d., ¶ 2). As a result of these tests, trends in reading, science, technology and mathematics were established (Nations Report Card, 2004). If plans progress as indicated, NAEP will try to link their data with PIRLS and TIMSS in 2011. This is an indicator that there is continued interest in international comparisons.

Many countries around the world in 2011 will participate in international assessments in reading (at grade 4 for the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, or PIRLS), and mathematics and science (at grades 4 and 8 for the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS). NAEP, for which the Governing Board sets policy, will also be administered in 2011. This presents a unique opportunity to have U.S. students take both NAEP and one of the international assessments in the same grade and subject, enabling statistical linking of the two sets of results (National Assessment Governing Board, 2009).

NAEP was followed by the passage of the Education Amendments of 1972, which put the focus primarily on equal rights but not to the exclusion of global competitiveness. At the time, President Nixon said:

Today I am signing into law the Education Amendments of 1972. This legislation includes comprehensive higher education provisions, authority for a new effort to revitalize our educational research effort, and authority to provide financial assistance to school districts to meet special problems incident to desegregation (Woolley, J. & Peters, G., 2010)

Contained in the Education Amendments of 1972 was Title IX, which added to the breadth of equal opportunity by adding gender to the legislative equation. It states:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (Title IX, 1972).

To round out the equal opportunity discussion in education, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 addressed the concerns of those with disabilities. It says:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20) shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

“Section 504 does not require special education programming to be developed for students with disabilities but does require an institution to be prepared to make appropriate academic adjustments and reasonable modifications to policies and practices to allow for full participation of students with disabilities” (Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, n.d., ¶ 8). As in previous legislation, failure to comply with section 504 resulted in cessation of funding and legal proceedings described in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The 1970s were also marked by recognition of the competitive advancements made by Asian countries, particularly Japan. This raised a red flag regarding American education. National test data showed that students in other countries were outperforming American students on standardized tests. Gradually, the United States began to recognize that global competition was directly tied to academic achievement. Recognizing this, the U.S. Congress, in 1979, raised the Department of Education to a Cabinet level agency (Department of Education Organization Act, 1979).

By 1983 the United States was in a deep economic recession and concern continued to grow regarding international competition. Frustrated with the waning academic performance of American students in the international domain, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), recommending a tougher set of academic basics for high school graduation, higher standards for universities, a longer school year and/or school day, merit pay for top teachers, and more citizen participation (Henson, 2003). Here there is irony. Once again

a large infusion of money was directed at education; however, rather than allocating the majority of the funds to K-12 education, it was mainly earmarked for post secondary education, the development of community and junior colleges and technical schools where there was hope for a quick advancement of competitive edge in the marketplace.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush, recognizing the need for added attention to educational outcomes, convened a meeting of the country's governors at the University of Virginia to give consideration to the state of education. At that meeting, the governors agreed to establish national goals for education and undertake appropriate reforms. The governor's association, in cooperation with the Department of Education, produced a set of goals to be accomplished by the year 2000 entitled, America 2000. The goals included in the document focused on the following:

1. Every child should start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate should be increased to 90%.
3. Students should be able to demonstrate competency in challenging subject matter.
4. American students should become first in the world in mathematics and science.
5. Every adult should be both literate and prepared for lifelong learning.
6. Every school should be free from drugs and violence and the classroom environment should be conducive to learning (Lapan and Houghton, 2003).

In the 1990s public schooling moved toward standards-based accountability as political pressure came to bear, and by 1995, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) under the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES), added The Trends in

International Math and Science Study to its tableau (USDOE, 2003). TIMSS was given a global mission. It was to measure student achievement in math and science in grades 4, 8 and 12 in participating countries throughout the world. This assessment put the U.S. squarely in 8<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place respectively for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in math and science, and in 13<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> place respectively for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in math and science (USDOE, 2003). As far as reading achievement, between 1971 and 1999, the reading scores of nine year olds showed less than significant growth (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000).

By the year 2000, during the presidential campaign, then contender, George W. Bush suggested there was a “deep educational recession”. Shortly after Bush’s election to the presidency, the NCLB Act of 2001 was enacted.

By 2003, a new TIMSS assessment was undertaken in which fifteen countries participated. The resulting data was compared to the results of the original TIMSS of 1995. As in the past, the results included math and science assessments of students from participating countries at comparable ages and grades. The comparative results indicated that there were no measurable changes in average math and science scores for U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> grades during this period of time. The TIMSS results for 2003 showed that the U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were rated 12<sup>th</sup> among international leaders in math, while 8<sup>th</sup> graders were ranked 15<sup>th</sup>. In science, 4<sup>th</sup> graders were ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were ranked 9<sup>th</sup>. In fact, math and science scores were lower in 2003 than in 1995 (USDOE, 2003).

These events gave impetus for more educational reform. To that end, several theories have been advanced to explain the nature, characteristics, and need for

sustainable, school-based reform; and when it comes to educational reform, what is important is the question of what works and what has sustainability. As Samuel Mitchell succinctly states, “educational change is now legislated, publicized, and promoted as never before” (1996, p. 12).

The most recent reform legislation, NCLB, has the priority of raising student achievement for every child represented in every subgroup. As in the 1960s and 1970s, there now exists a pressing concern for the United States to close the “achievement gap.” This is described as the distance between the typical higher achievers of White, Asian and Indian, versus the lower achievers of Hispanic, Black, and special needs students (Rothstein, 2004).

Some educational theorists believe this gap exists as a result of social class. According to Garner (2008) and Ishida and Slater (2009), social class determines the success of a child. Rothstein states that, “the influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained...their teachers and no matter how well designed ...their instructional programs and climates” (p. 5); yet, he also warns that we must not use that as an excuse to allow the difference in achievement between our social classes and our ethnic groups to grow or even exist. Whether one subscribes to this postulate or not, a big gap in academic performance does not mean that excellent schools could not offset these differences. Reeves (2003), in his 90/90/90 schools research makes a strong argument that with consistent and pervasive use of high yield strategies, high poverty and high minority

schools can succeed. Nicotera (2009) assumes that with the apparent success of the charter school movement, high poverty and high minority schools can meet academic success. Indeed, there are many claims today made by policy makers and educators, including those responsible for the LFS program, that higher standards, better teachers, more accountability, better discipline, and other effective practices can close the achievement gap.

The waves of reform initiated what Hess (1999) calls the “spinning wheels of reform” and when educators and policymakers go about “spinning wheels”, efforts end up being of little to no value. Hess states that public policy makers and the educational community have heralded three waves of reform within the last two decades. The first wave represented an attempt to adjust the instructional delivery system of the nation’s schools. Second wave reforms advocated school site organizational changes while the most recent third wave reforms, such as the Learning Focused Schools Program, propose large-scale initiatives aimed at the broader school system level. He further opines that regardless of which wave reform efforts have been undertaken, they have produced little to no difference in student outcomes for a specific reason. The number of institutional problems from which change occurs is broad and all encompassing, making change a difficult action to undertake successfully. From fragmented approaches to reform (Hatch, 2009) to poor leadership (Fullan, 2001; Blankenstein et.al., 2009), to lack of resources (Rebell & Wolff, 2008), to economic challenges (Harris, 2009), to bureaucratic processes and political agendas (Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Ravitch, 2010), the process of change is

difficult indeed. Politicians are promoting change because it is good for their platform rather than undertaking change for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Portrayed as “policy churn” are the “endless streams of initiatives” (Hess, p. 52) that result in such reforms described as being “a hindrance, consuming time, money, and energy, while distracting school personnel from becoming more proficient at specific teaching and learning tasks” (p. 53). Supporting this notion, Fowler (2004) writes that

State governments have asserted their authority over public schools by issuing a bewildering array of new policies and policy proposals. More often than not, they have not asked public school educators for input into these reforms. Instead, they have defined educators as a major part of the problem rather than as professionals qualified to offer solutions (p. 3).

Hence, reform efforts fail because policymakers often pursue reform without sufficient research or planning, and with fragmented organizational support (Hatch, 2009).

Educators, the primary implementers of reform, are often left out of the search for the solution (Fullan, 2001; Hess, 1999; 2004). And finally, reforms become symbolic rather than producing actual school improvements (Hess, 1999; Ravitch, 2010).

### Literature of School Reform: Whole-School

Throughout history, education has been the subject of one reform movement or another. Often U.S. school reform focused on societal concerns: the integration of an immigrant population, reducing poverty, eliminating gender differences, class inequities, civil rights, or closing the minority gap. The emphasis is bifurcated. At one end of the



spectrum, U.S. education is still focused on societal concerns such as equal academic achievement among subgroups including ELL, and special education students. At the other end of the spectrum, there is deep concern that the United States is losing the international competitive edge that it has enjoyed for fifty years. Jobs are being outsourced to nations that have highly trained workforces and lower wage demands than their U.S. counterparts. Lower wages are always more attractive when a dependable educated workforce is available (Thomas, 2004).

The loss of competitive edge is also evidenced in the quality of graduating high school students in the United States. A significant number of these students do not have the skills to function immediately in college or in the work environment. Further, students arriving in the eighth grade are not prepared for rigorous course work so that the potential for international advancement in this area remains under duress (American College Testing, 2005).

Gross National Product (GNP) is no longer an issue when it comes to educational achievement in the global competitive environment. Countries around the world are challenging the United States' literacy rates. The countries that have 99%+ literacy are listed below (Table 2). Literacy correlates with economic advancement. The United States is under pressure to remain competitive educationally and economically as we see more and more countries rise in educational achievement.

Table 2.

*Global Top Literacy Rates*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Literacy Rate</b>			
			1	<u>Trinidad and Tobago</u>	99.9
1	<u>Australia</u>	99.9	1	<u>United Kingdom</u>	99.9
1	<u>Austria</u>	99.9	1	<u>United States</u>	99.9
1	<u>Belgium</u>	99.9	22	<u>Cuba</u>	99.8
1	<u>Canada</u>	99.9	22	<u>Estonia</u>	99.8
1	<u>Czech Republic</u>	99.9	22	<u>Montenegro</u>	99.8
1	<u>Denmark</u>	99.9	24	<u>Barbados</u>	99.7
1	<u>Finland</u>	99.9	24	<u>Latvia</u>	99.7
1	<u>France</u>	99.9	24	<u>Poland</u>	99.7
1	<u>Georgia</u>	99.9	24	<u>Slovenia</u>	99.7
1	<u>Germany</u>	99.9	28	<u>Belarus</u>	99.6
1	<u>Iceland</u>	99.9	28	<u>Lithuania</u>	99.6
1	<u>Ireland (republic of)</u>	99.9	28	<u>Slovakia</u>	99.6
1	<u>Japan</u>	99.9	31	<u>Kazakhstan</u>	99.5
1	<u>Luxembourg</u>	99.9	31	<u>Tajikistan</u>	99.5
1	<u>Netherlands</u>	99.9	33	<u>Armenia</u>	99.4
1	<u>Netherlands</u>	99.9	33	<u>Russian Federation</u>	99.4
1	<u>New Zealand</u>	99.9	33	<u>Ukraine</u>	99.4
1	<u>Norway</u>	99.9	36	<u>Hungary</u>	99.3
1	<u>Sweden</u>	99.9	36	<u>Uzbekistan</u>	99.3
1	<u>Switzerland</u>	99.9			

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(Human Development Report, 2005, pp 258-261).

Finally, more and more technological advancements are taking place outside the United States as improvements in European, Asian, Malaysian and Indian education advance. From 1980 through the mid 90s the United States, Britain, Japan and Germany

jockeyed for technological prominence. By the late 1990s and into the millennium, competition rallied in Singapore, India, and Taiwan, in addition to the old competitors of Britain, Japan and Germany. This is not merely a function of trade agreements; to a larger extent it is a function of educational achievement. The more educated a population becomes, the more it is able to compete (National Science Foundation, 2002).

As supported by the Human Development Report (2005), the need for significant reform in education is motivated dually by a sense of economic urgency and societal concerns. A logical conclusion for the thrust of whole school reform is then based on the potential for losing the global economic race (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2009).

The emphasis of whole school reform is achievement-based and responsive to the question, in what way can we increase student performance as measured by test scores? On this subject, school officials and administrators have spent three decades examining various school reform programs and ideas. As the breadth of the problem has escalated, there has been growing recognition that what we have been doing in the name of reform “no longer can do the job, hasn’t been doing the job, isn’t doing the job, and can’t do the job” (Lapan and Houghton, 2003, p. 47).

Rogusky succinctly summarizes the next phase of reform by saying:

In 1997, the U.S. Congress passed legislation authorizing the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program, which provided financial incentives for schools to undertake comprehensive reform. Each school's reform program had to meet nine components identified in the law. Although schools themselves were responsible for developing plans that integrate these nine

components, the legislation encouraged them to consider adopting an externally developed reform model as a central part of their plan. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 authorizes the continuation of this program under Title I. Now called the Comprehensive School Reform program, several changes have been made. Most notably, there are now eleven components of comprehensiveness, including a requirement that schools use strategies backed by scientifically based research (Rogusky, 2006, ¶ 1).

### Educating the Populous: A Historical Perspective

As we study early educational theorists and their approach to setting the stage for learning to occur, we can see correlates of their methodology reflected in the LFSP.

Developing an educational protocol has an additive function. One theorist builds on another theorist, one practitioner on another practitioner such that educational processes are refined over time. So too with the whole-school reform process, i.e. the Learning Focused School Program.

There have been educational theorists going back as far as Socrates and Aristotle. Most of what is known of Socrates comes from others, especially the works of Plato. Plato was a student of Socrates and in his “dialogues of Plato” he wrote the Apology of Socrates, which Benson (2000) used to analyze the Socratic method of education. Socrates defined learning as the “seeking of truth in matters and [that] it occurs when, after questioning and interpreting the wisdom and knowledge of others, one comes to recognize their own ignorance” ( p.17). Benson goes on to summarize the 8-step approach that Socrates used to develop knowledge and skills in his students emphasizing that both knowledge and skills are acquired by:

(1) interpreting the statements of others; (2) testing or examining the knowledge or wisdom of those reputed (by themselves or others) to be wise; (3) showing those who are not wise their ignorance; (4) learning from those who are wise; (5) examining oneself; (6) exhorting others to philosophy; (7) examining the lives of others; (8) attaining moral knowledge (p. 17).

Aristotle believed that education and teaching were content specific. The teacher instructed a student about a set of concepts, or some discipline by focusing on content. Teaching and learning consists of a dynamic relationship between instructor and content and are always about disciplined inquiry into some aspect of reality. The purpose of the school was to cultivate and develop each person's rationality (Ornstein, 1981).

It was not until the 1700s that Plato's contribution to educational methodology was improved upon and that was by the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. He believed that the acquisition of skills and of knowledge was an additive, developmental process achieved through trial and error starting at birth (Tbayer, 1965). The teacher had the role of a facilitator and exposed the student to educational opportunities. Then, through sensate experiences and reason, the student would acquire various skills and knowledge. Rousseau wrote the novel, *Emile*, which defined his theory of education.

John Dewey followed Rousseau and influenced the entire field of education throughout his long life. He too believed that from the moment of birth, a child is fully immersed in a learning process, albeit unconsciously, and that the child is learning from his social interactions as well as his interactions with the environment (Dewey, 1897). Dewey defined education as an organic process between the psychological and the social

aspects of the human being. He believed that the purpose of education was not merely to develop mental powers but to develop them in the context of where the capabilities were to be used (1897).

By the early 1900s, B.F. Skinner entered the educational arena as a behavioral psychologist. His attention was focused mainly on the role of positive feedback in the learning process. He suggested that positive reinforcement changed behavior and that behavior was the outcome of learning (Bjork, 1993). This grew into the practice of operant conditioning, wherein types of feedback elicited specific responses in behavior. By the 1960s, students of education were immersed in the theory of operant conditioning (Meyer, 2010). This is the old, stimulus, response, feedback model of education wherein future teachers learned that positive feedback supported the learning process; negative feedback diminished self-esteem, and no feedback kept the student in a learning mode hoping to receive some positive feedback.

Warren Bennis straddles both the world of education and the world of business. Like Skinner, he believes that change is intrinsic to the learning process. His focus is on the nature of change, which he believes, in effect, is the product of education. To advance the learning process, one must understand that learning is the changing and adapting to what is thought to be true (Bennis, 1993). To respond to the current environment and using a quasi-Skinnerian model, he suggests that the teacher use structured and unstructured educational opportunities to advance student learning. His methodology asks in what way does the teacher help to define the problem; lead the class

to explore the assorted relationships, biases, nature and depth of the problem; encourage exploration of various and diverse points of view; determine alternative solutions and potential outcomes thereof and to make a decision free of personal bias (1993)? To do this, Bennis believes that the teacher's main communicative role is to clarify meaning using the Socratic Method. Imbedded in this process is conflict between what is known and what is unknown and to this end, it is the process of finding an answer that yields knowledge and skill development.

Contemporary theoreticians also recognize the need for reform. Grindle (2004) argues that through educational reform, large-scale issues such as endemic poverty and inequality could be fought and overcome if an educated population were the ones waging the battle. Hess believes, "characteristics of good, effective schools are missing in too many of our nation's schools" (2004, p. 28). He goes on to say that effective schools:

1. are safe and orderly
2. have a climate of high expectations for the success of all students
3. have a clear and focused mission
4. have an active and engaged principal focused on academic performance, and
5. make it a point to frequently monitor student progress.

When these characteristics are not present in our schools says Hess, then students are not being educated in a manner that prepares them to face the challenges or needs of our society; hence, the need for reform.

The pattern of building on the successes and theories of the past, yield educational reforms in the present. The postulates of the aforementioned theoreticians are reflected to a greater or lesser degree in the LFS program, in that the student is primed to learn; the student begins the quest for knowledge by being introduced to the subject with minimal structure, then, through self-discovery, structured and unstructured learning experiences, the student formulates an opinion which is then reviewed in a classroom environment such that, what has been learned can be effectively channeled into the right direction through communication. To this, Thompson, founder of the LFSP, added Marzano's research and amalgamated the product with data and findings from the 90/90/90 schools.

Research on high achieving schools points to the success of 90/90/90 schools, where "more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch...are from ethnic minorities...[and] met or exceeded high academic standards (Reeves, 2000). A study of the 90/90/90 schools shows that they share several common characteristics: "a focus on academic achievement, clear curriculum choices, frequent assessment...an emphasis on nonfiction writing, [and] collaborative scoring of student work" (p. 187). Success is credited to the schools' persistent emphasis on writing tasks, multiple methods of assessment, professional collaboration, and a single-minded focus on learning; hence, the appellation, exemplary schools.



### Barriers to Reform

While the need for reform is apparent and has been recognized for decades, the ability to successfully carry out school reform has been limited. Several of the barriers to successful school transformation are lack of resources and funding, lack of stakeholder input, and controversy surrounding assessment validity. These barriers to reform fuel resistance to change and bring to light the entrenched problems to whole-school reform that must be addressed if success is to be realized.

Karp (2003) believes that there exists a profound gap between the funding provided and the promises made in NCLB. Sunderman (2008) believes that state educational agencies as well as local educational agencies do not have the time, funding, knowledge, and organizational capacity to implement the law and intervene in low performing schools on the scale demanded by NCLB. Resources are one key to significant improvement; without them, teachers are confined to the constraints of scarcity. Grubb (2009) does not argue against the cruciality of resources but emphasizes the criticality of using them correctly. Furthermore, he states that effective change requires “compound rather than simple resources; many are complex or abstract resources that require small sums of money but depend more on vision, leadership, planning, collaboration and other characteristics that cannot be bought” (p. 267).

Another entrenched barrier, which impedes reform, is the absence of teacher input. This absence, limits the robustness of innovation, transformation, and design. In nearly all reform models one finds that teachers, the implementers of reform and

arguably, those who understand educational demands the best, have a minimal function in the planning and organizing of the reform (Fullan, 2001; Hess, 1999; 2004; Weber, 2010). These are the people responsible for service delivery, who understand the demands of the classroom and the difficulty of curriculum delivery. Teachers are the daily agents of change; yet they are rarely asked for their input to the reform process and are the first to be held accountable for the outcomes. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario (2009) believes, regardless of the money spent or the desire for change, without teachers' input, change will not occur. As such, overt or covert resistance to change is a likely outcome (Fullan, 2001; Hess, 1999; 2004).

The subject of barriers to reform is not complete without a discussion of the parental role in the educative process. Whole-school reform does not begin and end at the schoolhouse door. Parents provide critical educational continuity to the child. To do this, parents must understand where their children are academically, and what their children are to learn. Parents also support and reinforce the role of the child in the educational process. Their support is vital and derived from understanding what the reform is all about, its plan of action, standards that are to be achieved, methods of measurement, and accountability (Hatch, 2009). Any limit in the parental domain directly influences the success or failure of a reform initiative. Traditionally, the education and indoctrination of a parent comes through the teacher. Teachers are the first line of contact for this explanation, and as mentioned earlier, teachers have not been involved with the reform movement. Instead, they have been "ordered" to implement

reforms, which others have engineered (Roselli, 2005). Researchers identify the need for a community approach to reform and they stipulate that the best way to sustain efforts to improve schools is to keep it personal by gaining ownership and subsequent commitments from stakeholders: parents, teachers, and school leaders (McGuinty, 2009; Wartgow, 2008).

Finally, one cannot talk about barriers to reform without closely examining the topic of assessments. Throughout history, assessments have driven the subject of reform (Meyer, 2010); but with the advent of systems management, has come the subject of “whole-school” reform, a considerably larger and more complex undertaking. Assessments yield numbers and the need to reform is based on the numbers derived from comparative assessments. A current demand of NCLB requires 100% proficiency in reading and math for all students by 2014 (Wagner, 2008). As mentioned in Chapter one, under the same mandate, failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) comes with strong consequences. Critics believe this assessment approach is flawed and that 100% proficiency is unrealistic. Further, they believe that NCLB is a highly punitive approach for students, teachers, and schools in terms of consequences for poor performance on the tests (Meier, 2004; Sunderman, 2008; Wagner, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

Because of the importance of assessment under NCLB, and the apparent need to do well on assessments, many fear that under this pressure, teaching to the test is becoming a regular practice of educators (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In essence, in order to get good results on high stakes tests, teachers narrow their instruction to the limited

scope of what will be on the test. This brings to bear many questions regarding the quality of a students' education. If teaching to the test is the prevailing practice, then the validity of the test must be examined regarding the quality of the child's' education. Are we really educating the whole child when the curriculum is test-centered? Is the content of the test a true, fair, and accurate example of what a child should know? Does the test really reflect material mastery over material coverage? Are schools really improving or exceeding standards if they have high test scores? And, given that every state has a different set of standards what does 100% proficiency mean overall? Nehring (2009) states that we are in a state of gross misunderstanding if we believe that learning is reduced to test scores, and further opines that, "Talking about learning solely in terms of test scores narrows the focus of education and the extent to which we persist with that narrowed focus leads to a narrowed learning experience for our students" (p. 27). Last, but certainly not least, do these reforms produce children who are able to live a wholesome, responsible and productive life, who are ready for the demands of society, or are we producing children who are good test takers? Many educational experts would argue that an assessment-centered education is not meeting these needs (Meier, 2004; Sunderman, 2008; Wagner, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

At the same time, there are other experts who see some value in standardized testing but believe it should be a piece of a larger accountability system rather than the penultimate focal point. Sunderman (2008) believes the most accurate assessments include varied and multiple indicators. Bond, Herman, & Arter (1994) take the position

that there are new skill requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that require new kinds of assessments. Ravitch (2010), while understanding the need for accountability, asks, “How did testing and accountability become the main levers of school reform” (p. 16)? She states that accountability and assessment are prime components of gauging academic success but assessment is overshadowing the importance of teaching standard mastery. “The standards movement has been replaced by the accountability movement and what was once an effort to improve the quality of education is now turned into an accounting strategy where schools are measured, then punished or rewarded” (p. 16).

Overcoming these barriers is crucial to closing the achievement gap, making academic gains, and on a stronger scale securing the fate of our country (Weber, 2010). “The fact is, we don’t have the luxury of ignoring this challenge. The education crisis in the United States is becoming a crisis for our entire economy and endangering our country’s ability to compete in the global marketplace” (p. 190).

### Literature of School Reform: Learning Focused Schools

#### Components of the Learning Focused Schools Program:

The Learning Focused Schools Program is a school improvement model enforcing material mastery over material coverage. LFS focuses on four targeted areas for school improvement. The areas are as follows:

Planning and Organization, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Leadership (Bandy, 2004). Max Thompson, creator of the Learning Focused Schools program, established

these domains and then created specific questions to address and target improvement for each domain based on what Marzano describes as the “essential nine instructional strategies most likely to improve student achievement across all content areas and across all grade levels” (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 24 ). The “essential nine” strategies are as follows: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, cues, questions, and advance organizers (2001). Thompson believes that these strategies will fit into one or more of the four domains that he targeted as areas for focused improvement (Planning and Organization, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and Leadership). Within the four domains, Thompson has developed specific questions that he believes schools and school systems should be addressing in an attempt to ensure that teaching and instructional practices that are being carried out are ones that would be considered exemplary practices or extractions from the 90-90-90 schools. These questions would also facilitate accomplishing the desired end results of the NCLB legislation. The following will highlight the questions Thompson believes schools and school systems should be addressing within each of the Learning Focused targeted areas of Planning and Organization, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and Leadership.

### Planning and Organization

Planning determines where a school is going over the next year or more; how it's going to get there; and how it'll know if it got there or not. The plan allows the stakeholders to organize the resources available to address the priorities and goals deemed important throughout the planning process. As such Thompson (2000) believes that there are some essential questions that must be addressed within the domain of planning and organization in order for the school to experience success.

- What are the school or school system priorities?
- What are the 2-3 focused goals of the school or school system?
- Has a plan for implementation been developed and shared?
- Are structures for collaborative planning in place?
- Does the school have a schedule that supports these priorities?

Thompson makes the point that planning and organization is a key element that must be addressed appropriately in order for LFS to be successfully implemented. Administrators of the schools that implement the LFS program must stipulate the non-negotiable tenets of LFS to the teachers. The Learning Focused Schools Program prescribes block scheduling for Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grades where reading/writing/literacy, math, and social studies/science with reading and writing in content, make up the three major blocks. Every teacher per the same grade level must have common planning so collaboration amongst teammates can be facilitated. In this format claims Thomas (2004), teacher teams and grade levels can unify their efforts to focus on the top goals of

the school. Supporting the importance of planning and organization, Lindahl & Beach (2010) stress the point that planning is directly linked to the change process, school improvement, and educational reform. Even more important, they state, is the correlation between planning, implementing and institutionalizing change processes.

While few educational experts would argue against the need for planning and organizing, some believe that the structured approach offered by Thompson and LFS is too stringent. Lillard and Jessen (2003) and Stephenson (2003) point out that such approaches as Montessori and Waldorf still aim for student success but take a less architected approach to priority and goal setting. Fundamental to the Montessori method is the belief that children have an innate impulse to comprehend the world around them. This results in a plan for each individual child. The Waldorf approach uses a plan focused on group instruction. Both Montessori and Waldorf are experiential based yet less prescriptive than the LFS approach.

Regardless of the approach to planning and organizing, this is an essential ingredient of improving student outcomes.

### Curriculum

The instruction that takes place in public schools is driven by the state curriculum. In Georgia, the state curriculum is made up of a series of subjects with correlating performance standards for each subject. Subsequently, student success is measured by state tests that gauge the degree to which a student has mastered the curriculum



standards. Thompson (2002) notes that in most states, the time allotted to teach the curriculum versus the time needed to master the expansive scope of the curriculum is markedly disproportionate. Herein he establishes the argument for the creation of a prioritized curriculum that addresses the following questions:

- Are curriculum priorities established?
- Does each academic course have designated units and are they mapped out and paced for the year?
- Is previewing used for key vocabulary and key concepts?
- Is there a clear understanding of what students should know, understand, and be able to do?

The LFS program enforces the strategy of prioritizing and mapping curriculum.

While it is recognized that each state's curriculum is rich with learning material that should be mastered by its K-12 students, many states, including the one wherein this study is being conducted, have come to the realization that their K-12 curriculum consists of high, medium, and low priority standards that would take in excess of 20 years to master, making it impossible to achieve in the 13 years that are allowed (Reeves, 2000).

To combat this issue, the LFS program advocates curriculum mapping and curriculum prioritizing. Curriculum prioritizing essentially entails the identification and prevalence of themes and trends that will be included on the standardized tests. Once the curriculum is aligned with the state standards, those themes/trends that are found most often in the standardized tests are deemed high priority standards and given a weight of 70%. Those

that are found regularly, but not abundantly are dubbed medium priority standards and given a weight of 50%, and those that are hardly found, yet still appear on the tests are given a weight of 10% to 20% and labeled low priority standards. This is a practice which Kennedy (2003) calls aligning the educational process with inputs and desired outcomes. Essentially, teachers are to focus their efforts on the high and medium priority standards since these are the most prominent parts of the curriculum for which students and teachers are held accountable. Moreover, passing the standardized tests and making AYP is enough to satisfy the demands of current legislation.

Jacobs (2010), a leading proponent of curriculum mapping, points out that there can be drawbacks to the process. Curriculum mapping often is leadership dependent and with that comes the potential for lack of agreement on what should be taught and when. November (2010) suggests that once the curriculum map has been designed, teachers often view it as inflexible. Lastly, using the map metaphor, if one forgets, ignores or skips a turn, the destination becomes harder to reach. Likewise, if teachers ignore or skip certain material within the curriculum, student success is compromised.

### Instruction and Assessment

The crux of what NCLB is asking or is demanding of school systems centers around instruction and assessment. In essence, students must be able to demonstrate what they have learned. Thompson's LFS protocol relies heavily on teacher-centered instruction and constant data analysis in order to ascertain the degree to which students

have achieved mastery over subject matter. With an emphasis on data-driven decision-making, student engagement, and specific reading and writing priorities, Thompson believes that student achievement will improve. To this end, he set forth questions for school systems to consider as they embark on their approach to instruction and assessment.

- Is data used in setting instructional priorities and instructional goals?
- Are essential questions, activating strategies, graphic organizers, effective teaching strategies, and critical thinking strategies used?
- Is writing to inform and reading comprehension a priority for the school or school system?

According to Marzano (2003), the top five instructional strategies that have most impact on student achievement are found in Figure 3.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Percentile Gain</b>
1	Extending Thinking Skills  (compare/contrast; cause/effect; classifying; analogies/metaphors)	45
2	Summarizing	34
3	Vocabulary in Context	33
4	Advance Organizers	28
5	Non-Verbal Representations	25

*Figure 3.* Categories of instructional strategies that affect student achievement. Reprinted with permission from The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development copyright © 2003 ASCD 800.933.2723 All rights reserved.

The LFS program provides direction in the areas of reading comprehension, writing, balanced literacy, scaffolding for at-risk students, and training (for teachers/administrators) in what is referred to as strategies for exemplary practice that work across the curriculum.

In order for students to comprehend what they are reading, the LFS program breaks down reading instruction into a practice that employs nine strategies that should be the focal point for the reading instructor. Those strategies are:

1. Cueing systems - the need for the reader to identify context clues within a reading passage in order to understand what is being read.
2. Main idea - the importance of understanding what the passage is all about.
3. Sequencing - the ability to understand what comes first, next, and last.

4. Compare and contrast - telling how things are alike and different.
5. Fact and opinion - distinguishing between what is true versus what someone thinks or feels.
6. Cause and effect - why something happens or what makes it happen and then understanding or predicting what will result.
7. Literary elements - voice, setting, characters, mood, themes, style, and illustrations.
8. Inferences - reasoning based on information stated in the text and from personal experiences.
9. Extending thinking activities– activities designed to improve mental processes that enable the learner to “deepen their understanding of concepts and skills” (Brewer and Gann, 2005, p. extend/refine 1).

These strategies coupled with teacher-directed reading, flexible grouping, self selected reading, word work to understand words and word patterns, and writing to express thoughts and ideas make up what the LFS program describes as a balanced literacy approach to reading and writing (Brewer and Gann, 2003). Furthermore, for at-risk and exceptional students (students with specific learning needs, special education students, ESL student), the LFS program promotes scaffolding.

Scaffolding is the planned implementation and then incremental cessation of academic assistance for students who are not on grade level (Boyles, 2005). Through the use of scaffolding strategies such as task analysis, previewing and acceleration, analogies

and metaphors, and memory mnemonics, support is given when needed then removed systematically as the student “catches up”. It is with this practice, that the LFS program says that it attempts to reach all students, including those subgroups that historically show less growth on standardized tests.

Concurrent with these strategies, the LFS program calls for regular assessment in order to gauge student progress. The LFS program recommends that as the curriculum is mapped out by quarters across the school year, 5-8 high priority standards should be targeted for benchmark assessments, 2-4 medium priority standards should be targeted, and 1-2 low priority standards should be targeted. With a focus on these strategies and subsequent assessment, students are expected to progress through acquisition of skills, to extending and refining of skills, and then to authentic, meaningful use and mastery.

While not against the use of assessment, Davies (2003) cautions that the proper types of assessment must be used appropriately. She believes that descriptive and specific feedback is far more constructive than evaluative feedback. McDonald and Boud (2003) recognize the need for assessment but believe that a key piece is missing; student self-assessment. “A common theme shared by many of the key writers about assessment is that it is not sufficient for feedback on learning to be solely the province of teachers. Students themselves, it is argued, have a necessary role in taking responsibility for assessing their own work” (p. 210). While experts vary on their approach to assessment, it is clear that it is a vital piece of the educative process.

## Leadership

For successful implementation of the LFS Program and subsequent student success, leadership is key according to Thompson. The principal must be the instructional leader of the building and require that the recommended practices of the LFS program are consistently and pervasively being carried out within the school. This is not a new notion related to successful whole school reform movements (Bandy, 2004). Leadership is often the key focal point.

When evaluating the leadership setting in school systems, Thompson asks the following:

- What is the principal's vision and how has it been communicated?
- Is the principal the instructional leader?
- Is the principal conducting daily walkthroughs?
- Is planning monitored by the principal?

In order to respond to these questions, it is apparent that accountability is a key feature to Thompson's leadership approach. McNeal (2010) supports the role of the principal in this regard expressing the opinion that making a positive difference results in being accountable and establishing measurable results.

Principals, along with their administrative teams are required under LFS to conduct daily classroom walk-throughs. The LFS program recommends 5 minutes in 5 different classrooms each day, using a specific set of "look fors" and "ask abouts" developed for the LFS program. In this check-off fashion, the principal looks for

evidence of the following: essential questions, activating strategies, lesson format, graphic organizers, summarizing, extending/refining, extensive use of vocabulary, writing processes, and a reading comprehension strategy. In essence, each “look for” is a direct correlate of the “essential nine strategies” identified in Marzano’s (2003) earlier research. Specific to each of the nine “look fors” are subsequent “ask abouts”. These are one to four specific questions that principals and administrators should ask teachers about the lesson(s) they are currently teaching. For example, one of the aforementioned “look fors” is use of graphic organizers. Two questions, or “ask abouts” administrators are to ask to monitor the use of graphic organizers are:

1. How do students use a graphic organizer in today’s lesson?
2. Why did you choose that graphic organizer?

“Ask abouts ” are scripted with the intention to provide administrators with an indication as to the level of implementation/usage of LFS protocols. Furthermore, “look fors” and “ask abouts” serve as the primary accountability piece for teacher utilization of the substantive instructional practices prescribed by the LFSP.

A final component of the LFS program that school leaders are responsible for monitoring in classrooms is teacher incorporation of exemplary practice model strategies across the curriculum. The LFS initiative incorporates the successful strategies of the 90/90/90 schools into a framework for practical application. They include:

- (a) professional collaboration,
- (b) frequent teacher-student feedback,



- (c) goal-driven scheduling,
- (d) action research responsive to situational context,
- (e) subject-matter expert instructional staff,
- (f) data-driven decision making,
- (g) timely and consistent assessment,
- (h) high professional standards for adult leaders, and
- (i) an integrated curriculum.

Evident in Thompson's protocol is the need for school systems to focus on their intended outcomes. The questions within each domain appear to demand a clearly defined answer with no room for ambiguity. Either what Thompson is declaring as "needed and important" in each question is happening, or it is not. Thompson has developed the LFS program to address these questions should the "needed and important" strategies not be evident within a school or school system. Overall, leadership is highly prescribed using the LFS program and leaves little room for collaborative leadership or for principal innovation that is responsive to his /her own specific organization

While experts may not agree on the type of leadership needed for school reform, it is clear that leadership, in some way, is critical to success. Jones, Shannon and Weigel (2009) offer an approach that is not as inflexible by suggesting that effective leadership practices fall on a continuum that on one end can encompass a single-minded, authoritative approach, to the other end which is the empowerment of a multi-faceted, distributed approach to leadership. Another perspective offered by Burke (2010) is less

cut and dry than Thompson's. Burke recommends a shared governance approach to leadership wherein principals and school leaders not only share the authority of monitoring effective instructional practices but also together decide what is appropriate for their specific school, learning environment, and instructional culture.

Opponents of LFS and other similar whole school reform initiatives feel that implementation of such programs places too much emphasis on teaching to and passing the test. This opposition does raise serious questions. Are students being taught simply to pass the test or are they being taught life skills that will serve them well after their public education? To what degree can students experience the implications of their education when a test looms at the forefront of their instruction? To what degree can the teacher expand on a thought or investigate ancillary discussion points? In what way can life skills be tested against content? Proponents of teaching to the test assert that this modality fosters increased communication between the faculty and the administration, that it unifies the school to one centralized mission and that it focuses energy in a solitary direction. In the English department in one Kentucky high school, teachers, unified by a focus on their end of course tests, more willingly collaborate with teachers of other subjects (Berryman & Russell, 2001). Indeed, teaching to the test may cause teachers to unify their mindset on scoring considerations but is there evidence that teaching to the test yields a student who is able to practice and apply what has been taught?

Edward Lazear of Stanford University (2005) points out that even though all schools are required to participate in high-stake testing because of "No Child Left

Behind”, high performing schools are not even near the margin where anything is at stake. Generally these high performing schools produce year-after-year exceptional results until such time as there is a demographic shift. To this end, the NCLB “system” is essentially bifurcated, producing high-stake testing for those who go to problem schools, and at best, stochastic monitoring for those who are going to schools that are doing well.

There are a number of arguments for and against, teaching to the test. One concern that arises out of teaching to the test, notes Posner (2004), is the emergence of scripted programs where teaching is regimented down to the exact material, timing, and wording of instruction. These scripted programs are now appearing with greater frequency as a result of the preoccupation with standardized tests. The educational danger that lies within this scenario is that teaching may be reduced to a simplistic and ultimately ineffective activity that would be amenable to automation. Another argument is the notion that some teachers “teach to the test” as an act of resistance to what they see as a corrupt and unfair system. Concerned that the test is more important than the acquisition of true knowledge when it comes to evaluations, they sacrifice principle in favor of “points”. In a report generated by the Educational Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, Raudenbush (as cited in Nichols & Berliner, 2005) says, “High-stakes decisions based on school mean proficiency are scientifically indefensible. We cannot regard differences in school mean proficiency as reflecting differences in school effectiveness” (p. 25). In other words, high, medium or low test scores do not necessarily reflect the academic prowess of each individual child.

At the other end of the spectrum, “one in three teachers supports test-focused teaching” (Popham, 2004, p. 82). They are tired of seeing the erosion of test scores and a degradation of international educational status. This group wants to re-elevate U.S. education to world-class status.

To further address the curriculum domain under LFS, instructional emphasis is placed on the key concepts of each lesson as well as the prominent vocabulary used in the lessons. Across the curriculum, including math, twenty to thirty words with which the students may not be familiar are selected from the texts. The words are then listed in a columnar format grouped by likeness (nouns, verbs, parts of the body, geometric shapes, etc....). Students then undertake two tasks. First, they work on predicting the meaning of each term, and second, using the same strategy, they predict the key concepts of the text or lesson in which they will participate. The next step is for the students to read the selected text and then discuss why each of the selected terms was important to the text and why each was chosen to aid in the students’ understanding of the lesson.

Another key component to addressing vocabulary under this domain is the focus on word walls. According to Riedl (2004), “Word walls play a significant role in developing authentic language experiences and enhancing learning through practical use” (p. 2). “If word walls are designed to be a systematically organized collection of key words targeted for study in a specifically interactive manner, then it is likely that, using this methodology, students will feel some ownership and control of their learning and yield a more permanent record of what is being learned in the students mind” (p. 3).

Word walls are utilized in LFS as a way to highlight high frequency words. By LFS design, high frequency words should be categorized by theme during a unit of instruction.

#### Literature of School Reform: Measuring Reform Success

NCLB is about measurable student outcomes. And, to describe measurable outcomes there must be useful and reliable measurements. Presently, most states are using the criterion referenced testing tied to minimum acceptable standards to describe proficiency in curriculum standards. To the extent that students improve their test scores over the course of a year, the school system can say that AYP was met or exceeded. Overall in Georgia, and as stipulated by NCLB, the desired end result is that by the year 2014, all students will be achieving the minimum statewide standard for the academic objectives (2004 AYP Overview Report).

The Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), tests students by grade level standards. For example, all third graders and only third grade students in a given elementary school will be tested on the states' third grade curriculum standards. Students making a score of 800 or higher on each of the subject areas tested (reading, English language arts, math, science, and social studies) are deemed proficient at understanding their grade level curriculum.

Problematic to studies that want to examine students' growth over time, such as growth from first grade through second grade, through third grade and so on, is the fact that the CRCT is not a vertically scaled assessment (Blank, 2010). In order to measure

growth over a sequential period of time, students would have to be tested on the same standards over that period of time (Hull, 2007). In Georgia, students must be tested on their grade level standards, which are inherently different from year to year (GADOE, 2005). Given that the CRCT is not vertically scaled, one cannot conclude that a treatment or program (such as LFS), given to a student who then scores an 820 at the end of the first grade on the CRCT, and subsequently scores an 840 and 860 in second and third grade respectively, contributed to the growth in scores of that student or had any effect on that student's performance. For this reason, educators argue that additional ways of measuring student improvement over time need to be considered. Administrators concur on this point given that funding is tied to improvement (Hull, 2007). To that end, the subject of growth modeling comes into play.

Growth modeling is an emerging field of inquiry when it comes to education. A growth model is used to measure improvement over a specified period of time (Hull, 2007). It attempts to take into consideration divergent student populations and measure the actual growth of the population from point X to point Y. In contrast, an achievement model measures the degree to which a student is proficient (Hull, 2007). The argument for growth modeling versus achievement modeling postulates that merely achieving AYP on a criterion-referenced test does not accurately describe the amount of improvement for a given student population. For instance, a group which is comprised of many subgroups might make significant improvement from the point at which a whole-school reform program was initiated, and yet, that improvement might not be acknowledged through the

use of the achievement model alone. The reason for this, is that the student may show a score improvement and still not change their achievement category. For example: a student who scores between 800 and 849 on the CRCT falls into the achievement category of “meets standards”; yet, if on one test administration the student scores 810 and on the next test administration the same student scores 848, while this might be considered significant growth, categorically the student would still be labeled as “meeting standards”. Thus many educators feel the achievement model alone is an unfair way to measure student achievement. This is echoed in the words of California’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O’Connell, "The growth model is a much more accurate portrayal of a school's performance" (Wallis & Steptoe, as cited in Hull, 2007, ¶ 4).

Currently there are five general categories of Growth models and more can be expected over time as this field matures.

- Improvement models
- Performance Index Models
- Simple Growth Models
- Growth to Proficiency Models
- Value-added Models (Bettebenner, 2009, Hull, 2007; see also Auty, 2008).

NCLB recognizes both the Improvement Model and the Performance Index as ways of measuring AYP. Both measure the percent of change or distance traveled towards a specific benchmark of achievement for a given population from year to year (Goldschmidt & Choi, 2007).

*The Improvement Model* (aka “The Safe Harbor” measure of NCLB) compares a cohort of students from one year to a parallel cohort of students in a subsequent year (de Vise, 2008). The percentage of students deemed proficient in the first group is subtracted from the percentage of students deemed proficient in the subsequent year. The result is the +/- percentage measure of growth.

*The Performance Index Model* is comparable to the Grade Point Average (GPA). It adds a population of scores (X) described as a percentage and divides by the number of students in the population (N). This provides the statistician with an average percentage (A) level of achievement (Goldschmidt et.al., 2007). The outcome is a measurement of proficiency that can be compared year to year. And, like a GPA, the closer the school is to the minimum level of overall population proficiency the closer it comes to the 2014 NCLB end result.

Neither the Improvement Model nor the Performance Index requires sophisticated data systems so implementation is fairly easy. Neither one measures individual student achievement or breaks out subgroups within a given population. Of the states that use these models, there are no gradient levels between proficiency or movement towards proficiency. It is all or nothing with these two statistical models.

*The Simple Growth Model* takes into consideration individual student growth from year to year and the calculated average of all students’ growth or lack thereof from year to year.



<i>Simple Growth Model</i>			
<b>Student</b>	<b>Last year's 4th grade scale score</b>	<b>This year's 5th grade scale score</b>	<b>Change</b>
Student A	350	400	+ 50
Student B	370	415	+ 45
Student C	380	415	+ 35
Student D	325	390	+ 65
Student E	310	370	+ 60
<b>School average</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>+ 51</b>

*Figure 4.* Example of Simple Growth Model with noted differentiation. Reprinted with permission from The Center for Public Information copyright © 2007. [centerforpubliced@nsba.org](mailto:centerforpubliced@nsba.org). All rights reserved.

The Simple Growth Model has several drawbacks. It does not provide the reader with any knowledge of target levels of achievement or minimum standards of achievement and it can only measure those students who have been in school for all the years in which the data is collected (Gong, Perie, and Dunn, 2006).

The *Growth to Proficiency Model* attempts to combine measurements of mastery with growth over time (Hull, 2007). The achievement element describes the absolute levels of mastery attained by students on their end-of-year tests. The growth element describes the progress towards mastery that has been made over the school year. This model is designed to help stakeholders comprehensively track students' progress. The benefit of this model is several-fold. The student has the opportunity to demonstrate growth in knowledge and skills by meeting or exceeding a personal target level of achievement. Further, while this same student may not meet the proficiency standards established for the grade level, the student and the school receives recognition of the achievement since growth was made. This methodology usually provides a window of

three to four years for proficiency to be achieved by any individual while AYP is managed on the year-to-year basis. As of 2007, nine states were piloting this methodology and outcomes are yet to be announced (Hull).

Finally, there is the *Value-Added Model*. The benefit of this model is that it is comprehensive. It has the potential for assessing numerous elements of an educational system from individual teacher performance, to teaching methods, or educational program as it contributes to academic growth (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, and Hamilton, 2004). It can be designed to take current growth and predict future growth for students, which by 2014 yield a completely proficient student body. Implicitly, the reality of achieving this growth target is dependent on internal variables as well as external variables that cannot be controlled by the education system. However, the ideal of the value-added model is that it can isolate a variety of variables that contribute to student achievement.

The Value-Added Model is a complex system of measurement and requires significant funding, sophisticated statisticians, and educator development in order for the outcomes to be usefully understood and used for future growth. In essence, when value is added by a school, the school is said to be effective. The challenge here is sorting what the school actually added from what the student brought with him or her, the environmental variables and previous teacher impact (Ligon, 2008).

Growth modeling is emerging in importance and a field of endeavor for the educational community. The status models of assessment currently in place, i.e. CRCT,

are easy to implement, moderate in cost and easy to understand. Value-Added Models hold greater promise for ascertaining specific strength and weaknesses in the system and for identifying successful educational teaching methodologies. As the field matures, there is much potential in these models. However, at present, there is a limit as to what these various models can do based on their level of development (Ballou 2002, McCaffrey, et al. 2003).

The goal of NCLB is increased student performance. With international competition as a motivating factor, the desire is to make what educators do functional in the community of daily living; the ability to earn an income; live safely; and compete with the rest of the world. The sophistication of growth modeling has not matured but it holds great promise for the future.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Scientifically based research, according to the NCLB law, “involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003, p. 33). Schools and school systems today are relying on data-driven decision-making to improve the quality of education for the nation’s schoolchildren. By comparing data across groups, this study tested the theory that student achievement would increase with the implementation of specific research-based intervention. This chapter describes the purpose, research design, setting and sample population, data collection, and data analysis used in the study.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the Learning-Focused Schools improvement model on student achievement as evidenced by the percentage of LFS students meeting or exceeding Annual Measurable Objectives on the Georgia State assessment (CRCT) versus students not exposed to the LFS model. Secondly, it was the intent of this study to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in achievement outcome in any of the studied subgroups.

## Research Design

De Vaus defines the ex post facto study as one that happens “after the fact” and one in which “explanations can be inductively developed after making observations” (1996, p. 302). It is a study in which the researcher examines the effect of a treatment after it has occurred. Diem concludes, “This type of study is very common and useful when using human subjects in real world situations” (1994, p. 3). The ex post facto method of research was particularly suited to this educational study as it occurred in a “real world situation” (p. 3).

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP) for its ability to effect student reading achievement, the underlying hypothesis was that there was a significant, positive relationship between LFSP and student achievement. In this study there were multiple groups that differed on one independent variable. The independent variable for this study was LFSP. The dependent variable was third grade reading achievement as a whole, and reading achievement within multiple sub-groupings, both as measured by the CRCT.

It is important to note that an ex post facto research design is flexible. “By their very nature, ex post facto experiments can provide support for any number of different, and perhaps contradictory hypotheses; they are so completely flexible that it is largely a matter of postulating hypotheses according to one’s personal preferences”(Lord, 1973, p. 10). Lord goes on to say, “The point is that the evidence simply illustrates a hypothesis” (p. 10). With an ex post facto study, the researcher attempts to discover a causal

relationship between the independent and dependant variables. There are strengths and weaknesses to this particular research design. The major strength of an ex post facto design is that its utilization becomes paramount when the control of all variables except a single independent variable is highly unlikely or unrealistic. Reflective of its greatest strength is its main weakness; the lack of control over all independent variables. This can be mitigated however, by the researcher's ability to consider all possible reasons/affects that would influence the dependent variable.

To that end, this study used archival data to analyze the results of standardized testing conducted by Valley County School System. Effectiveness of program intervention was measured by the presence or lack of change in scaled scores on third grade 2007 CRCT reading scores.

This study compared archival data from all grade three, standardized reading test administration, across two major groups of participants. One group was comprised of three LFS schools and one group was comprised of three non-LFS schools all within the Valley County School System. Data was collected for each group from school years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007. This data were further broken down to reflect any variances in sub-groups within the two major groups. Those sub-groups were:

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Multiracial

- Students with Disabilities (SWD)
- English Language Learners (ELL)

The purposes for this collection of data were to measure student performance and evaluate achievement. The quantitative design supported a large sample to test the theory and validate findings; data collection was highly controlled to maintain uniformity, and its structured content kept the study focused. The analytic design of this study was expected to identify comparable patterns or trends to student achievement.

To mitigate against the possibility of environmental impact on student learning, this study used a Likert scale survey to ascertain potential environmental variables on student outcomes. To gauge the degree to which each learning environment was similar, each administrator and teacher within each of the six study schools in the Valley County School System were surveyed. Although not validated, questions were designed to measure attributes of a school environment that typically have an effect on student learning. Copies of the surveys are included in Appendices A and B.

### The Setting and Sample/Population

For this study, the researcher controlled the situation by picking the subjects and selecting the instruments for the study. In order to test and evaluate the merits of the Learning Focused Schools approach, the research design used intact, nonrandom groupings. The target population for this study was students in grade 3, who began as

first graders in the selected school in SY 2004-2005, and remained enrolled in the same school through SY 2006-2007. The dependent variable for this study is third grade reading scores for SY 06-07. The independent variable for this study is the Learning-Focused Schools instructional delivery method.

Six schools were chosen to participate in this study; three were LFS schools, and three were not. These elementary schools were selected because

- a) all six were similar in demographics and size,
- b) each third grade within the three LFS elementary schools was fully involved with the implementation over the 3-year time period for which data was collected for this study and
- c) each third grade within the non-LFS elementary schools experienced no reform intervention during the three years included in this study.
- d) each of the three schools utilizing the LFS program was at the same level of implementation training as dictated by LFS protocol.

In order to be included in this study, the elementary students involved had to be present for each successive year in their school of origin and have taken the standardized reading CRCT subtest at the end of school year 2006-2007. Students leaving the school system and new enrollees to the schools were not included in the study since they did not meet the study criterion. All teachers within the LFS population were uniformly trained by the same trainers. Further, teacher turnover within the LFS population was limited to



three teachers across the span of the study. Their replacements were trained by the same personnel who trained the original LFS teacher population.

Chronologically, each of the three schools utilizing the LFS program had to be at the full level implementation by the time of the SY 2006-07 CRCT administration. This aspect was monitored by respective administrators in each school using the LFS implementation checklist. State education policy determined the specific design and type of criterion-referenced instruments used to measure instructional effectiveness.

#### Data Collection

Quantitative data collection methods include, but are not limited to, checklists, rating scales, rubrics, grades, surveys and standardized tests (Linn & Gronlund, as cited in Scherba de Valenzuela, 2002). These instruments have greater objectivity because the results are quantified and can be statistically analyzed.

Student participation data were collected for a 3-year period, spanning SY 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007. Student achievement data was collected for school year 2006-2007. Demographic student data across the span of the study included ethnicity per NCLB and state of Georgia sub-grouping criteria. The data were gathered from local school records, school system databases, and the Georgia Department of Education. These data included student, school, and school system performance results on the Georgia CRCT, attendance records, and student, school, and school system demographics disaggregated by NCLB sub-grouping, that is, "race/ethnicity, gender,

disability, and English proficiency, economic and migrant status as required by the A+ Plus Education Reform Act of 2000 (GA state law) and the No Child Left Behind Act (federal law)" (2003-2004 Annual Report Cards, 2004).

Likert scaled surveys were given to administrators and teachers in the study population. Each administrator and teacher who participated in the survey had to be present in the study schools for the entire span of the study; SY 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007.

Standardized procedures as outlined in the LFSP implementation protocols, specifically administrative walk-throughs along with checklists, detailed the level and type of LFS implementation in the elementary schools from 2004 through 2007. (See Learning-Focused Monitoring for Achievement: "Look For" & "Ask About" Implementation Observer Form, Appendix C). These observations were conducted by external administrators during the first, second and third years of implementation and made up the protocol for charting LFS practice, and for quantifying the level of teacher compliance with the LFSP.

The Code of Ethics for Educators developed by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission was applied to this study as were the Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board's guidelines, as well as the Valley County Board of Education policies regarding confidentiality of student records. At no time were student participants identified by anything other than student characteristics as available in school system databases (e.g., school, gender, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch).

Data were comprised of paper media and electronic media. Paper media were stored in a locked desk in the researcher's home office to which only the researcher had access. Electronic files maintained on the researcher's personal home computer were password and firewall-protected. Access to the raw data was limited to members of the dissertation committee, Valley County Schools' administrators, and statistical data analysis consultants as appropriate.

#### Data Analysis

Results for the CRCT were stated in terms of mean, proficiency, and scaled score. Student scores were evaluated against three performance levels: does not meet standards (Level 1), meets standards (Level 2), and exceeds standards (Level 3) (2004 CRCT Score Interpretation Guide, 2004).

Data analysis considered actual test scores within the NCLB student sub-groupings. Student achievement was measured by the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and included percentages of students who met or exceeded the standards in reading. Test results came from the standardized tests administered during SY 2006-2007. To determine whether LFS strategies had an effect on student achievement, standardized test results from the final year (2006-2007) of implementation of the LFSP were compared against 2006-2007 test data from the non-LFS group. Finally, test data specific to subgroups were compared against each other within the three schools employing the LFSP.

Criterion-referenced measurement was evaluated according to school system requirements, curriculum objectives (subject area), and population (age/grade). The quantitative design of the study relied on statistical information for analysis and controlled data collection to maintain uniformity. The structured content enhanced reliability and should make replication easier in order to validate findings (Gall et al., 2003).

For all statistical analyses, the level of significance was set at .05. Test scores, attendance, and demographic data were obtained for purposes of this study. Performance scores on the CRCT for reading were analyzed using the chi square statistical analysis with the dependent variable being third grade students' reading CRCT scaled scores.

The primary independent variable was the Learning-Focused Schools instructional delivery method. Data were gathered and analyzed between the group utilizing the LFS Program after the implementation (Huck, 2000) and the group using no formal educational reform program. Other variables were gender, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This study examined the relationship between instructional methodology and student achievement. Its major goal was to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the use of the Learning Focused Schools (LFS) instructional delivery method and academic achievement for a group of third grade students in the Valley County School System. To test the merits of the LFSP, reading achievement of third grade students in three schools employing its practices were compared against reading achievement of third grade students in three schools not using any whole-school reform program. Student reading achievement was reported in terms of scaled scores on the Spring 2007 CRCT, the standardized assessment given to all students in the Valley County School System. Student achievement was measured at each proficiency level; *does not meet standards, meets standards, exceeds standards*, as well as by comparison of actual scaled scores on the 2007 reading test portion of the CRCT. A total of 337 third grade students met the participation criteria for the LFS group. A total of 326 students met the participation criteria for the non-LFS group.

Proficiency in terms of students' CRCT score is defined by the state of Georgia as an 800 or above. Student score ranges on the CRCT may fall between 650 to 920. Students scoring between 650-799 on the reading subtest would fall into the "Does Not Meet Standards" category. Students scoring between 800-849 would fall

into the “Meets Standards” category. Students scoring 850 and above would fall into the “Exceeds Standards” category.

The aforementioned groups (LFS and non-LFS schools), similar in demographics and size were analyzed using a chi square statistical analysis to test for a significant statistical difference in student achievement outcomes. In addition, within each LFS and non-LFS group, subgroups were meted out and compared against each other for significant statistical differences.

The chi square statistical analysis provides a way of measuring the difference between the frequencies we observe and the frequencies we expect (Griffiths, 2009). In this study, it was used to test the independence of two variables: LFS and student achievement. The purpose of doing so was to examine if there was a significant relationship or association between the variables, or if the variables were independent of each other (Boslaugh & Watters, 2008). The formula for calculating a chi-square is:

$$(X^2) = \frac{\sum(\text{observed} - \text{expected})^2}{\text{expected}}$$

Where:

$X^2$  = Chi-square

$\Sigma$  = symbol for “summation” the differences are cumulative

observed = number of observations in a cell

expected = number of observations in a cell in the theoretical distribution (Preacher, 2001). Once the chi-square is calculated, it is compared against critical values of chi-square distribution to determine if there is significance. If the chi-square calculation exceeds the critical value found on the figure below, significance is evident and for the purpose of this study, it can be reported that the implementation of the LFSP had a significant impact on student achievement.

<i>df</i>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.025</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.001</b>
1	2.706	3.841	5.024	6.635	10.828
2	4.605	5.991	7.378	9.210	13.816
3	6.251	7.815	9.348	11.345	16.266
4	7.779	9.488	11.143	13.277	18.467
5	9.236	11.070	12.833	15.086	20.515
6	10.645	12.592	14.449	16.812	22.458
7	12.017	14.067	16.013	18.475	24.322
8	13.362	15.507	17.535	20.090	26.125
9	14.684	16.919	19.023	21.666	27.877
10	15.987	18.307	20.483	23.209	29.588

← Non Significant      Significant      →

*Figure 5.* Upper critical values of chi-square distribution with *df* degrees of freedom: Probability of exceeding the critical value. Reprinted with permission from Statsoft Electronic Statistics Textbook copyright © 2010 Statsoft Inc. <http://statsoft.com/textbook/distribution-tables/>. All rights reserved.

### All Students-Performance

The first research question addressed:

Was there a significant statistical difference on standardized third grade reading test scores (CRCT) between three treatment elementary schools utilizing the Learning-Focused Program versus three similar elementary schools not using the program?

To address this question, a chi square analysis was conducted on all third grade students in this study. The students were broken into two groups, LFS students and non-LFS students. The chi square was run comparatively in four ways with a representative table outlining each of the four analyses:

1. Third grade students failing the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those passing.
2. Third grade students failing the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those only meeting standards.
3. Third grade students failing or meeting standards on the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those exceeding standards.
4. Third grade students meeting standards on the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those exceeding standards.

The purpose of each of these analyses respectively was:

1. To ascertain if the LFS program had a statistically significant effect on the number of third grade students passing the reading portion of the CRCT. (Did the LFS program help more students pass reading?)



2. To ascertain if the LFS program had a statistically significant effect only to the limit of third grade students meeting standards on the reading portion of the CRCT. (If a difference, did the LFS program only affect those in the meeting standards range of 800-849?)
  
3. To ascertain if the LFS program had a statistically significant effect on the number of third grade students exceeding standards on the reading portion of the CRCT. (Did the LFS program allow more students to excel by scoring in the highest range of the CRCT, 850-920?)
  
4. To ascertain if the LFS program had a statistically significant effect on the number of third grade students meeting standards compared to the number of students exceeding standards? (Of all students who passed, did more pass significantly in the meets range 800-849 versus the exceeds range 850-920?)

Each table represents a comparison between the LFS students and the non-LFS students and is labeled according to the information above. Immediately below each table, the statistical calculations are represented. Following each calculation, a finding of statistical significance or non-significance is reported. Lastly, at the end of each group representation, a narrative summary is provided.

Table 3.

*Score Distribution of ALL Third Grade Students on CRCT*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	44	293	337
Non-LFS	68	258	326
Total	112	551	663

$$X^2 = 663[(44)(258) - (293)(68)]^2 / (112)(551)(326)(337) = 7.186$$

Table 3 notes that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed a statistically significant, positive impact on the overall third grade population using the LFS program. A score of 800 was the line of demarcation between fails to meet standards and meets standards.

Table 4.

*Number of Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	44	171	215
Non-LFS	68	170	238
Total	112	341	453

$$X^2 = 453[(44)(170) - (68)(171)]^2 / (112)(341)(215)(238) = 3.988$$

Table 4 indicates that within the third grade population, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 5.

*Number of Third Grade Students Not Exceeding Standards and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	215	122	337
Non-LFS	238	88	326
Total	453	210	663

$$X^2 = 661[(215)(88) - (238)(122)]^2 / (453)(210)(337)(326) = 6.492$$

Table 5 indicates that within the third grade population, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who exceeded standards compared to those who did not.

Table 6.

*Number of Third Grade Students Meeting Standards and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	171	122	293
Non-LFS	170	88	258
Total	341	210	551

$$X^2 = 551[(171)(88) - (170)(122)]^2 / (341)(210)(293)(258) = 3.298$$

Table 6 indicates that within the third grade population, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

Summary of All Third Grade Students:

The statistical analysis run on all third grade students reveals that the Learning Focused Schools Program had a statistically significant impact on passing the test. Those exposed to the program significantly fared better on the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those not exposed to the LFSP. However, when comparing the entire third grade student population meeting standards versus those exceeding standards, no statistical significance was found. According to these results, the LFSP helped students pass the CRCT, but of those who passed, more passed in the “meets standards” range than in the “exceeds standards” range.

### Subgroup-Performance

To further understand the implications of LFS as a method of improving reading performance, the sample was divided into six different subgroups within the third grade population. These were: White, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Students with Disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learner (ELL). The purpose of this was to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in the level of achievement in each subgroup of those receiving LFS compared to those who did not. The last research question to be addressed was:

Did LFS significantly affect student reading achievement in any isolated subgroup(s) in the treatment schools?

To address this question, a chi square analysis was conducted on all students within the third grade population that fell into the aforementioned subgroups. In the same format noted earlier, the students were broken into two groups, LFS students and non-LFS students. The chi square was run comparatively in four ways with a representative table outlining each of the four analyses:

1. Third grade students, subgroup specific, failing the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those passing.
2. Third grade students, subgroup specific, failing the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those only meeting standards.
3. Third grade students, subgroup specific, failing or meeting standards on the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those exceeding standards.

4. Third grade students, subgroup specific, meeting standards on the reading portion of the CRCT compared to those exceeding standards.

Each table represents a specific subgroup comparison between the LFS students and the non-LFS students and is labeled accordingly. Immediately below each table, the statistical calculations are represented. Following each calculation, a finding of statistical significance or non-significance is reported. Lastly, at the end of each subgroup representation, a narrative summary is provided.

#### White Subgroup Performance

White students constituted the biggest racial subgroup in the Valley County School System. 48% of Valley County students were in the White subgroup.

Table 7.

*Number of White Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/ Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	3	112	115
Non-LFS	12	90	102
Total	15	202	217

$$X^2 = 217[(3)(90) - (12)(112)]^2 / (15)(202)(115)(102) = 7.043$$

Table 7 indicates that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed a statistically significant, positive impact on the overall third grade White subgroup using the LFS program.



Table 8.

*Number of White Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	3	48	51
Non-LFS	12	39	51
Total	15	87	102

$$X^2 = 102[(3)(39) - (12)(48)]^2 / (15)(87)(51)(51) = 6.331$$

Table 8 indicates that within the White subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 9.

*Number of White Third Grade Students Not Exceeding  
and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	51	64	115
Non-LFS	51	51	102
Total	102	115	217

$$X^2 = 217[(51)(51) - (51)(64)]^2 / (102)(115)(115)(102) = 0.693$$

Table 9 indicates that within the White subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who exceeded standards and those who did not.

Table 10.

*Number of White Third Grade Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	48	64	112
Non-LFS	39	51	90
Total	87	115	202

$$X^2 = 202[(48)(51) - (39)(64)]^2 / (87)(115)(112)(90) = 0.005$$

Table 10 indicates that within the White subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

**Summary of White Subgroup Performance:**

According to the chi square analysis, the Learning Focused Schools program did have a statistically significant positive effect on third grade reading achievement within the White subgroup, but only to a certain degree. More White LFS students than White non-LFS students significantly scored in the passing range of 800 and above (meets and exceeds ranges) on the reading portion of the CRCT.

Breaking it down further, the next analysis showed that more White LFS students than the non-LFS White students fell significantly into the meets range. That however was the extent of statistical significance. There was no statistical significance found

between the number of White LFS and White non-LFS students who exceeded standards, nor was there statistical significance when analyzing the same groups in the meets versus exceeds categories.

What can be concluded from this is that LFS did help more White students pass the reading portion of the CRCT, but it did not help more White students exceed standards on the CRCT.

#### Black Subgroup Performance

Black students made up the second largest portion of Valley County's student population. They comprised 30% of Valley County's school population.

Table 11.

*Number of Black Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	13	106	119
Non-LFS	34	87	121
Total	47	193	240

$$X^2 = 240[(13)(87) - (34)(106)]^2 / (47)(193)(119)(121) = 11.238$$

Table 11 notes that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed a statistically significant, positive impact on the overall third grade Black subgroup using the LFS program.

Table 12.

*Number of Black Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	13	70	83
Non-LFS	34	66	100
Total	47	136	183

$$X^2 = 183[(13)(66) - (34)(70)]^2 / (47)(136)(83)(100) = 7.990$$

Table 12 indicates that within the Black subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 13.

*Number of Black Third Grade Students Not Exceeding  
and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	83	36	119
Non-LFS	100	21	121
Total	183	57	240

$$X^2 = 238[(83)(21) - (100)(36)]^2 / (183)(57)(119)(121) = 5.510$$

Table 13 indicates that within the Black subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who that exceeded standards compared to those who did not.

Table 14.

*Number of Black Third Grade Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	70	36	106
Non-LFS	66	21	87
Total	136	57	193

$$X^2 = 193[(70)(21) - (66)(36)]^2 / (136)(57)(106)(87) = 2.216$$

Table 14 indicates that within the Black subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

**Summary of Black Subgroup Performance:**

The chi square analysis run on the Black students in this study indicated that again, the LFS program did have a statistically significant effect on reading achievement. The third grade black LFS population outperformed the non-LFS population significantly in number of students passing the test, number of students meeting standards on the test, and number of students exceeding standards on the test. The LFS program did not prove to be of statistical significance however when comparing students meeting standards against those exceeding standards.



### Hispanic Subgroup Performance

From study inception to study completion, the Hispanic subgroup is one that continued to grow within the Valley County School System. They constituted 14% of the student population. Many of the Hispanic students are transient.

Table 15.

*Number of Hispanic Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	26	64	90
Non-LFS	18	59	77
Total	44	123	167

$$X^2 = 167[(26)(59) - (64)(18)]^2 / (44)(123)(77)(90) = 0.650$$

Table 15 notes that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed no statistically significant impact on the overall third grade Hispanic subgroup using the LFS program.

Table 16.

*Number of Hispanic Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	26	43	69
Non-LFS	18	48	66
Total	44	91	135

$$X^2 = 135[(26)(48) - (18)(43)]^2 / (44)(91)(69)(66) = 1.663$$

Table 16 indicates that within the Hispanic subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 17.

*Number of Hispanic Third Grade Students Not Exceeding  
and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	69	21	90
Non-LFS	66	11	77
Total	135	32	167

$$X^2 = 167[(69)(11) - (66)(21)]^2 / (135)(32)(90)(77) = 2.193$$

Table 17 indicates that within the Hispanic subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who exceeded standards and those who did not.

Table 18.

*Number of Hispanic Third Grade Students Meeting  
and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	43	21	64
Non-LFS	48	11	59
Total	91	32	123

$$X^2 = 123[(43)(11) - (48)(21)]^2 / (91)(32)(64)(59) = 3.202$$

Table 18 indicates that within the Hispanic subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

**Summary of Hispanic Subgroup Performance:**

The chi square analysis run on the Hispanic subgroup indicated that there was no statistical significance on reading achievement across any of the tested. The LFSP neither helped students pass, meet standards, or exceed standards with any significance compared to the non-LFS Hispanic students.

Multiracial Subgroup Performance

The Multiracial subgroup constituted only a small portion of the Valley County student population. Multiracial students comprised 4% of the entire student population.

Although small in percentage, there existed enough students to qualify for a subgroup, making them a critical population for AYP determinations.

Table 19.

*Number of Multiracial Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	1	12	13
Non-LFS	1	15	16
Total	2	27	29

$$X^2 = 29[(1)(15) - (12)(1)]^2 / (2)(27)(16)(13) = 0.023$$

Table 19 notes that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed no statistically significant impact on the overall third grade Multiracial subgroup using the LFS program.

Table 20.

*Number of Multiracial Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	1	8	9
Non-LFS	1	10	11
Total	2	18	20

$$X^2 = 20[(1)(10) - (1)(8)]^2 / (2)(18)(9)(11) = 0.022$$

Table 20 indicates that within the Multiracial subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.



Table 21.

*Score Distribution of Multiracial Third Grade Students Not  
Exceeding and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	9	4	13
Non-LFS	11	5	16
Total	20	9	29

$$X^2 = 29[(9)(5) - (11)(4)]^2 / (20)(9)(13)(16) = 0.001$$

Table 21 indicates that within the Multiracial subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who exceeded standards and those who did not.

Table 22.

*Number of Multiracial Third Grade Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	8	4	12
Non-LFS	10	5	15
Total	18	9	27

$$X^2 = 27[(8)(5) - (10)(4)]^2 / (18)(9)(12)(15) = 0.000$$

Table 22 indicates that within the Multiracial subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between in the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

#### Summary of Multiracial Subgroup Performance

The Multiracial subgroup was the second subgroup for which the LFSP had no statistically significant impact on reading achievement. Multiracial students exposed to the LFSP did no better on the standardized reading test than non-LFS students. Both groups of students performed almost identically with no statistical significance in passing the test, meeting standards, or exceeding standards.

### Students With Disabilities (SWD) Subgroup Performance

The SWD subgroup appeared to pose the biggest challenge to many schools within the Valley County School System. They represented 12% of the Valley County student population. According to the data from 2007 through 2010, 25 schools in Valley County did not make AYP solely because of their SWD subgroup.

Table 23.

*Number of SWD Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	9	38	47
Non-LFS	25	29	54
Total	34	67	101

$$X^2 = 101[(9)(29) - (38)(25)]^2 / (34)(67)(54)(47) = 8.293$$

Table 23 notes that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed a statistically significant, positive impact on the overall third grade SWD subgroup using the LFS program.

Table 24.

*Number of SWD Third Grade Students Not Meeting  
and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	9	27	36
Non-LFS	25	21	46
Total	34	48	82

$$X^2 = 82[(9)(21) - (25)(27)]^2 / (34)(48)(36)(46) = 7.166$$

Table 24 indicates that within the SWD subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 25.

*Number of SWD Third Grade Students Not Exceeding  
and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	36	11	47
Non-LFS	46	8	54
Total	82	19	101

$$X^2 = 101[(36)(8) - (46)(11)]^2 / (82)(19)(47)(54) = 1.214$$

Table 25 indicates that within the SWD subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who exceeded standards and those who did not.

Table 26.

*Number of SWD Third Grade Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	27	11	38
Non-LFS	21	8	29
Total	48	19	67

$$X^2 = 67[(27)(8) - (21)(11)]^2 / (48)(19)(38)(29) = 0.015$$

Table 26 indicates that within the SWD subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

Summary of SWD Subgroup Performance:

According to the chi square analysis, the Learning Focused Schools Program did have a positive statistically significant effect on third grade SWD reading achievement, but not in all the ranges analyzed. More SWD LFS students than SWD non-LFS students significantly scored in the passing range of 800 and above (meets and exceeds ranges) on the reading portion of the CRCT.

Breaking it down further, the next analysis showed that more SWD LFS students than the non-LFS SWD students fell significantly into the meets range. That however was the extent of statistical significance. There was no statistical significance found between the number of SWD LFS and SWD non-LFS students who exceeded standards,

nor was there statistical significance when analyzing the same groups in the meets versus exceeds categories.

What can be concluded from this is that LFS did help more SWD students pass the reading portion of the CRCT, but it did not help more SWD students exceed standards on the CRCT.

#### English Language Learner (ELL) Subgroup

The ELL subgroup also brought challenges to the Valley County School System. Many of these students also fell into the Hispanic subgroup, and likewise, were more transient than the other subgroups. The ELL subgroup represented 5% of Valley County's student population.



Table 27.

*Number of ELL Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting/Exceeding Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800 and Above Meets/Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	8	41	49
Non-LFS	17	41	58
Total	25	82	107

$$X^2 = 107[(8)(41) - (41)(17)]^2 / (25)(82)(58)(49) = 2.501$$

Table 27 indicates that the chi square analysis of standardized test data revealed a statistically significant, positive impact on the overall third grade ELL subgroup using the LFS program.

Table 28.

*Number of ELL Third Grade Students Not Meeting and Meeting Standards*

	Below 800 Does Not Meet Standards	800-849 Meets Standards	Total Students
LFS	8	31	39
Non-LFS	17	37	54
Total	25	68	93

$$X^2 = 93[(8)(37) - (17)(31)]^2 / (25)(68)(39)(54) = 1.386$$

Table 28 indicates that within the ELL subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who met standards compared to those who did not.

Table 29.

*Number of ELL Third Grade Students Not Exceeding  
and Exceeding Standards*

	Below 850 Does Not Exceed Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	39	10	49
Non-LFS	54	4	58
Total	93	14	107

$$X^2 = 107[(39)(4) - (54)(10)]^2 / (93)(14)(49)(58) = 4.264$$

Table 29 indicates that within the ELL subgroup, there was a positive significant statistical difference between LFS achievement and non-LFS achievement in those who exceeded standards compared to those who did not.

Table 30.

*Number of ELL Third Grade Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards*

	800-849 Meets Standards	850-920 Exceeds Standards	Total Students
LFS	31	10	41
Non-LFS	37	4	41
Total	68	14	82

$$X^2 = 82[(31)(4) - (37)(10)]^2 / (68)(14)(41)(41) = 3.101$$

Table 30 indicates that within the ELL subgroup, there was no significant statistical difference between the LFS achievement and the non-LFS achievement for those who met standards and those who exceeded standards.

Summary of ELL Subgroup Performance:

As with the Hispanic subgroup, the LFSP had no statistically significant impact on the third grade ELL population with regards to passing the CRCT or meeting standards on the CRCT. The numbers noted in the tables above show that the number of ELL students meeting or exceeding standards was identical in both the LFS and non-LFS populations. However, of those meeting or exceeding standards on the CRCT, more LFS ELL students demonstrated statistical significance in the “Exceeds Standards” range. This was the only area of statistical significance within the ELL subgroup.

**Summary of All Findings:**

Table 31 below summarizes the chi square results across all the subgroups analyzed with S representing statistical significance and N representing non-significance.

Table 31.

Score Distribution for all categories: A Summary Table of Findings

	All	WH	BL	HIS	MULT	SWD	ELL
Below 800; 800 And Above <i>(Not Passing vs. Passing)</i>	S	S	S	N	N	S	N
Below 800; 800-849 <i>(Not Passing vs. Meets Standards Range)</i>	S	S	S	N	N	S	N
Below 850; 850 And Above <i>(Not Passing and Meets vs. Exceeds Standards Range)</i>	S	N	S	N	N	N	S
800-849; 850-920 <i>(Meets vs. Exceeds Standards Range)</i>	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Table 31 shows that the LFSP had a statistically significant effect on the entire student population in terms of passing the third grade reading portion of the CRCT. Furthermore, it had a significant effect in terms of passing the CRCT on the White, Black, and SWD subgroups. The LFSP had no statistically significant impact on the Hispanic, Multiracial, or ELL subgroup in terms of passing the CRCT.

Likewise, the same results hold true in the “Meets Standards” range. It significantly impacted all students, as well as the White, Black, and SWD subgroups. The LFSP did not significantly impact the Hispanic, Multiracial, and ELL subgroups.

In terms of the LFSP's impact on exceeding standards, it proved to be of statistical significance with the entire population, the Black, and the ELL subgroups. There was no statistical significance found in exceeding standards with the White, Hispanic, Multiracial, and SWD subgroups.

Lastly, the LFSP did not prove to be of any statistical significance with any portion of the third grade population when comparing meets standards versus exceeds standards on the CRCT.

#### Likert Scaled Survey Results

The study used a five point Likert scale with one being "strongly disagree" and five being "strongly agree" to ascertain potential environmental variable impact on student outcomes. It was essential that the learning environments in all settings were equivalent or as close to equivalent as possible in order to rule out environmental variables. Administrative surveys were given to the 6 LFS administrators and to the 6 non-LFS administrators. All 12 administrators completed the survey. A total of 329 teacher surveys were handed out of which 260 were returned. Of the teacher surveys, 159 were given to non-LFS teachers of which 133 were returned. 180 teacher surveys were handed to LFS teachers of which 127 were returned.

Each table below represents a comparison between the LFS administrators/teachers and the non-LFS administrators/teachers.

Table 32.

*Administrative Survey Results*

<b>Item</b>	<b>LFS Schools Average Response</b>	<b>Non-LFS Schools Average Response</b>
There is an expectation at my school that teachers consistently use research-based, high-yield strategies in their instructional delivery.	5.0	5.0
Instructional delivery is consistently monitored at my school.	4.7	4.5
Teachers at my school can take their knowledge of strong teaching practices and transfer that into effective lessons for their students.	4.3	4.3
A plan of action for professional development is in effect at my school.	4.7	4.7
Instructional time is protected at my school.	4.5	4.7
Teachers at my school have the training and knowledge to deliver effective instruction to their students.	4.5	4.3
Standards of achievement are clearly defined.	4.5	4.7
My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.	4.5	4.3
Teachers at my school have been provided adequate training in the use of best practices to increase student achievement.	4.5	4.3
Students are motivated to learn at my school.	4.2	4.3
Collaborative planning takes place regularly at my school.	4.7	4.7



Expected standards of achievement are shared with students from the beginning of the school year.	4.5	4.5
My school uses data to drive instruction.	4.8	4.5
My school regularly assesses student progress toward mastery of the standards.	4.8	4.7
Behavior at my school does not impede student learning.	4.0	4.5
Overall	4.5	4.5

Based on the averaged results of the classroom learning environment administrator survey, the learning environments in the LFS and non-LFS schools were equivalent.

Table 33.

*Teacher Survey Results*

<b>Item</b>	<b>LFS Schools Average Response</b>	<b>Non-LFS Schools Average Response</b>
There is an expectation at my school that teachers consistently use research-based, high-yield strategies in their instructional delivery.	4.7	4.3
Instructional delivery is consistently monitored at my school.	4.3	3.9
I have been trained to teach all the subjects of which I am responsible.	4.4	4.4
A plan of action for professional development is in effect at my school.	4.6	4.3
My principal protects instructional time from interruption.	3.9	4.2
My students know how to apply what is taught to them.	3.5	3.8
Standards of achievement are clearly defined.	4.5	4.3
My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.	4.3	4.0
Teachers at my school have been provided adequate training in the use of best practices to increase student achievement.	4.1	4.2
My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging the staff.	3.4	4.4
Collaborative planning takes place regularly at my school.	4.4	4.0
Expected standards of achievement are shared with students from the beginning of the school year.	4.4	4.2

I feel knowledgeable of all the subjects I am expected to teach.	4.6	4.3
I know how to interpret the results of the assessments given in my school.	4.5	4.4
My school uses data to drive instruction.	4.7	4.4
My school regularly assesses student progress toward mastery of the standards.	4.6	4.3
I currently have or have access to all the necessary resources to provide adequate instruction for my students.	4.2	3.9
Behavior at my school does not impede student learning.	3.1	3.5
Overall	4.2	4.2

Based on the averaged results of the classroom learning environment teacher survey, the learning environment in the LFS and non-LFS schools were also equivalent.

Given that the learning environments in both the LFS and non-LFS groups did not vary, based on the limited results of these surveys, any variation in student achievement can be attributed to the implementation of the LFS Program.

In summary, with the learning environments being equal, the statistical analysis of student scores shows that the Learning Focused Schools Program had a varied effect on third grade reading achievement within the Valley County School System. The entire third grade population exposed to the Learning Focused Schools program outperformed those who were not exposed to the program. The effect on each subgroup however, was not as prominent as on the entire population. Only certain subgroups seemed to respond

to the program and only to the point of passing and meeting standards. Chapter five addresses some of the possible questions that were derived from these findings. It also discusses the conclusions and implications that can be considered from this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Learning Focused Schools Program (LFSP) in a suburban school system for its ability to effect student reading achievement in response to recent government mandates under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110). This act calls for a measurable, incremental increase in student achievement from year to year such that by 2014, all students will be academically proficient. The act does not fund the efforts required to demonstrate said measurable gains. Thus, each school system, as it addresses the demands of NCLB, needs to be attentive to well researched methods of improvement; clearly defined end results; and the cost to achieve those results in dollars, manpower, system and structure. Failure to consider any one of these features has a very high price to the student, the system, and the budget.

There were several notable findings in this study of the Learning Focused School Program (LFSP). For all the students who participated in the LFSP continuously for a period of 3 years, more children met or exceeded standards than those not exposed to LFS. The ramifications of this are noteworthy for school systems that need to get more students to pass the reading portion of the CRCT.

The results were different when the total population was broken into subgroups. The student subgroups included: White, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.

Hispanic students and Multiracial students did not show any statistically significant improvement in any assessed category using the LFSP. The implication for this finding suggests that school systems should look to other whole-school reform programs if they have specific achievement concerns with these subgroups.

English Language Learners showed statistically significant improvement in only one assessed category. More ELL students in the LFS treatment group exceeded standards than their ELL peers who were not exposed to LFS. ELL students showed no statistically significant improvement in any other category.

White students and Students with Disabilities did show statistically significant improvement resulting from the LFSP environment. More students in these subgroups met standards than those not in the LFS group. There was however, no statistically significant effect on students exceeding standards. Based on these results, it would be beneficial for school systems needing to demonstrate reading improvement with their White and SWD subgroups to consider the LFSP.

Black students fared best overall when exposed to the LFS Program and mirrored the results of the “ALL Students” subgroup. More students in the Black subgroup significantly met or exceeded standards than non-LFS Black students. Equally important, this subgroup also showed statistically that LFS moved them from merely meeting

standards to exceeding standards, which is an added benefit for closing the achievement gap for this subgroup. With this in mind, school systems with a significant Black population should consider the LFSP as a potent whole school reform model.

In summary, LFS helped most categories of students meet reading standards. Furthermore, it can be concluded that LFS worked better for some populations than it did for others. In this exceedingly diverse Valley County School System, the Learning Focused School Program yielded measurable improvements for major parts of its population.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

LFS is one solution to improving student reading achievement, but given the number of intervening variables that impact the public education system, it would be difficult to say that it will deliver similar end results for all other subject matter.

In the year 2010, the United States of America has curricula that are less robust than they once were; ancillary, but well recognized programs of art, music and physical education have often disappeared from the horizon in favor of math, science and reading at the great expense of the developing the whole child (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008; Ravitch, 2009; Stetcher, Vernez, & Steinberg, 2010). No Child Left Behind did improve math scores but did not improve reading scores (Dee & Jacob, 2010). As in decades past, the politician still has his/her “child-centered” effort d’ jour and school systems are a combination of politics, opinions and pressure (Ravitch, 2010; McNeil,

2010). Educators are caught between their knowledge of what is right and good (Ravitch, 2010) while the union is in the business of staying in business by sustaining mediocrity (Hoxby, 1996; Legere, 2010). The teacher on the front lines is often the last to be asked what is best for the children (Ravitch, 2010) and all of this complexity falls under the umbrella of No Child Left Behind.

This complex reality suggests that there will always be a need for educational reform. It is evident from this study that under similar conditions, LFS can address some of the literacy deficits that our country is facing. Also, as a result of this study, more topics arose that invite further investigation.

This study of the Learning Focused School Program did not measure achievements in math, science or any other element of the school curriculum. The question of whether LFSP would improve achievement results in those subject areas and, if so, to what degree, merits exploration.

Furthermore, this study did not include an examination of the impact of LFS on the economically disadvantaged; a subgroup that exists in nearly all school systems. This could be valuable for schools system pressured to increase academic achievement under the current rubrics of NCLB.

Noted in the assumptions, there exists within each school setting a specific school culture and learning environment. Although Likert-scaled data showed comparable learning environments, care should be taken to establish survey validity for future studies using the survey questions included in this study. Researchers from the Colorado State



University suggest that terms of a dichotomous nature should be minimally utilized as they lend themselves to artificiality in approximating peoples' true feelings or opinions (Colorado State University, 2011).

The study was not a vertical study so the degree to which students experienced improvement from year to year, cannot be derived. Implied in the consequences of NCLB is a strong argument for verticality. AYP needs to be made each year, and each year the standard is raised. For each year that AYP is not achieved, sanctions become more punitive. Verticality allows one to measure growth from year to year. School systems needing to realize immediate results may have difficulty relying on a reform program such as LFS that requires three years for full implementation, while the measure used to evaluate its' success does not measure verticality. Therefore a study using a measure that evaluates year to year improvement could be informative.

Neither did the study delve into the notion that perhaps only specific elements of LFS produced the improvements realized. Is the LFSP reliant on one or two key elements or do they function more as a system, where, in the absence of one, the whole fails? Exploration of this idea necessitates a value-added research project.

LFS does not change the presumption that No Child Left Behind encourages teachers to teach to the test. The price to the school system is quite high when test scores reflecting low student achievement prohibit a school system from making AYP, so much so that teachers have been known to change test scores in order to reach successful outcomes (Ravitch, 2010). Furthermore, the merit of standardized test scores reflecting

students' actual mastery of state performance standards has been a topic of debate. Do substantive test scores really express mastery of educational standards? This is a subject for further research. What this study shows is that LFS has the capacity to improve the reading scores of certain categories of third grade children who are tested on skills that parallel the elements of the CRCT.

Then again, can we say that higher test scores result in students being set up for success in their post educative lives given that much of today's educational reform is aimed at maintaining global competitiveness? Do higher test scores sacrifice the rigor and relevance of a solid curriculum? Do higher test outcomes also result in the ability to innovate, problem solve, draw conclusions, or discern good from bad, long-term from temporary?

Neither can the question of cost effectiveness be cast aside given the magnitude of the educational dilemma. It, most assuredly, should be addressed when considering reform efforts. At what point is the overall cost of implementing a successful whole-school reform model overshadowed by the actual cost of making such sweeping change? Therein lays the importance of in-depth value-added analysis of various reform models.

Not examined by this LFS study is the role of the parent and the community in educational success. Much research points to an overwhelmingly positive effect that parents can have in the success of their children's education (Constantino, 2003; De Carvalho, 2001). Can this be ignored in a whole-school reform model or does it explicitly need to be investigated? Given that parents are an integral part of all support

systems involved with learning, it is entirely possible that the non-improved subgroups (Hispanic, Multiracial, English Language Learners) contain many non-English speaking parents who are not able to provide the level of support required by LFS regardless of their desire to do so. Possibilities for further research exist in this area. A related topic that invites additional research is that of parental support capability in addition to the implementation of LFSP. Essentially, are parents in the unaffected subgroups (Hispanic, Multiracial, ELL) capable and willing to support the role that LFS requires of parents?

The Valley County LFS study was comprised of a high level of transient and first generation Hispanics, ELL's and Multiracial students. An area of query in this domain should include the investigation of school systems with well-established populations of Hispanics, ELL's and Multiracial students to ascertain if statistically significant reading improvements using LFS can be realized.

Implementing the Learning Focused School Program (LFSP) is no small task and not an inconsiderable cost. The program calls for system-wide commitment from the school board to the parent, and includes the input of staff, teachers, administrators and students. The initial cost from the program vendor is negligible in comparison to the cost of time, training, tracking, intense communication requirements, and systems changes essential to make LFS work as a self-sustaining system that delivers an increase in the overall scores of students. As such, a value-added study would benefit the educational research arena to determine if it is the whole-school reform package that

raises the reading score or if it is a subset of the reform package that is most likely to create the desired improvements.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### Teacher Survey on School Environment

# \_\_\_\_\_

Please take a moment to anonymously answer the following 17 questions related to school environment. Please rate your answers on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated.

1. There is an expectation at my school that teachers consistently use research-based, high-yield strategies in their instructional delivery.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

2. Instructional delivery is consistently monitored at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

3. I have been trained to teach all the subjects of which I am responsible.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

4. A plan of action for professional development is in effect at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

5. My principal protects instructional time from interruption.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

6. My students know how to apply what is taught to them.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

7. Standards of achievement are clearly defined.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

8. My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

9. Teachers at my school have been provided adequate training in the use of best practices to increase student achievement.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

10. My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging the staff.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

11. Collaborative planning takes place regularly at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

12. Expected standards of achievement are shared with students from the beginning of the school year.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

13. I feel knowledgeable of all the subjects I am expected to teach.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

14. I know how to interpret the results of the assessments given in my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

15. My school uses data to drive instruction.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

16. My school regularly assesses student progress toward mastery of the standards.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

17. I currently have or have access to all the necessary resources to provide adequate instruction for my students.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

18. Behavior at my school does not impede student learning.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

## APPENDIX B

### Administrator Survey

#\_\_\_\_\_

Please take a moment to anonymously answer the following 15 questions related to school environment. Please rate your answers on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated.

1. There is an expectation at my school that teachers consistently use research-based, high-yield strategies in their instructional delivery.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

2. Instructional delivery is consistently monitored at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

3. Teachers at my school can take their knowledge of strong teaching practices and transfer that into effective lessons for their students.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**



4. A plan of action for professional development is in effect at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

5. Instructional time is protected at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

6. Teachers at my school have the training and knowledge to deliver effective instruction to their students.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

7. Standards of achievement are clearly defined.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

8. My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

9. Teachers at my school have been provided adequate training in the use of best practices to increase student achievement.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

10. Students are motivated to learn at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

11. Collaborative planning takes place regularly at my school.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

12. Expected standards of achievement are shared with students from the beginning of the school year.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

13. My school uses data to drive instruction.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

14. My school regularly assesses student progress toward mastery of the standards.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

15. Behavior at my school does not impede student learning.

**1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree   3 Somewhat Agree   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree**

## APPENDIX C

### LEARNING-FOCUSED MONITORING FOR ACHIEVEMENT: “LOOK FOR” & “ASK ABOUT”

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Look For...	Ask About...
<p><b>Essential Questions:</b>            _Posted            _Guides Instruction            _Used at end of lesson to assist summarizing and gather evidence of learning</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you use the essential question in a lesson?</li> <li>How did you have students answer the essential in your most recent lesson?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Activating Strategy:</b>            _Activating strategy to start student thinking            _Previews/teaches vocabulary</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What activating strategy did you use in your current lesson?</li> <li>What researched-based strategy did you use to preview key vocabulary?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Lesson:</b>            _In large group lesson, uses numbered heads in pairs to distribute summarizing/practice            _Energetic pacing of lesson            _Students actively engaged/thinking</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you use collaborative pairs or numbered heads in your large group lessons?</li> <li>How do you know when the lesson is moving too slow or too fast?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Graphic Organizers:</b>            _Guides instruction and student thinking            _Guides writing extensions            _Guides reading assignments and questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do students use a graphic organizer in today's lesson?</li> <li>Why did you choose that graphic organizer?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Summarizing:</b>            _Reflects evidence of student learning            _All students participating            _Guided by essential question</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What summarizing strategy did you use in your last lesson?</li> <li>How do you make sure that all the students summarize?</li> <li>What evidence do you have of students' learning?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Extend/Refine:</b>            _Consistently uses for important content            _Higher level thinking activities            _Direct instruction to understand skill            _Indirect instruction: writing/instruction</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How often do you have an extending thinking activity or lesson?</li> <li>What are some ways you cause students to have to extend information?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Vocabulary:</b>            _Content driven            _Visual representation well organized, easy to use, graphic            _Uses researched-based strategies and direct instruction to preview vocabulary at beginning of lessons and units            _Indirect instruction to build vocabulary through writing, reading, discussion, etc.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are students aware of current vocabulary?</li> <li>What vocabulary strategies do you usually use?</li> <li>How is your current vocabulary organized for learning?</li> <li>How do students use vocabulary for reading or writing?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Writing:</b>            _Writing process posted and used by students            _Uses graphic organizers in pre-writing            _Evidence of using current vocabulary            _Consistent use of rubric(s)            _Student writing samples</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you know that students use a systematic process for writing?</li> <li>How do you set up the pre-writing and vocabulary for the writing assignment?</li> <li>Do you use a consistent rubric?</li> <li>How often do students grade their own writing?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Reading Comprehension:</b>            _Reading comprehension strategies guide reading assignments and comprehension questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What reading comprehension strategy did you use in your most reading assignment?</li> </ol>

Comments/Examples/Answers:

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