AN EVALUATION OF A STRATEGIC STAFFING INITIATIVE IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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ABSTRACT

LAURA JULIA ROSENBACH. An evaluation of a Strategic Staffing Initiative in a large urban school district. (Under the direction of DR. CLAUDIA FLOWERS)

This mixed method study examined the impact of a district-wide Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) that paid school personnel to transfer to low-performing schools. Surveys were administered to three different stakeholder groups including principals (N=9), staff who received bonuses for working in the schools (N=32), and other staff members in the school (N=91). In addition, school effectiveness scores were examined to determine changes in school effectiveness before and after implementation of the initiative. The findings suggest that the SSI had mixed impact on the schools. Survey results indicated that respondents believed that the initiative had a positive impact on student achievement and increased the number of effective teachers in the schools, but principals reported that more staff was needed to make a long-term impact. Principals indicated the benefits of the initiative were (a) the focus on the school's vision and goals, and (b) the authority to remove weak teachers. All stakeholder groups reported that low-performing schools continue to struggle to recruit and retain effective teachers and that more incentives may be needed to keep teachers to create a stabilize staff. While school effectiveness scores increased after the SSI, the changes were small and not statistically significant. The study is important for educational leaders and reformers because it examines one large school districts approach to solving the challenges urban schools face in trying to hire and retain highly effective teachers in its lowest performing schools and to implement reform policies that are sustainable and result in substantial gains in student achievement levels.

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) – An individual state, school district or school's measure of yearly progress towards meeting established state standards for each subgroup of students. AYP measures the minimum level of improvement that must be made each year ("Glossary of Terms," n.d.).

ABC Schools (ABC) –Located in Southeastern United States the school district serves over 135,000 students in 178 schools ("CMS About Us," n.d.).

Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) – refers to the use of school reform models or designs that offer an approach for changing the curriculum and the structure of a school, a singular instructional or pedagogical strategy, or the school culture (Lezotte, 2009).

Days of Instruction (Days) - is the way ABC district displays value-added estimates to compare teacher effectiveness scores across years, subjects, teachers, and other variables. The scores do not represent actual days of instruction, but provide the district with a way to display and compare scores in terms of relative distance above or below the average ("Talent and Teacher Effectiveness,"2011).

Effective School Movement (ESM) – The ESM started after the release of the Coleman Report in 1966 and is led by researchers Ron Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, and Lawrence Lezotte. ESM researchers seek to find characteristics in high poverty schools that are showing high success rates in student achievement to determine if the models can be replicated in other schools (Lezotte, 2009).

End of Grade (EOG) – Comprehensive tests given by the North Carolina Department of Public Education given at the end of each school year in areas of Math, Reading and Science. Students in grades 3-8 are tested each year (Science only grades 5 and 8) ("Glossary of Terms" n.d.).

High Poverty Schools – defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as public schools where more than 75 percent of the students are eligible for federal government's free or reduced lunch program (Aud et al., 2011).

Highly Qualified Teacher–A mandate from the 2002 No Child Left Behind Legislation that mandates all teachers in public schools must meet certain qualifications. To meet the requirements, teachers must have a bachelor's degree, be full state licensure or certified, and prove they know the content they teach (No Child Left Behind Legislation, 2001).

No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB) – Federal legislation passed in 2002 that increased accountability standards in order for all states to receive federal funding. The mandates included; higher teacher qualification standards, improving accountability measures, and focusing on subgroups of students in schools (No Child Left Behind Legislation, 2011).

Race to the Top (RTT) – Federal funding passed in 2009 that encourages states and local school districts to take an even more aggressive approach to improve public schools. States and school districts have the choice to apply for the funding and do not have to follow the requirements unless they receive funding. RTT was passed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that was designed to stimulate the economy and invest in critical public sectors such as education ("RTT executive summary," 2009).

Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) – An initiative that began in 2007 in ABC School district to provide comprehensive support and funding the districts lowest performing schools ("CMS About Us," n.d.)

Strategically Staffed (SS) – Principals, teachers, and other support staff members who were chosen by district leaders and principals to work in a low performing school as part of the ABC School district's Strategic Staffing Initiative. Each individual received a monetary bonus in exchange for committing to working at the school for three years. ("CMS About Us," n.d.).

Teacher Effectiveness – Measuring a teacher's impact on student learning on focusing on student's growth from year to year (Weisberg, Sexton, Mullhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Value Added – A collection of complex statistical techniques that uses multiple years of data to measures the effect an individual teacher or school (Sanders, 2000).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of education as the means to improving future occupational opportunities is becoming more evident everyday as the difference in earnings for individuals without a high school diploma and with one continues to increase. According to 2010 national statistics, the average income for a student without a high school diploma or its equivalent is $21,000 compared to$36,000 for those with a high school diploma and $45,000 for those with a bachelor's degree (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). States and schools are under increasing pressure from Federal legislation like No Child Left Behind that holds American public schools more accountable for providing each student an equitable and quality education (No Child Left Behind Legislation, 2001). The debate on how to best educate all students is not an easy one to agree on and continues to be the source of many reforms and curricular decisions. Around the nation, urban schools are struggling to ensure that every student has an effective teacher. This is a particular challenge at high poverty schools where there is often a disproportionate number of inexperienced or unqualified teachers (Aud et al., 2011).

The impact that an "effective teacher" can have on the achievement levels of students was first presented in the Coleman Report in 1966, which concluded that teacher characteristics tended to have more influence on student achievement than any other factor (Coleman, J., Campbell, S., Hobson, D., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfield, F.

& York, L 1966). Current research (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Marzano, 2007) confirms the importance of having effective teachers in every classroom. Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that after two years, the performance of fifth graders was still affected by the quality of their third grade teacher. Unfortunately, high poverty, high minority schools are far less likely to have qualified and effective teachers (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Kain & Singleton, 1996).

The attempt to implement comprehensive school reforms and increase the effectiveness of teachers is even more challenging as the nation's schools face more challenges. Data in the annual "Conditions of our Schools Report," created by the National Center for Education Statistics, indicates that in 2011 one in six students attend a high poverty school (Aud et al., 2011). A high poverty school is defined as a school that has at least 75% of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch (Aud et al., 2011). The report also found that students who attend high poverty schools perform consistently lower in math and reading achievement and are less likely to attend four-year colleges when compared to their peers in low poverty schools (Aud et al., 2011). Unfortunately, despite the growing attention and funding for public schools by the national government, the achievement rates for urban schools have not improved at the rate that is needed to ensure all students are receiving a quality education that will prepare them for the workforce or higher education.

Federal and state legislatures have made attempts to raise the standards for teachers by passing mandates that require teachers to pass certification tests and have coursework in the subject areas that they teach. The No Child Left Behind legislation passed in 2001 requires states to adopt minimum teaching standards for teachers to be

considered "highly qualified" (No Child Left Behind Legislation, 2001). Despite the mandates, research (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002) indicates that there is little evidence that there is any correlation between teachers labeled "highly qualified" and increases in student achievement.

Realizing that simply labeling a teacher as highly qualified does not guarantee that a teacher is effective, researchers and educators have continued to seek other measures to evaluate the impact of teachers. Widely known as "teacher effectiveness," research (Goet, Bell, & Little, 2008) is being conducted and debated to see if there are characteristics or measures that can predict the impact that teachers can have on student achievement levels. The most widely known model to measure the impact of a teacher is most often referred to as "value added," and attempts to measure a teacher's impact on student achievement using a variety of factors. The value added model is growing in popularity because it holds teachers accountable for things that they have control over rather than things they do not. For example, previous achievement levels and exceptional student status are beyond a teacher's control, but the teacher is responsible for the growth of the student from the beginning of the year to the end (Sanders, 2000).

President Obama's Race to the Top (RTT) initiative that was passed in February 2009 has motivated states and local school districts to take an even more aggressive approach to improving public schools. RTT was passed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 that was designed to stimulate the economy and invest in critical public sectors such as education. Over four billion dollars is available through RTT as a grant program that is designed to provide schools with the resources they need to implement educational reforms in four areas that include (a) adopting

standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; (b) building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; (c) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and (d) turning around our lowest-achieving schools ("RTT executive summary," 2009). The guidelines for the RTT grants list comprehensive school reform efforts as a number one priority for all applicants.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The school district that is the focus of this research study will be identified as the ABC School District. The ABC School (ABC) district is located in the Southeastern region of the United States and is one of the nation's 25 largest school districts and serves nearly 135,000 students with 178 schools ("CMS About Us,"n.d.). Similar to other urban school districts around the country, ABC has struggled to meet the needs of all students, especially minority and impoverished students. ABC has a unique history in the approach they have taken in regards to student assignments dating back to the 1971 Supreme Court Case *Swann v Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools* (1971). As a result of this case, school officials were mandated to use busing to help integrate the schools to ensure a quality education for all students. Since then, ABC has continued to face many of the same challenges of other urban schools, with the city growing into a major city, and the expectations for the public schools increasing by both the business and private communities.

Over the last 40 years, ABC has undergone many changes and reforms in attempts to continue to meet the needs of all students. In 2007-2008, ABC introduced a new

reform model known as the "Strategic Staffing Initiative" (SSI) to specifically address the needs at its lowest performing schools. By 2011, 26 schools were involved in the comprehensive reform model. ABC's approach of strategic staffing to improve low performing schools is relatively new to educational reform. Believing that effective principals and teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement, district leaders have implemented a model that recruits educators with financial rewards. Instead of using money to implement new programs and policies, ABC has decided to invest its money in human capital. The SSI was developed by ABC leaders and has many of the characteristics that previous research and new RTT legislation stress are important to sustaining systemic reform. The model has shown some success in improving student achievement and improving the overall culture of the schools. For example, data from the first cohort of seven schools, who finished their third year under the initiative in June 2011, showed gains in Math, Reading, and Science ranging from 14% to over 42% ("NC Report Card," n.d.). ABC leaders have indicated that they are committed to the Strategic Staffing Initiative and include it as part of the district's "Strategic Plan 2014" that outlines the goals and steps for the district for the next two years ("Strategic Plan 2014" n.d.). The reform model has also gained the attention of educational leaders across the country. In October 2010, The New York Times highlighted the SSI and said that "local administrators — and the Department of Education in Washington should be paying close attention to what is happening in [ABC district]" ("When the System Works", 2010).

In addition to implementing reforms to address the needs of the lowest performing schools, ABC is beginning to address the current research discussed earlier on how to accurately evaluate the effect of a teacher. ABC has begun to analyze teachers

using a value added approach. As discussed earlier, the value added model is used to evaluate the impact of teachers on individual students. It focuses on the growth of each student each year. The ratings compare teachers to other teachers teaching the same subject throughout the district and takes into account over 30 variables. ABC's attempt to place a value on teachers is also aligned with the goals in RTT, and is being tried in other urban districts across the nation as research continues to suggest that measuring the effectiveness of a teacher cannot be done simply on experience or credentials, and that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other school variable (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Marzano, 2007; Jacob 2007). A detailed discussion of the value added model is provided in Chapter Two.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed method study is to describe the impact that the ABC district's Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) has had on improving student achievement as perceived by different stakeholders, and to compare the findings with the district-created value added data. The study will use a mixed methodology approach combining survey data and district-created school effectiveness data. Specifically, the study will focus on the perceived impact that the strategically staffed (SS) staffs have had on the student achievement levels in their schools. Three groups of stakeholders from SS schools will be included in the study: principals, SS staff, and staff (non-SS) who have been at the school throughout the SS, but did not receive the SS bonus. Members of each group will be given a survey that will ask them to evaluate the impact the SSI has had on improving student achievement with their students and the school as a whole. The survey also asks each group to evaluate what they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of the SSI.

The study is important to assess the extent to which those directly involved with the SSI at each school attribute academic gains to the hiring of SS staff. The school effectiveness element to the study will provide additional information in regards to the school's value added rating in math and reading over time and in comparison to other ABC schools. The ABC value added model provides a different data source than the state released proficiency and growth scores because it takes into account over 30 factors that may affect student achievement on the school, team, and teacher level, and may be a more appropriate comparison of how well the SS schools are doing in regards to improving student achievement as measured by teacher effectiveness ratings. The mixed method approach of this study provides a comprehensive picture with specific feedback from different stakeholders about the SSI, and compares the school effectiveness data to look for trends and patterns among the different schools and different stages of the implementation of the SSI.

1.3 Research Questions

The specific research questions are organized by the survey and school effectiveness data methods used in this study. These questions provide multiple stakeholders perceived impact of SSI, and school effectiveness measures before and after SSI implementation.

1.3.1 Survey Questions

The following research questions were examined using survey research method. Principals, SS staff, and non-SS staff were surveyed about their perceived impact of the SSI. The questions are:

School Effectiveness Questions

1. What perceived impact did the SS and entire staff have on increasing student achievement?

2. What role do teachers have in school wide decision making processes in regards to student achievement?

3. What does each group perceive as the benefits of SSI?

4. What does each group perceive as weaknesses of SSI?

5. What does each group perceive as barriers to making greater gains in student achievement? (internal and external)

6. What changes would each group make to improve the SSI?

7. If given the opportunity, would teachers and principals make the same decisions about working in an SS school?

8. What factors/ characteristics did principals use to select SS staff and teachers use to decide to accept a SS position?

9. How effective are the Professional Learning Communities (PLC)'s in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?

10. What level of flexibility do teachers have in designing lessons?

11. What instructional decisions have had the biggest impact on student achievement?

The following questions used school-based measures of effectiveness to describe changes before and after SSI implementation. The following questions were examined:

1. How has the school's value added scores in math and reading changed from before to after SSI?

2. How has the Days of Instruction measure in math and reading changed from before to after SSI?

1.4 Significance of Study

To date, there has been limited research that focuses specifically on the Strategically Staffed Initiative and all that has been done was in cooperation with the

district's research and evaluation department. No published research has been released since June 2011, when the first cohort of SS schools completed the three-year cycle that provides funding for the initiative. The results of this study will provide additional information about the effectiveness of the Strategic Staffing Initiative as it relates to improving student achievement. The findings are important for ABC leaders and other reformers across the nation, who are interested in this or a similar model on whether the money invested in this aspect of the SSI is worth the financial costs. School leaders across the nation may benefit from the results of this study as they seek policies that align with the federally funded Race to the Top initiative, which supports comprehensive school reform models like the SSI.

1.5 Summary

Urban school districts similar to ABC face continuous challenges while trying to provide each student with a quality education. According to research (Borman & Kimball; 2005, Marzano, 2007; and Sanders & Rivers, 1996), teachers are the most important factor in improving student achievement. Like many other urban school districts, ABC has struggled to recruit and maintain top teachers in the lowest performing schools. In an effort to implement comprehensive reforms at its lowest performing schools, ABC has developed and committed resources to its SSI. The first cohort of SSI schools completed its three-year cycle in June 2011, which makes this study timely to explore the impact that the SS staff had on improving the achievement levels in math and reading in the SS schools.

Chapter Two will examine school reform at the macro and micro levels. The chapter begins with a review of philosophical roots on education as a resource and the

Federal government's role in proving funding as an equalizer to high poverty schools who face additional challenges. The chapter continues with a macro level review of research on effective schools and teachers, and an explanation of emerging value added models. Lastly, a micro level view of the challenges urban schools face is presented through a close examination of the ABC School System's attempt at comprehensive reforms through the SSI.

Chapter Three provides the reader with a detailed description on the methodology for the study. The chapter includes the procedures for selecting participants, the survey questions for each group, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the study. An explanation of the methods for collecting and analyzing the surveys, and value added data are also included.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the surveys. The results of the survey data are presented first by looking at each group separately and then together to look for common themes and patterns. The school effectiveness data is analyzed by each cohort to look for statistical significance in the value added data for the duration of the SSI. Chapter Five provides an explanation for the results of this study and compares it to previous findings. Strengths and limitations of this study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous literature regarding school reform in America's public schools over the last fifty years is summarized in this chapter. First, the important role that education plays on an individual's future attainment and social mobility is addressed. Next, a review of the Federal Government's role in supporting the vision to ensure all Americans receive a quality education is examined beginning with the Coleman Report. Americans reacted both positively and negatively to the Coleman report in 1966 which suggested that it is nearly impossible for all students to receive an equal education due to social and economic factors. Since then, the Federal Government has invested heavily in programs and passed legislation that attempt to equalize the quality of education that students receive. Three of the most recent trends in school reform are the implementation of Comprehensive School Reforms (CSR), Turnaround reforms, and using data to identify effective teachers. The findings of current research on these reforms are reviewed with a specific focus on the challenges that urban schools face. The chapter concludes with a closer look at one school district, ABC, and their attempt to implement a comprehensive school reform known as the Strategic Staffing Initiative.

2.1 Education and Society

A study by H. Johnson (2008) interviewed 260 parents and not one of them claimed that schools in America were actually equal. When asked what factors determined whether a school was good or not the parents overwhelmingly responded that

the most important factor was the demographics of the neighborhood where the school was located. One parent explained his response by stating "the more money you have, the better the neighborhood you live in. The better the neighborhood, the more taxes, the better the school. Your kid goes where you live" (p. 277). According to H. Johnson, the importance of where an individual lives (geographically) has become more important in the last fifteen years with the removal or easing of many court ordered desegregation plans that were enacted in the seventies as a result of the *Brown* decision. In the mid-1990's, many courts began to lift the mandatory desegregation student assignment plans that required schools to be racially balanced by declaring districts "unitary." School districts that met "unitary status" no longer were required to consider race when creating student assignment plans. Since then, the Supreme Court (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, 2007) has gone even further to forbid schools to consider the race of individual students when creating student assignment plans (Walsh, 2007).

O. Johnson (2008) argues that the parents' responses on the importance of having a school in a "good neighborhood" are aligned with research that focuses on the varying achievement levels in education. He argues that where one lives is more important than race or socioeconomic class. He points to research by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that indicates that the largest achievement gap is not according to race, or family socioeconomic status, but along the dimension of place.

Ashton and Green (1996) believe that the inability of social classes to improve their conditions will have an effect on the United States position in the world and is a result of the inequalities in schools. Lewis (2007) agrees, and argues that "the extreme

polarization of the labour force is mirrored by considerable inequities in the quality of school provision, and relatively severe educational problems among its young college dropouts" (p.332). A similar conclusion was reached by the US Commission on Civil Rights ("Economic Stagnation," 2005) who examined why the number of black middle class families has not increased. They concluded that the primary problem was rooted in the structure and student assignment plans of schools.

As a result, many school districts like ABC have become increasingly re-segregated and achievement gaps among schools have widened. Research has also indicated that higher income groups are much more likely than lower income and minority groups to take advantage of school choice options that may give them an opportunity to attend a better school (Johnson O., 2008). Nationally, the differences between low poverty suburban schools and high poverty urban schools are becoming more apparent. As discussed earlier, students who attend high poverty schools are much less likely to perform on grade level, graduate from high school, or attend a four year college (Digest of Education Statistics, 2010).

2.2 Philosophical Roots

The connection between education and future occupational attainment is not new and can be traced to the views of conflict theorists, particularly Max Weber. Weber believed that conflicts in society exist due to the scarcity of resources and the inequalities between social classes that result from scarcity. Weber divided his beliefs on social class into three unique groups: class, status, and party. Class can be defined as "a group having the same 'causal component of life chances'" (Weber in Lemert, 2004, p.116). Class situation is determined "by the life chances that a class has when an individual sell

their skills and abilities on the market in change for salaries and incomes with which they obtain goods and services" (Weber in Lemert, 2004, p.116). Weber described two types of class situations: one was determined by property ownership, and the other was based on educational credentials. Weber argued that an individual's ability to improve his life economically was dependent on the ownership of property and the skills he possesses. Weber's definition of resources goes beyond physical resources such as money and property and includes status and educational credentials. According to Weber, the power to change an individual's class situation through education caused a shift in the power that wealth played in individuals, and societies. Education is a skill that Weber believed could lead to a bettered life because the more educated an individual is the more likely they are to obtain a job that can improve their income (Weber in Lemert, 2004).

As with any valuable resource, those individuals who have the power try to limit the access to education in an attempt to keep its value. In the United States, individuals cannot limit access to education since it is a public government function, so instead they focus on ways to give their children a competitive edge in the educational credentials market. The pressure to increase the educational credentials of individuals has affected the structure of schools, curricula decisions and individual students, and has created a unique situation of conflicting views on social mobility. According to Hogan (1996)

> At one level, Americans embrace education because social mobility and the meritocratic project remain at the heart of the American dream of 'bettering our condition' and social approbation. Yet, at another level, they are compelled to embrace education because of the opportunity for social mobility and status for most Americans is heavily dependent on the market value or comparative advantage of their educational credentials (p. 252).

Hogan describes the feelings of Americans who believe that public education is important for all of society to improve, but also realizes on an individual level that in

order to be competitive in the future they must receive a better education than everyone else. H. Johnston (2008) argues that historically, education in America has been viewed as the "great equalizer" and that "if you work hard enough in school, then you can be anything, do anything, rise up to any level of you choose" (p. 274). Unfortunately, today there are vast differences in the quality of schools that make it difficult to ensure that every student receives the same educational opportunities.

Weber also believed that status groups play a role in educational outcomes. Weber defines status groups as social groups that are not influenced by the market and are mostly based on the pursuit of specific life styles and the habits of taste that qualify members of a group for distinction based on their standing or status (Weber in Lemert, 2004). Status groups for some communities may be stratified based on educational qualifications. Reformers today cite Weber's theories on status to support their views on the need to make comprehensive school reforms and point to the vast inequalities among "high" status schools and "lower" status schools. Collins (2000) presents a similar argument and believes that the US has created a "contest mobility" school system where the status value of American education has become diluted. Collins argues that as more people achieve higher levels of education, the bar is raised as to what is considered an appropriate level of education for each status level. Thus the need for "lower" status students to have access to "elite" schools is growing increasingly important.

2.3 Challenges of High Poverty Schools

High poverty schools face even more daunting challenges than other schools as they attempt to meet Federal, state, and local requirements with students who are often several grades levels behind their peers academically. The National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES) differentiates low and high poverty schools by the number of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) program. High poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75 % of the students are eligible. According to NCES, in 2008-2009 approximately 22% of elementary students and 8% of secondary students attended high poverty schools (Aud et al., 2011).

The NCES data indicates that there is an uneven distribution of students who attend high poverty schools. For example, while 54% of public school students are White, only 14% of them attend high poverty schools. In comparison, Blacks made up 17% of students overall and 34% of students in high poverty schools, and Hispanics made up 21% of students overall but 45 % of students in high poverty schools. Most of the high poverty schools were located in cities as compared to suburban areas (Aud et al., 2011).

The location of schools and student demographics are also related to the quality of teachers in schools. Researchers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Jackson, 2009; Jacob, 2007) have found that schools defined as high poverty are much less likely to have fully licensed and effective teachers and are more likely to have teachers who have little or no experience or who have attended a less competitive college or university. According to Federal statistics in the School and Staffing Survey (SASS), 20.3% of teachers in urban districts had three or fewer years of experience, compared to 17.6% in suburban districts (Digest of Education Statistics, 2010). Data collected in North Carolina suggests an even larger gap of more than six percent difference in the same teacher experience data between high and low poverty schools (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

According to Jacob (2007), supply and demand contributes to teacher shortages, especially in urban school districts where there are often teacher vacancies. The 2007 SASS data indicated that 34.7% of central city schools had difficulty hiring a math teacher compared with only 25.1% of suburban schools (Jacob, 2007). Jacob suggests that many teachers prefer to teach in the communities that they grew up in and in areas similar to their hometowns. This leads to more vacancies in urban schools, since most teachers come from suburban areas. He also found that teachers prefer to teach in a school with higher achievement levels, regardless of racial composition.

Jacob's findings are supported by a study done on Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) by Jackson (2009). Jackson examined the changing demographics of teachers in CMS beginning in 2003, after the school district ended busing and began assigning students to their neighborhood schools. Jackson's research of CMS found that "schools that had an influx of black students as a result of the policy change had a decrease in the share of high-quality teachers, as measured by years of experience and certification test scores" (p. 215). Jackson concluded that "sorting by student race occurs both across and within teacher race, implying that although teachers' preference for student race may be associated with teacher race, there is substantial heterogeneity in teachers' preference for student race among both white and black teachers" (p. 248). This research indicates that for most teachers, student academic achievement levels are more important than race when deciding to work at a specific school.

The research provides an explanation on the challenges that high poverty schools face in ensuring that every student has an effective teacher. The research by Marzano (2007) suggests teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement. It is critical for

urban school districts like ABC to recruit and retain effective teachers at its high poverty schools.

2.4 The Federal Government's Role in Improving Public Schools

The Federal government's role in helping improve the nation's public schools over the last fifty years has shifted as research emerges on which reforms have the greatest impact on student achievement. The most recent federally-funded school reform initiative was introduced by President Obama and is known as "Race to the Top." These reforms are reflective of the current research that confirms the importance of focusing on whole school reform and having an effective teacher in every classroom.

The Federal Government first recognized the need to improve public schools in 1966 with the release of "The Equal Education Opportunity Survey," also known as the Coleman Report. The Coleman Report was written to provide Congress with an update on the implementation of the educational mandates of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that sought to guarantee every student equal educational opportunities in all public schools. In his report, Coleman discussed the difficulty of accurately assessing and analyzing school reforms due to the challenges in the measurement of inputs upon different groups. Coleman used teacher salaries as one example when he wrote, "If a teacher salary in a city and the surrounding suburban area are equal they are equal for schools attended by Negroes and schools attended by Whites in the same metropolitan areas, then the city is not competitive in salary, and loses the best teachers to the suburbs" (p.10). Coleman claimed that, because of the differences in inputs, it was not possible for resources to erase the differences in achievement levels across groups such as those between African

American and White students. Instead, Coleman concluded that family background, not the school, was the major determinant of student achievement.

Coleman's findings were and still are widely debated and had two primary effects on individuals and school policy makers' perceptions on schooling in America. First, it questioned the American belief that schools could be viable agents in closing the achievement gap in students due to environmental factors. Second, it called into question the notion that schools have little, if any, relationship with student achievement. The report claimed that schools accounted for only about 10% of the variance in school achievement; the other 90% was accounted for by student background characteristics (Coleman et al., 1966).

On one side, Coleman's supporters agreed that family factors such as poverty or a parent's lack of education impacted a student's achievement level regardless of the method of instruction. Many of the "compensatory education" reforms were based on Coleman and his supporters' belief that reforms should attempt to introduce programs that targeted students of poverty. One example was the Title I programs, as part of the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965, that targeted funds to schools from low income families to prevent poverty from being a barrier to academic achievement through extra funds and programs. There was some evidence that this approach worked, as evidenced by the decline in the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in the 1980's (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Coleman's findings were a catalyst for other educators who did not agree and were convinced that all students can learn and that the school controls enough of the

factors to ensure students can master the core curriculum (Lezotte, 2009). Researchers such as Ron Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, and Lawrence Lezotte began to conduct studies that would contradict Coleman's findings by focusing on within school factors that affect student achievement. Their research, which became known as the Effective School Movement (ESM), sought to find pairs of schools with similar size student bodies, similar proportions of minority and poor students and comparable resource inputs, but with one of the schools showing significantly higher levels of student achievement. ESM researchers continuously asked "How did these schools do it?" and "In what ways are these schools different than most other schools serving poor and minority students?" (Lezotte, 2009, p.11). The pinnacle of Edmond's work was his research that led to what he referred to as the five "correlates" or variables that are most strongly connected to student achievement: (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) high expectations for student achievement, (c) an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, (d) an emphasis on basic skill acquisition, and (e) frequent monitoring of student progress (Marzano, 2001 p. 13). Edmond's correlates became widely popular and led the development of many programs and reforms in the following decade and beyond.

The debate over ensuring that every student received a quality education became the center of attention again in 1983 with the release of the federal report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled "A Nation at Risk." The report examined the quality of elementary and secondary public education and found a "rising tide of mediocrity" that threatened the country's future. The commissioners of the report stated that American students were not receiving a rigorous curriculum and our students were being outperformed by their peers around the world. The report criticized schools

for providing too many remedial courses and having low expectations for students. Commissioners also pointed to poor teaching and teacher preparations as problems. The commission called for a new public commitment to education reforms that was focused on tougher standards for students and teachers (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

Across the United States, educational leaders and policy makers responded and began to look not only at their curriculum and standards, but also at the structure and organizations of their schools and districts. Many of these changes were systemic in nature and included school-based management and school choice. These reforms were known as Comprehensive School Reform or CSR (Lezotte, 2009).

The concept of systemic reform emerged as educational leaders realized that the previous approaches to educational reforms were not working. According to Smith and O'Day (1991), systemic reform combined two previous waves of educational reforms. The first wave from the 1970s to early 1980s focused on expanding and improving educational inputs and ensuring basic skill competency. The second wave spanned the mid-1980s through the end of the decade, and stressed decentralization, teacher professionalism, and bottom up changes. Neither of the approaches produced the desired results. Consequently, reformers began to focus on systemic reforms that focused on three major efforts: challenging standards for students, the alignment of the policy components of educational governance, and school flexibility to develop the strategies to best suit the needs of their students (Supovitz, & Taylor, 2005). The expansion and implementation of systemic change became synonymous with standards-based reforms and standards-based accountability. At the school level, these systemic reforms were labeled comprehensive school reform (CSR).

The Federal Government first supported systemic reforms with the Federal Goals 2000: Education America Act of 1994 as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The comprehensive reform model was a marked change from the piecemeal approach that had dominated federal legislation in the past. Research done in the early 1990's indicated that the previous model of site-based management was not as effective as once thought because schools failed to develop coherent statements of beliefs or models for guiding the work and decision making (Borman et al., 2003). For example, Title I funds, which provided extra funds to high poverty and at-risk students and schools since the 1960's, were found to have a limited impact on whole schools because of the categorical and uncoordinated approach. So, while a small number of students may have benefited from the Title I initiated programs, the overall impact on schools and communities was negligible.

In 2001, President George W. Bush announced major federal educational reforms with the introduction of the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act. The legislation called for increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools, greater choice for parents and students attending low performing schools, more flexibility for states to use federal education dollars, and stronger emphasis on reading in the early grades (NCLB Act, 2001). NCLB also called for every student to be taught by a "highly qualified" teacher. Teachers would have to provide documentation that they had met the requirements needed to be certified in the grades and content areas they taught. As a result of NCLB, states and districts developed standardized tests to measure student proficiency, and began to focus on subgroups such as Exceptional Children and Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Schools that failed to meet the state standards for more than

three years in a row faced sanctions or a restructuring plan (NCLB Act, 2001). NCLB was heavily criticized for not focusing on teacher quality and punishing the lowest performing schools for not meeting their proficiency goals despite showing increases in student growth.

In the spring of 2011, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan estimated that 82% of the public schools in the United States could be labeled as failing under the NCLB legislation. Duncan criticized NCLB and said; "This law has created dozens of ways for schools to fail and very few ways to help them succeed. We should get out of the business of labeling schools as failures and create a new law that is fair and flexible, and focused on the schools and students most at risk" ("Duncan Says 82", 2010). In response to the failures of NCLB, Secretary Duncan and President Obama introduced "Race to the Top" (RTT) legislation as part of the reauthorization of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The RTT provided funds beginning in 2010. The RTT legislation requires states and school districts to focus on four areas: (a) improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure every school has a great leader, (b) providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to help educators to help them improve their students' learning, (c) implementing college and career ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards, and (d) improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions("Blueprint for Reform", 2010).

The RTT funds support the need for comprehensive school reforms that allow school district leaders to create comprehensive reform programs and initiatives that meet

the needs of their specific students. The new focus on teacher and principal effectiveness is aligned with the emerging research on the important impact that teachers have on student achievement.

The current federal mandates and legislation have clearly focused on reforms in two main areas: comprehensive reforms and teacher effectiveness. The following two sections will review the current research on the impact that these two reform strategies have on school improvement and student achievement.

2.5 Comprehensive School Reform

While research (Rowan & Miller, 2007; Johnston, 2002) suggests that school districts and individual schools that undergo CSR programs are highly motivated to improve the quality of the school, district leaders and principals face a number of problems as they attempt to implement reforms. One of the biggest obstacles is that school districts and schools fail to realize the influence of external policies and internal practices on schools. According to Johnston (2002):

> What we find in school-level efforts to implement comprehensive reform is the relative absence of explicit consideration of the influence of external policy on school practices and relative absence of application of system perspectives during reform efforts. The consequence is that almost without exception, and contrary to principles of comprehensive reform design, initial school improvement efforts remained a relatively disjointed assemblage of programs and practices (p. 206).

Johnston refers to this dilemma as the "presence of an absence" (p.206) and warns of the difficult task that researchers face when trying to evaluate the effectiveness or impact of comprehensive reforms.

Research by Mac Iver (2004) examined the effectiveness of one of the earliest and largestscale attempts at CSR as part of the New American Schools (NAS) project. The project began in 1995 and included major urban school districts including Miami-Dade,

Memphis, San Antonio, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, San Diego, and several districts in the states of Washington, Maryland, and Kentucky. Each of the participating districts agreed to implement CSR models in at least 30% of their schools over a five-year period. Each of the districts used different processes to select a nationally approved CSR model and used their own discretion in determining which schools would participate. The freedom of the districts to make these decisions made it difficult to compare the results due to great variances in school achievement levels, demographics, size, and selection of different models and strategies. Despite the variances, MacIver's findings suggest widespread differences in the level of effectiveness, and highlight the strengths of the more successful schools. Among the most important factors were stable leadership, flexibility, and support in resource allocation from the district and central office in sustaining implementation of NAS models at schools.

Implementation of reforms varies from school to school because not all schools are at the same level in their organizational development. For example, in some schools, structures for collaboration and communication may already be in place for participatory decision-making. In other schools, teachers may not have had any role in decision making, and therefore are not as familiar with what is needed beyond their own classrooms (MacIver, 2004; Wetherall & Applefield, 2004). Mac Iver and Balfanz (2000) compare schools attempting to implement CSR reforms to small businesses, and argue that urban schools, like small businesses, are as likely to fail as to succeed due to lack of resources (especially human resources), lack of technical knowledge about effective curriculum and instruction, and unstable operating environments (teacher and principal mobility). Because of the high risk factors of individual schools, it is critically

important that school district central office leaders provide schools with the necessary infrastructure that ensures each school attempting CSR with the following: (a) continual professional development, (b)in-class implementation support for reform models, (c)organizational assistance (building level effective structures like professional learning communities, providing budget information early, minimizing last minute policy and staffing changes and adequate time for teachers to work collaboratively), and (d) productive use of data.

Due to the complex and overlapping needs listed above, it is essential that educators in multiple departments or divisions within the central office work collaboratively to meet the site-based needs and goals of each school attempting student achievement reform. Failure to do so will almost certainly result in little or no growth in student achievement.

MacIver's recommendations align with previous research (Graczweski, Loeb, Goldhaber, Staiger, Raundenbush & Whitehurst, 2007; Minthrop & Trujillo, 2005; Wetherill & Applefield, 2004) that suggests there is no single strategy that has been universally successful with schools implementing CSR strategies, but there are certain components that are critical to implementing any systemic reform. Most significantly, there must be ownership and buy-in from all stakeholders, particularly teachers. Ideally, the process of choosing and developing a reform model should be done over an extended period, with ample time for input from teachers.

Research (Graczweski et al., 2007; Rowan & Miller, 2007; Wetherall & Applefield, 2004) reveals the importance of a strong principal for schools attempting systemic reforms. As the leader of the school and agent of change, the principal must

skillfully navigate all stakeholders through the reform process. As leaders, principals must be both flexible to change and resistant to critics who refuse to support the reforms. Principals must guide the staff in professional development that is critical to improving student achievement. In an evaluation of his school's CSR reforms, a principal noted the challenges of getting the support of teachers by saying that teachers believe "they can outlast any principal" and make it difficult to get them to change their practices (Wetherall & Applefield, 2004).

2.6 Turnaround School Reform

Another approach to improving chronically low-performing schools is known as the "turnaround schools" model. Turnaround schools are defined as schools that have a high proportion of students failing to meet state standards of proficiency in mathematics or reading as defined under NCLB for two or more consecutive years (Herman et al., 2008). Turnaround models differ from CSR in that the turnaround model attempts to make quick, dramatic improvements within three years, while CSR makes change in a more incremental manner and has longer, three to five year implementation plans (Herman et al., 2008). The two approaches can be very similar in their strategies but differ in the implementation. For example, in CSR, school leaders may focus more on professional development to existing staff to build the capacity of teachers over a longer period of time, while in a turnaround school, a principal may have to hire and train a small group to implement and lead change immediately.

The national clearinghouse "What Works," supported by the U.S. Department of Education, reviewed previous studies on turnaround schools and made four broad recommendations. The guide is clear that each of the recommendations has shown only

modest results and that the research on turnaround schools is limited in scope and validity. The authors narrowed their findings down to four recommendations: (a) signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership, (b) maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction, (c) make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process, and (d) build a committed staff (Herman et al., 2008). The authors conclude that there is no one approach for implementing these strategies, but that each school needs to consider the specific characteristics and needs of its school and adjust accordingly.

Other research on turnaround schools indicates that the schools that have shown sustained success stressed similar aspects of reform. Daniel Duke (2006), a well-known researcher on turnaround schools, examined five different studies that examined the reform efforts of turnaround schools across the nation. Duke found eleven characteristics in the turnaround schools that showed success: assistance, collaboration, data-driven decision making, leadership, organizational structure, staff development, alignment, assessment, high expectations, parent involvement, and scheduling. Duke admits that simply focusing on these areas of reform will not guarantee success but are important to take into account when considering reforms.

Research by Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy (2007) also studied the similarities between turnaround schools and drew several conclusions to help guide future reforms. First, the researchers found that there is not one leadership style that is more effective than another. For example, in one school a more authoritative style may be needed while a more distributive style may be successful in another setting. Duke et al. (2007) concluded that no matter the leadership style, almost all turnaround school principals identified four major challenges; student achievement and behavior, staffing,

school system concerns, and parents and community. In the study, the principals ranked school programs and organizations issues most frequently, including concerns about ineffective instruction, data deprivation, lack of teamwork, and ineffective scheduling. In regard to staffing, the principals identified two major areas of concern: problems with the competence of staff members and lack of specialists in key areas. The principals found it difficult to dismiss ineffective teachers and to recruit specialists in the areas of reading and math, making it difficult to provide staff with the support and professional development that was needed to improve instruction.

Duke (2006) also stresses the importance of pinpointing the personnel problems. Duke encourages school leaders to think closely about why students are not achieving. Principals need to ask questions such as: Is the reason for low student achievement the instructor or the instructional program or intervention strategy? At what point does a principal decide that the efforts to work with a teacher to make them better not worth the time and energy? Are there teachers who have been able to adjust and improve their teaching in the same school with the new turnaround efforts and what makes them successful and not others?

The findings of the research presented on turnaround schools stress that there is no one answer or strategy that has shown absolute success. It is imperative that district officials and school leaders work together to develop a model that works, not for every school, but that has the flexibility to address the differences in each school. The need for school districts and individual schools to effectively implement lasting comprehensive schools reforms is becoming increasingly important as the Federal Government continues

to support such initiatives as Race to the Top that provide school leaders with flexibility to do so.

2.7 Previous Research on Teacher Effectiveness

One of the most comprehensive reviews of school reform efforts and the impact of teachers was conducted by Robert Marzano (2001) and included over 30 years of research. In his meta-analysis study, he examined national and international studies that focused on CSR efforts at the school, and teacher level characteristics that could be implemented without drastic changes in resources or personnel. He began by examining the Coleman report and attempted to answer the following questions: What have school reformers learned since then? Is the picture of schooling more positive now? His findings indicate that there is ample evidence in the last four decades of research "that schools can and do make a powerful difference in the academic achievement of students" (p. 2). Marzano focused on several categories of research, including the school effectiveness movement, classic synthesis studies, the school-level effect, the teacher-level effect, and the student-level effect. For the purposes of this paper, only his findings on the effective school movement and the teacher-level effect will be discussed.

The first area Marzano examined was the school effectiveness movement. Based on early research by Edmonds (1979), Rutter (1979), Kittgaard and Hill (1974), Brookover et al. (1978) and case studies by Brookover and Lezotte (1979), Marzano concluded that that there were fairly consistent findings regarding the characteristics of highly effective schools. In the end, Edmond's five correlates of effective schools were positive identifiers for schools where students performed better than expected based on students socio-economic status (SES) (Edmond, 1979).

Marzano's research on teacher-level effect considered variables that are under the control of individual teachers regardless of the context provided by the school: "those things a teacher might do to enhance student achievement no matter what the school's position is about monitoring student achievement, providing a positive climate, and so on" (2001, p.58). These factors include instructional strategies, curriculum design, and classroom management. Marzano pointed to previous research by Springfield and Teddlie (1989), Bosker (1992), Luyten (1994), Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997), and Madause et al (1979) to conclude that teacher effect has a greater impact on student achievement than school effect. The most widely accepted study to support these findings was the Tennessee Value Added System (TVASS) study, which revealed that teachers have more impact than school, heterogeneity, class size, and achievement levels. These findings combined with the other research suggest that "a realistic yet somewhat conservative estimate appears to be a ratio of 2 to 1 in favor of teachers (versus school)" (Marzano, 2001, p. 62).

The need to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of teachers is critical because of the impact they have on school reform. According to Darling-Hammond (2009), the increasing focus on teacher effectiveness makes sense when analyzing school reform because "there are no policies that can improve schools if the people in them are not armed with the knowledge and skills they need" (p. 1).

In recent years, policy makers and education leaders have begun to move away from traditional measures of teacher qualifications based on factors such as certification, experience, advanced degrees, and performance on content tests to a model that evaluates teachers on actual performance and effectiveness of increasing student achievement.

Darling-Hammond (2009) distinguishes the differences between previous research that focused on *teacher quality* and current research focuses on *teaching quality*. She describes teacher qualities as what "teachers are expected to be and do" (p.2). For example, some teacher qualities include; strong general intelligence, knowledge of content, understanding of learners and learning, and adaptive expertise. The abovementioned characteristics support student learning, and have been incorporated into educational institutions and state licensing requirements such as NCLB.

Darling-Hammond describes *teaching qualities* as the "teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions - but is also strongly influenced by the context of instruction" (2009, p.3). A "high quality" teacher may not be successful in all situations. Teachers may be asked to teach subjects with which they are not comfortable, or to be in a school where there is no opportunity to plan with other teachers.

Research by Jacob and Lefgren (2008) examined principals' ability to accurately identify and distinguish highly effective and less effective teachers based on observations and other data sources included in teacher evaluations. The principals were asked to rate each teacher on a scale from 1 (inadequate) to 10 (exceptional). The principals had to rank the teachers not only on overall effectiveness but also on other characteristics such as dedication and work ethic, classroom management, parent satisfaction, and ability to raise math and reading achievement. The ratings indicated very little variance among teachers in each school. Jacob and Lefgren compared the ratings with each teacher's value-added score and found some surprising results. The correlation between the principal ratings and teacher value-added scores suggests that while principals can accurately identify the very bottom and top performing teachers, they are not able to

distinguish the abilities of teachers in the middle. These findings are significant with the knowledge that "moving a student from an average teacher to a teacher one standard deviation above the mean would result in roughly a 2-3 percentile point increase in test scores" (p. 112). The findings of Jacob and Lefgren are not unique, and signal the need to find another way to evaluate teachers in addition to test scores and principal evaluations.

One of most comprehensive reports on school leaders' ability to accurately identify effective teachers was released in 2009 by the federally funded New Teacher's Project. The findings of the report, known as the "widget effect," reflect the survey responses of approximately 15,000 teachers and 1,300 administrators from four states and 12 districts that vary in size and demographics. The survey focused on the formal teacher evaluation methods used in each state. The findings reinforced the call by many educators for a new approach to evaluating teachers with five major flaws in current teacher evaluations. The first finding was that "all teachers are rated good or great." In districts that use binary evaluation ratings (i.e., satisfactory or unsatisfactory), more than 99% of teachers received a satisfactory rating. In districts with a broader range, 94% of teachers received the two top ratings. The second finding stated that "excellence goes unrecognized." Due to the extremely high number of teachers being highly rated, teachers say that district officials are not doing enough to recognize, compensate, promote, and retain the most truly effective teachers. The authors argued that another flaw was "inadequate professional development." Districts that fail to accurately define effective and ineffective teachers are not able to provide the needed professional development for their districts. Only 45% of teachers agreed that the professional development offered to them was helpful. The next major finding was "no special

attention to novices." Despite the research that recognizes that new teachers in their first three years are less effective, 66% of novice teachers received a rating better than standard on their evaluations. The last claim was that "poor performance goes unaddressed." Teachers and administrators overwhelmingly (81% and 58% respectively) admitted that they know of at least one tenured teacher who performs poorly in school. Too often, these teachers are not addressed, especially in higher poverty schools. District records show that at least half of the districts studied did not dismiss a single non-tenured teacher for poor performance in the last five years (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulher, & Keeling, 2009).

The authors of the 'Widget Effect" made several recommendations, including adopting a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately, and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement, and integrating the performance evaluation system with critical human capital policies and functions such as teacher assignment, professional development, compensation, retention, and dismissal.

2.8 Teacher Value Added Models

Alarming findings, such as those found in the Widget Effect report and the new guidelines for accurately assessing teachers required as part of the Race to the Top, have propelled educational researchers and school district leaders to begin looking at using "value added models." Value added models are similar to the to *teaching qualities* described by Darling-Hammond in that they acknowledge teachers' contributions to students' progress, taking into account where the student starts and many other factors that are beyond the control of the teacher but are known to impact student learning.

The earliest research on teacher effectiveness using a value added score was based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVASS) initiative which began in 1992. The TVASS model, designed with the support of the state leaders, aimed to determine the effectiveness of school systems, schools, and teachers in producing academic growth in students (Sanders & Horn, 1998). The TVASS model uses a statistical, mixed-model theory and methodology to create a multivariate, longitudinal analysis of student achievement data. The primary purpose of the TVASS model is to provide information "regarding how effective a school system or teacher has been in leading students to achieve normal academic gain over a three-year period" (Sanders & Horn 1998). Two studies (Wright et al., 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) used the TVASS model to investigate the effects of teachers, intra-classroom homogeneity, and class size on academic gains and found that "the teacher effect is highly significant in every analysis and has a larger effect size than any other factor in the twenty of thirty analyses" (Wright et al., 2010, p.65-66). Sanders and Rivers conclude that the impact of a teacher has a residual effect, as "both very effective and ineffective teachers were measured two years later, regardless of the effectiveness of teachers in later grades" (p.6).

More current research (Glazerman et al., 2010;Hanushek & Rivkin 2008; Hill et al., 2010; and Sass et al., 2010) suggests that the value added model is a reliable method of comparing teachers in different settings equally. Hill, Kapitula, and Umpland (2010) used a mixed method approach, combining classroom observations with quantitative value added data, and concluded that the value added models "do carry a 'signal' about the quality of classroom instruction and thus may be valuable and relatively inexpensive tools" (p. 826). All of the current researchers (Glazerman et al., 2010; Hanushek &

Rivkin 2008; Hill et al., 2010; and Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio & Feng, 2010) warn against using the value added model as the sole measure of to how to accurately evaluate teachers, but believe that the data produced can help leaders make decisions that can have a significant impact on improving student achievement.

Sass et al. (2010) focused their research on value added and its impact on high poverty schools. Sass et al. conducted a study using data from Florida and North Carolina to compare the differences in teacher effectiveness ratings in high and low poverty schools. They concluded that there was little difference in average teachers between and higher and lower poverty schools, but "significantly great variation in effectiveness among teachers working in high poverty schools" (p. 19). The data indicate that the best teachers are similar in higher and lower poverty schools but that the least effective teachers in high poverty schools are far less effective than those in lower poverty schools. The results are a cause for concern for district leaders who know that students in higher poverty schools are most often the students who struggle the most.

2.9 ABC School District's Reform Efforts

The ABC school district is one of the country's largest school districts, with over 135,000 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve. The annual operating budget is approximately $1.15 billion for 178 schools ("CMS About Us," nod.). The ABC district has a unique history of student assignment plans with its role in the Supreme Court case *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* (1971) that allowed busing to be used to desegregate schools. In 1972, as a result of the *Swann* ruling, ABC created a student assignment plan that used busing to create racially balanced schools. Under the plan, no school population in ABC was to be more than 50% black, and all students were

to share the burden of busing. Teachers were also reassigned to schools based on their race to equalize teacher demographics (Jackson, 2009).

For the next twenty years, ABC did not make any major changes to its student assignment plan. The next major change came in 1992, when newly appointed Superintendent John Murphy established a new magnet program as part of a larger student assignment plan that focused on controlled choice. The plan came partly as a response to a changing population in the city. During the early 1990's, the city emerged as a new leader in banking and technology, creating thousands of new jobs. Business leaders, realizing the importance of good schools in recruiting workers, began to put pressure on school leaders to improve the quality of schools and end the forced busing plan (Mickelson, 1999). When business leaders such as Hugh McColl, president of a major bank declared "our schools aren't good enough," community and school leaders began to listen and demand change (Smith, 1997, p. 257). Parents were also concerned about the increasing amount of time students spent on buses. Due to the expanding population, new neighborhoods were being developed further from the city. Most of these neighborhoods were racially divided and required some students to spend two hours a day on a bus to attend a racially balanced school (Gaillard, 1999).

The new student assignment plan unanimously approved by the ABC Board of Education was based on the court ordered guidelines of maintaining a fifty percent black student population at high schools, and elementary schools maintaining a black population that does not exceed the K-6 system-wide ratio, plus 15 % (Magnet Assistance Program Enrollment, 1995). The student assignment plan was considered a "living document" that could be adjusted regularly to meet changing needs of the community.

The business community was pleased with the new plan, and praised the magnet program as innovative (Smith, 1997).

The student assignment plan remained intact until 1997, when William Capacchoine, a parent of a student, sued ABC, claiming that his daughter was denied acceptance in a magnet school because she was white. Soon other parents joined the suit and asked the courts to declare ABC "unitary," meaning that the school district had met the requirements of desegregation and no longer had to consider race when creating student assignment plans. Attorneys from the *Swann* case announced in October 1997, that they would join the case to fight the Capacchione suit, saying that the school system had not fully desegregated and should not be released from court-ordered desegregation (*Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg*, 1971). In March 1998, U.S. District Judge Robert Potter reactivated the *Swann* case and consolidated it with Capacchione's suit. Two months later, six parents joined the case saying that race-based policies influenced everything from how students were assigned, to where schools were built. The parents argued that the schools were fully desegregated and continued use of race-based policies was unconstitutional ("CMS About Us," n.d.).

In 1999, the Federal courts ruled in favor of the parents and required that the district stop using race in any of its official actions. Judge Potter accused school officials of "standing in the schoolhouse door and turning students away from its magnet programs based on race" (Gaillard, 1999, p. 246). The 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the decision in 2001, and a year later, ABC created a new student assignment plan that was based on neighborhood schools with no consideration of race.

ABC's new plan was highly publicized, with the local paper declaring the system "on the path of radical, revolutionary change" (Smith & Mickelson, 2000). The new plan divided the district into four attendance zones with mixed demographics. Each student would be assigned to a "home school" with the option of attending any other school in the district if space was available. Although district officials believed the student assignment plan to be equitable by allowing all students to choose their own schools, not everyone agreed. Parents of black students complained that their students often did not get their first choice, whereas white students did. This occurred because most white students choose their home schools, as they were more likely to have qualified teachers and better resources. When black students applied to those schools they were told that they were full, and they were forced to remain in their home schools. Data from test scores in the 2002 and 2003 school year reveal that the new policy "increased socioeconomic and ethnic sorting among students and amplified the differences in test-score gaps among different sets of students" (Godwin, Leland, Baxter, & Southworth, 2006, p. 991). As expected, inner city schools saw drastic increases in the percentage of minority students and students with low socioeconomic status (SES), while the suburbs saw the opposite. The effects of this soon became apparent with major changes in student achievement in schools whose demographics saw an increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students. At the end of the 2005-2006 school year, seven ABC elementary and middle schools had proficiency rates below 45% and were designated as low performing schools by the NC Department of Public Instruction ("The ABC of Public Education," n.d.). The following year, the district hired a new

superintendent, Dr. Peter Gorman, who began to explore reform options to improve student achievement at the district's lowest achieving schools.

2.10 ABC Strategic Staffing Initiative

At the time Peter Gorman became the superintendent of ABC in 2006, roughly a third of schools had slowing or negative achievement levels compared to the last five years. As a first step to addressing these issues, Gorman assigned a team of the district's top administrators to analyze the characteristics and practices in the lowest performing schools to see what could be done to improve them. Gorman and other ABC leaders approached the need for change through a comprehensive school reform lens. The main focus of the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) was to provide struggling schools with strong principal leadership, and the resources needed, including teachers, to improve student achievement (Pulliam, Tingle, & Schoeneberger, 2010). The ABC Strategic Staffing Initiative is aligned with the research previously presented in this paper that stresses the importance of having strong principals who have the flexibility to make reforms that meet the needs of their individual schools, including decisions about personnel, curriculum, professional development, and school goals (Graczweski et al., 2007; Rowan & Miller, 2007; Wetherall & Applefield, 2004).

In order to truly address the needs at the lowest performing schools, Gorman and the district leaders formed a Strategic Staffing Team that was made up of principals, teachers, and other district leaders. The Strategic Staffing Team realized that in order for real reform to take place, the district would have to commit to several "cycle-breakers" in current district practices and policies. These included: (a) strong leaders who build high expectations and ownership, (b) effective teachers with proven track records, (c)

collaborative teacher teams, (d) removal of teachers who would hinder reform, and (e) expertise and resources to serve students who have fallen behind their peers (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

The Strategic Staffing Team also established several principles to follow: (a) schools must receive support over a period of time to ensure sustained growth, (b) "one size does not fit all" among low-performing schools, (c) different characteristics might require different strategies, (d) strategies must align with district priorities and state requirements, and (e) strategies should incorporate lessons from national and ABC best practices (Travers & Christiansen, 2010 p.5).

Following their own recommendations, Gorman and his team decided that more needed to be done to improve academic achievement at low performing schools. From the beginning, Gorman firmly believed that the principal and strong teachers could be the key change agents. Out of this belief and the "cycle breakers," the district introduced the Strategic Staffing Initiative (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

Gorman again assembled a team of district leaders and educators to determine the criteria for the first cohort of schools that would be designated as "Strategically Staffed" (SS). The team decided to focus mostly on the lowest performing elementary schools and a minimum number of middle schools. Most of the schools had already been identified by the NCLB sanctions as failing (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

2.10.1 Developing ABC Strategic Staffing Initiative

The Strategic Staffing Team established the criteria for selecting principals. Realizing that the ultimate goal for these schools was to improve student achievement, the decision was made that in order to be considered for a SS principal position, a

principal must have shown gains in student achievement that demonstrated over a year's worth of growth in a year's worth of instruction. The selected principals would also have to commit to staying at the school for at least three years. Realizing that change and academic gains do not always come quickly, Gorman and the team also made it a priority for principals to know that they would be given the freedom, flexibility, and time to establish a new culture and environment that would foster high academic standards and achievement (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

Next, the team decided on the other staffing positions that each school would receive. The team agreed that the principals should be able to choose their own teams, including an assistant principal, a literacy facilitator, a behavior management technician, and up to five teachers with proven success. Teachers with proven success were defined as "those with successful past summative evaluations and with demonstrated growth in student achievement" (Travers & Christiansen, 2010, p.8). Teachers would also have to make a three year commitment to the school. The team also gave principals the authority to choose as many as five teachers to leave the school for reassignment elsewhere in the district (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

One of the first obstacles Gorman faced was how to "get the right people in the right places." How could he convince principals, teachers, and the community that it was necessary to move highly effective principals and teachers from their current assignments to the lowest performing schools? Gorman did have some flexibility, since North Carolina is a "right to work" state without teacher unions, and School Board policy ("GCKA Instructional Staff Assignments and Transfers," n.d.) gives the superintendent the legal right to make involuntarily reassignments. Gorman, however, realized that

forcing principals and teachers to move could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the program. As a result, the SS team devised a plan offering incentives to attract principals and other educators to willingly make the switch to a strategically staffed school. According to the plan, principals, assistant principals, and literacy facilitators would receive a 10% pay supplement to their base salaries. Teachers would receive a $10,000 recruitment bonus with a three year commitment, plus a $5000 retention bonus in the second and third years (Pulliamet al., 2010).

Gorman and his team worried about how the public would react to the plan. He feared that parents and teachers at schools where the principals were chosen to be strategically staffed would be upset and react negatively, raising questions about "what about my child?" He was also concerned that principals would not take the challenge and would turn down the offer. Despite not knowing the support he would receive, Gorman announced the first seven Strategically Staffed schools and principals in the summer of 2008. To his surprise, each of the principals chosen was excited about the opportunity and immediately accepted the offer (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

Gorman tried to reassure other principals, who may have inherited a weaker teacher who was removed from a Strategically Staffed school, and teachers who may have lost their principals, by saying,

> This plan may make life tougher for some principals, who may lose a good teacher or gain a weaker one. But it's important to remember that our struggling schools belong to *all* of us. We are one district and we share our successes and our failures. So all of us must work together as a district to improve our schools and our scores (Travers & Christiansen, 2010, p.11).

With the support of the school board, Gorman was able to move forward with his plan, and he officially launched the first cohort of Strategically Staffed schools in the

summer of 2008. Less than a year later, in March 2009, Gorman announced the second cohort of seven more schools. In January 2011 more schools were added, bringing the total number of strategically staffed schools up to 26. Gorman and the school board announced early on that the success of the program and principals would not be judged for at least three years because of the time it takes to make true systemic changes (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

Table 1 shows the five key components of the SSI and previous research on CSR and turnaround schools. The table indicates that all five of the components are supported by research discussed in this paper earlier.

Table 1 Research that supports the SSI components

SSI Component	Ideas/research that supports component	References
A great leader is needed, a principal with a proven track record of success in increasing student achievement. Also, great teachers will not go to a troubled school without a great leader as a principal.	• Struggling schools need to have effective principals to guide reforms • The leadership style of the principal that is needed differs between schools • Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership • Schools need stable leadership to guide reform	• Duke 2006 • Duke et. al 2007, Herman et. al 2008 • Mac Iver 2004
A team needs to go to the school so a person is not along in taking on this challenging assignment; there is strength and support in numbers.	• Turnaround schools struggle to recruit needed specialists • Collaboration among teachers is important • In order for schools to improve there must be staff members capable of leading the change	• Duke et. al 2007 • Duke 2006, Duke et. al 2007,Mac Iver&Balfanz 2000 • Herman et. al 2008, Darling-Hammond 2009

Table 1 continued Research that supports the SSI components

SSI Component	Ideas/research that supports component	References
Staff members who are not supportive of reform need to be removed from the school.	• High poverty schools have higher numbers of effective teachers • Struggling schools need flexibility to dismiss ineffective teachers • In order for schools to make meaningful change there must be a committed staff	• Duke 2006, Duke et.al 2007 • Herman et. al 2008, Graczweski et. al 2007, Rowan & Miller 2007, Wetherall & Applefield 2004
Principals must be given the time and authority to reform the school, and be freed from the district list of "non-negotiable" that constrain autonomy.	• Schools need flexibility to adjust schedules and structure of school day • School leaders must be able to adjust instructional models/approaches • Schools need flexibility and support in resource allocation from district officials	• Duke 2006, Duke et.al 2007 • Duke, 2006, Duke et.al 2007, Herman et. al 2008, Rowan & Miller 2007, Johnston, 2002 • Mac Iver 2004, Mac Iver&Balfanz 2000
Not all job assignments are equal in difficulty and compensation should be varied to match.	• Struggling schools have difficulty recruiting effective teachers and specialists • Teachers are less likely to take a job at a low achieving school • Highly effective teachers have a large impact on student achievement	• Audet. al, 2011 • Jackson 2009 • Wright et al, 1997, Sanders and & Rivers, 1996, Sass et. al, 2010

Over the last three years, the SSI has continued to evolve as the success and challenges of the first and second cohorts provide feedback and guidance on improving the reform effort. As of November 2011, there were 26 Strategically Staffed schools and

the initiative is receiving more and more national attention. Table 2 shows the number of schools that have been designated as a Strategically Staffed School each year. In October 2010, Newsweek recognized the SSI as an "ingenious school-turnaround strategy" (Wingert, 2011).

Table 2

Number of ABC Strategically Staffed Schools

Cohort Implementation Date				
June 2008	March 2010	February 2010	January 2011	June 2011
7	7	5	3	4

2.10.2 Early ABC Strategic Staffing Initiative Findings

All twenty six of the Strategically Staffed schools face challenges. Each of the SSI schools had state test scores that were below 50% and as low as 1%, and student bodies whose economically disadvantaged status ranged from 66% to 96% ("School Progress Reports," n.d.). The ABC Center for Research & Evaluation (Schoeneberger & Pulliam, 2010) did a formative evaluation of the SSI after year one and released their most recent interim findings in April 2011 that shared findings of the both the first and second cohort. The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the SSI. The study used data from student standardized tests, student attendance/suspension, and teacher survey results. The researchers also interviewed each principal in year one and year two.

To complete their quantitative analysis, Schoeneberger and Pulliam (2011) used a propensity-matching method in order to accurately compare SSI and non-SSI schools.

They used numerous covariates, including gender, race, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Exceptional Children status (EC), gifted, grade level, age, retention, attendance data, and discipline records. The students in non-SSI schools were treated as a control group. The findings indicate that the proficiency rate on EOGs generally increased or stayed the same across three years in each of the 14 schools in the first two cohorts. Only one school, however, managed to attain a higher level of proficiency in 2009-2010, compared to the average of the comparison school in that same year. The comparison schools were not named in the report.

The interim report compared SS recruited teachers with non-SS staff in regard to student achievement as measured by EOG proficiency and ABC growth rates. The non-SS staff were teachers who were previously teaching in the same school. The comparison linked students to teachers using ABC data files. The proficiency findings for math and reading for the two cohorts does not reveal a clear pattern that SS staff is doing a better job than non-SS staff. For example, in Cohort 1, in year one (2008-2009), the SS staff in six out of seven schools out-performed non-SS staff in math; however, only four out of seven did the same in reading. In their first year of implementation (2009-10), Cohort 2 SS staff did better in only four out of seven schools in both reading and math. The mixed findings are similar when comparing student growth rates of SS staff versus non-SS staff. Generally, the SS staff showed more growth than non-SS staff in math. The growth score for reading for both SS and non-SS staff was extremely low and showed very little difference between growth rates for the two groups.

The findings from Schoenebergerand Pulliam (2011) are important for this study because they attempt to examine the effectiveness of the teacher recruitment aspect of the

SSI. Although the report compared only 57 teachers, the findings suggest that some of the teachers recruited to SS schools may not be as effective as principals and district leaders had hoped. When the SSI initiative began in 2008, the district had limited data on the effectiveness of teachers other than growth and proficiency scores.

The first cohort of seven schools completed their third year in June 2011. There has not been any formal evaluation released on the success of the schools in regard to the SSI. EOG proficiency scores released through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction indicate that there have been positive increases with each school's math, reading, and science scores ("NC school report cards," n.d.). Table 3 shows the math scores for each school over the last three years. The 2007-2008 data are for the year before the SSI began. Cohort 1 principals began their new jobs in the summer of 2008. The school with the greatest gains in math student achievement increased 39.3%. The smallest gain of the schools showed an increase of 23.4%. The average gain in scores was 29.5% over the three years.

Table 3

Cohort 1 Math EOG Scores Proficiency Averages

Cohort 1	07-08	08-09*	09-10	10-11
School 1	45.7	57.1	66.0	67.3
School 2	43.8	56.8	62.4	67.2
School 3	54.2	77.3	81.8	93.5
School 4	39.0	64.1	64.9	66.8
School 5	30.8	46.8	61.8	61.9
School 6	52.4	93.8	81.5	86.4
School 7	41.7	54.9	66.2	72.0

Note: *It is important to note that the state made a change to the testing polices in 2008-2009 by allowing any student who did not show proficiency on the first test to retake the test. The change resulted in higher scores for most schools across the state ("NC school report cards," n.d.).

Cohort 1 saw similar gains in Reading achievement levels with the seven schools improving by an average of 23.1% during the three years. Reading scores ranged from 37.4% to 73.6%. Table 4 shows that the largest gain was school 6, which improved by over 39 % raising its achievement levels.

Table 4

Cohort 1 Reading EOG Scores

Cohort 1	07-08	08-09*	09-10	10-11
School 1	31.8	41.6	50	56.3
School 2	18.6	36.4	42.3	43.9
School 3	33.9	54.9	54.7	55.3
School 4	32.0	48.9	50.7	52.7
School 5	22.8	35	33.9	37.4
School 6	34.5	59	65.8	73.6
School 7	32.4	43.9	48.3	48.5

Note: *It is important to note that the state made a change to the testing polices in 2008-2009 by allowing any student who did not show proficiency on their first test to retake the test. The change resulted in higher scores for most schools across the state ("NC school report cards," n.d.).

Each of the seven schools also showed positive gains in their Science scores. North Carolina's public schools did not begin testing until 2008 so there is no data for previous years. Table 5 shows that scores improved from 14.1% at school 1 to over 42% at school 6. The average gain for all schools was 28.5%.

Table 5

Cohort 1 Science EOG Scores

Cohort 1	08-09	09-10	10-11
School 1	33.7	42.9	47.8
School 2	22.2	27.3	48.2
School 3	64.3	81.7	80.7
School 4	32.4	58.1	64.9
School 5	18.3	22.5	56.1
School 6	24.8	39.7	67.2
School 7	24.5	54.2	54.9

("NC school report cards," n.d.)

The EOG scores for the second and third cohorts also indicate overall positive growth. The improvements suggest that the SSI has shown some success in increasing the number of students who pass EOGs over the last three years. The aim of this study is to look beyond the EOG numbers and examine the stakeholders' (teachers and principals) perspective of the SSI. Specifically, the study will focus on the perceived impact of the teachers who were hired as part of the SSI and received the bonus monies.

2.11 Summary

While these initial studies show promising results for improving student achievement, further research is needed to understand the impact of SSI. It is important to look beyond the EOG data to gain insight on the opinions and perceptions of the principals and teachers (both SS and non-SS) to learn how they feel about the effectiveness of SSI.

The research presented in chapter two explains many of the challenges that school districts and leaders face in improving student achievement levels. School officials must consider mandates from the Federal Government, such as NCLB, that require schools to meet even higher levels of achievement for all students. High poverty schools struggle even more as they attempt to recruit and retain highly effective teachers. There are no "silver bullets" in regards to reforming schools and implementation of changes require leaders to consider the individual needs of their school and students. ABC has done just that with the development of the SSI that focuses on the district's lowest performing schools. Chapter Three will provide details on the methodology of this study that addresses how successful ABC has been in their implementation of the SSI reform model.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used to conduct this descriptive study. The chapter begins with the research questions and the purpose of the study. The chapter continues with an explanation of the rationale for the research design, describes information related to sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis procedures and validity issues. The study combines both survey and school effectiveness data to provide an exploratory summary on the perceptions of the SSI process, as well as a descriptive analysis of quantitative trends as they relate to school level effectiveness as defined by the district created value added scores.

3.1 Research Questions

The following questions were investigated in this study. The survey questions focused on the perceptions of principals, SS staff, and teachers in the SSI schools. Survey research methods were used to examine these questions. The school effectiveness questions focused on the changes in school effectiveness scores after SSI was implemented.

3.1.1 Survey Questions

1. What perceived impact did the SS and entire staff have on increasing student achievement?

2. What role do teachers have in school wide decision making processes in regards to student achievement?

3. What does each group perceive as the benefits of SSI?

4. What does each group perceive as weaknesses of SSI?

10. What does each group perceive as barriers to making greater gains in student achievement? (internal and external)

11. What changes would each group make to improve the SSI?

12. If given the opportunity, would teachers and principals make the same decisions about working in an SS school?

13. What factors/ characteristics did principals use to select SS staff and teachers use to decide to accept a SS position?

14. How effective are the Professional Learning Communities (PLC)'s in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?

10. What level of flexibility do teachers have in designing lessons?

12. What instructional decisions have had the biggest impact on student achievement?

3.1.2 School Effectiveness Questions

1. How has the school's value added scores in math and reading changed from before to after SSI?

2. How has the Days of Instruction measure in math and reading changed from before to after SSI?

3.2 Research Design Rationale

The research design is a mixed method approach. Mixed method research can be defined as "the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently, sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research" (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 212). Unlike other research design methods that use only one form of data, mixed methods allows researchers to obtain

results from several sources and gain a deeper understanding of the program of interest (Hanson, Creswell J., Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell D., 2005).

Mixed method research is based on the philosophy of pragmatism (Hanson et al, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Pragmatic research designs, such as mixed methods, focus on employing approaches that seek "workable solutions through the practice of research to help answer questions that we value and to provide workable improvements in our world" (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p. 54).

Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) argue that there are five purposes for researchers to employ mixed methods designs: (a) triangulation, (b) complementarily, (c) development, (d) initiation, and (e) expansion. Each of the purposes has different characteristics and seeks different outcomes (Green et al., 1989). For this research, the expansion method offers the best approach because the design of the study seeks to increase the scope of knowledge about the SSI by using qualitative data to assess program processes and participants' perceptions of the process and quantitative methods to assess changes in program outcomes.

For the purposes of this study, a concurrent equal priority approach, also known as concurrent nested, was used. The surveys and school effectiveness were collected at the same time and contributed equally in an attempt to expand on existing knowledge of the SSI.

3.3 Research Methods

This section will be divided into two sections. The first section describes the the survey part of the study. The second section describes the school effectiveness effectiveness research method.

3.3.1 Survey Method

The study used a survey approach. Surveys are both useful and efficient tools for gaining information about an individual's opinions and behaviors (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). The survey was administered via the Internet. Dillman et al. (2009) suggest that participants are more likely to provide substantially longer answers and more detail when surveys are conducted on the Internet than given a paper-and-pen survey.

Participants. In this study, three different surveys were administered to three groups: (a) principals, (b) recruited staff (referred to as SS staff), and (c) staff members who were employed at the school before SSI (referred to as non-SS staff). These groups provided a diverse and comprehensive view of the impact that the SSI has had on improving student achievement.

These three groups were chosen because the philosophy behind the SSI is that schools will be more successful when led by strong principals and when the principals are able to hire a team of teachers (CMS Announces Strategic Staffing, n.d.). Under the SSI, the principals in the study were given the flexibility to recruit and hire the strongest teachers from around the district to support them in leading the change. By including both SS staff and teachers who remained in the schools but were not given bonuses, it is possible to compare perceptions of the two groups of teachers (SS and non-SS).

The sample included participants from schools that are in different phases of implementing the SSI. A total of 26 schools have implemented SSI since 2008. By including participants who have been involved in the SSI for different time periods, the researcher can reveal similarities and differences of perceptions over time. For example, teachers in their first year of implementation may have a different perspective on the impact of the SSI than those who have been a part of it for three years. The five schools that implemented SSI in 2011 were not included due to lack of data. In addition, two schools, one from Cohort 1 and one from Cohort 2 were closed last year. The data from these schools were included, but there were no individuals from these schools included in the survey part of the study. The decision was made not to include the one high school that was designated as SSI, since there are no other schools to compare it to.

The sample size varied among the groups. The surveys were given to all SS principals and SS staff. Of the 21 principals whose schools are included in the study, 17 are still employed in the district. As part of the SSI, each principal was able to hire up to five teachers or staff members using SS funds. Of the staff who received SSI bonuses, 37 are still employed by the district and were invited to participate. Another 285 staff who work in SS schools but did not receive SSI hiring incentives were invited to participate.

Instrumentation. Three surveys were developed and are included in Appendix A. All surveys include a limited number of closed questions that ask the participants for basic demographic information such as years of teaching experience, years in current school, and educational background. The remainder

of the questions were open-ended response, in an attempt to have participants respond to a variety of questions related to the impact that SSI has had on their schools and student achievement. Principals were asked about the factors and data sources they considered when making decisions about selecting SS staff. Principals were also asked to explain the impact that the SS staff had on student achievement. The SS staff and non-SS staff were asked about the challenges they face in regards to student achievement and their role in decision making, and designing lesson plans. All three groups were asked about their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the SSI and the internal and external barriers they face in regards to improving student achievement. Each research question has been aligned with the survey questions to ensure that they are addressed in the study and are in Appendix B.

Procedures. All eligible participants received an email from the Chief Academic Officer of the district asking them to participate in the survey, along with a copy of the invitation letter and a link to the surveys. The invitation letter included a statement of informed consent; by clicking on the survey link they agreed to participate. Each participant was asked to complete the survey, which was designed to take less than twenty minutes. A reminder email was sent to all participants a week later to increase the rate of return.

Data analyses. A thematic approach was used for the qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is an inductive approach, where categories are sorted after the data is collected (Izzy, 2002). Data analyses consisted of three linked phases: data reduction, data display, and data conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1994). In the data reduction phase, the researcher developed coding and themes for all survey responses.

Separate analyses were done for each survey, and after themes were developed, the researcher examined the themes across the surveys. After the researcher reduced the set of data, a more focused display of data (e.g., structured summary) was developed. The researcher then drew meaning from the displayed data using comparison/contrast, noting patterns, and looking for negative cases.

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to ensure trustworthiness of the project (Shenton, 2004; Guba, 1981). Guba (1981) has established four criteria for assessing the trustworthiness in qualitative research studies. The first criterion, known as truth value or credibility, ensures that there is internal validity within the study. One strategy to address this issue is triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of different methods or data sources. For this study, triangulation was employed through the use of three separate focus groups, and combining qualitative and quantitative sources. Another criterion that is met by the triangulation techniques is neutrality or confirmability. Confirmability focuses on the investigator's attention to objectivity. The use of several data sources limits any biases that the researcher may have toward the study.

The third criterion for establishing trustworthiness is applicability or transferability, and addresses the issue of external validity. Shenton (2004) states that due to the nature of qualitative projects "it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations" (p. 69). It is important, however, that the study provide readers with a "thick description" of the setting and study so that they can compare it to other, similar

situations that they may encounter. The detailed description of the setting and study also allows for a similar project to be established in a different environment (Shenton, 2004). For this reason, a detailed description of the beliefs and history of the SSI was included in chapter two.

The last criterion for trustworthiness is consistency or dependability, and demonstrates to the reader that "if the work was to be repeated in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). To meet this criterion, the study included a detailed report on how the research was conducted, and analyzed, and an evaluation of the outcome of the findings.

3.3.2 School Effectiveness Data Method

The quantitative collection of school effectiveness data analyzed the ABC produced value added scores. Value added data from the last four years were secured for each school. The value added data provides school and district leaders with a score that compares the effectiveness of schools, teams, and teachers to others in the ABC district in regards to student achievement. In this study, the change in value added data will be examined from before to after the intervention.

The ABC Value-Added Measure (VAM) was developed in 2010 and is a calculation of effectiveness based on student achievement as measured by the state End of Grade (EOG) or End of Course (EOC) tests. The ABC VAM is similar to the North Carolina ABC model for growth, except that the ABC model includes student factors and not just test scores. The ABC VAM is a multilevel, mixed effects, linear regression

model ("Talent and Teacher Effectiveness," 2011). The VAM combines student factors that may affect student achievement and a calculated predicted test score for each student based on previous test scores. The difference between the actual score and the predicted score combined with student factors indicates the impact of a school, team, or teacher on student achievement. The VAM does not provide information about how or why the school affected student test scores. There are three levels of variables in the VAM, including student level, class level, and school level. Overall, 35 variables are included in the model ("Talent and Teacher Effectiveness,"2011).

This study examined the VAM at the school level, which provides a percentile score of the school's contribution to student achievement on EOGs by content area relative to all other ABC schools. A high VAM indicates that "student scores were higher than predicted and that the school is more effective at supporting student achievement as reflected by test scores (p.15)" ("Talent and Teacher Effectiveness," 2011). Conversely, a low VAM would indicate a school is less effective at supporting student achievement.

The VAM uses days of instruction known as the "180 day construct" (Days) as a way to display value-added estimates on a graph and to compare VAM scores across years, subjects, teachers, and other variables. According to the 180 day construct, an average teacher's VAM score would translate to a score of 180. Teachers above the 180 threshold would be above average. The scores do not represent actual days of instruction, but provide the district with a way to

display and compare VAM scores in terms of relative distance above or below the average ("Talent and Teacher Effectiveness,"2011).

The value added data (VAM and Days) were reviewed through a descriptive lens to explore trends at the school level in both math and reading among SS schools and all other ABC schools. Group comparisons among the data helped to determine if there were commonalities or significant differences between and within cohorts in regards to changes in value added scores as it relates to the years of being designated a SS school. The VAM scores for each school and cohort were provided for the year before the schools were designated as SS schools, to establish an initial mean score to compare to other schools and from year to year. Statistical analysis was done using the Freidman test to determine if the changes were statistically significant.

3.6 Summary

Mixed method research has played an important role in educational research (Yin, 2006). The mixed method approach was appropriate for this study and provided a more holistic analysis of the SSI as it relates to hiring teachers in an attempt to improve student achievement. Izzy (2002) notes the strength of using theory and research to answer questions through different types of analysis and argues that the goal should not be to seek absolute truths, but instead, acknowledge that research is "not a choice between absolute truth and no truth at all. Rather, truth is always historical, cultural, and socially created" (p.2). The results of this study will allow readers to look at the success of the SSI through several different perspectives. Chapter Four presents the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter reports the findings from the survey and school effectiveness data collected. The results of the survey for each of the three groups will be shared. Next, results will be reviewed to determine if there was any significant change in the VAM and Days for the three cohorts.

4.1 Survey Results

4.1.1 Principal Survey Results

Nine (53%) of the 17 principals responded to the survey, including three principals from Cohort 1, four from Cohort 2, and two from Cohort 3. A majority of the principals (67%) had eight years or more of experience as principals, with the rest having five to seven years of experience. All of the respondents had served as principals in other schools in the district before taking a Strategic Staffing position. The principals were asked what factors they consider when deciding which teachers to hire strategically. The top five responses were: (a) previous EOG/EOC proficiency and growth scores (89%), (b) they had worked with the teacher at another school (77%), (c) recommendations from others (67%), (d) district created VAM data (56%), and (e) interviewed well (the principals were able to choose more than one answer) (33%). Principals also stated that they considered shared philosophies that children of poverty can learn, and they looked for teachers who met the needs of the school's strategic plan.

Fifty-six percent of the principals rated their SS staff's ability to improve student achievement as very effective, with the remaining 44% rated at the somewhat effective level. The principals' responses were mixed on whether or not they would rehire their Strategically Staffed teachers. Three of the nine principals stated that they would rehire the same individuals. The remaining six principals expressed that they would rehire some, but not others. Three principals commented that some of the teachers struggled and were moved to other positions in the school or left the district for unknown reasons. A majority of the principals (67%) believe that the five allotted positions were not enough to have a significant impact on student achievement. One principal stated that having more SS staff would impact growth in a shorter period of time. Another principal stated that the five teachers did not impact the school and said, "This school was and continues to be in academic crisis, especially in the area of Reading. I need, and needed then, an effective teacher in EVERY class, not just average." Two principals commented that they believe the gains their schools have seen are more a result of their focus on hiring the right teachers and retaining them than the impact of the SS staff.

Despite the mixed results on the questions about whether the principals would rehire the SS staff, and if the five allotted positions were enough, each of the nine principals listed several ways that the SS staff impacted student achievement. Three principals described the impact that the SS staff has had on increasing collaboration with other teachers, and providing curriculum and instructional support to other staff members. One principal responded to the survey explaining the mixed impact of the SSI staff:

> Three of the teachers had a major impact, as they not only grew the students in their classroom, but they also played a major role in

> changing the way in which teachers planned and collaborated in a number of areas. They changed the way the staff talked about kids and families, and how to analyze data.

Four of the principals attributed the SSI staff for the positive increases in growth and proficiency scores.

4.1.2 Strategically Staffed Staff Survey Responses

Thirty-two (86%) of the 37 individuals eligible to participate responded to the survey. Seventy-two percent of the respondents had 11 years or more of experience as educators, with the remaining 18% reporting between 3-10 years of experience. Half of the 32 SS staff who responded are currently in their second year of being Strategically Staffed. Of the remaining participants, 12 are in their third year, one person is currently in an SS school beyond the three year commitment, one person completed the SS commitment and has moved to another school, and two did not complete the SS commitment. There were no respondents from Cohort 1. Cohort 2 had 14 respondents and Cohort 3 had 18. All 34 of the SS staff worked in the same or another ABC school before accepting their SS positions. A majority of the SS staff served in three roles: Academic Facilitator (38%), teacher of an EOG/EOC course (31%), or Assistant Principal (21%).

Several themes emerged in the SS staff responses to the open-ended question about why they decided to move to a SS school. The two reasons mentioned most were (a) they wanted to work for the principal of that school and (b) the bonus money. Other repeated themes included (a) looking for a new challenge (6), (b) financial bonus (6), (c) making a difference (4), (d) enjoying working with the population of students (4) and (e) already being at the school

(3). The rest of the responses from the survey will be addressed in comparison with the other two groups.

4.1.3 Non-Strategically Staffed Staff Survey Responses

Of the 285 eligible participants, 91 (32%) completed the survey. The majority of the respondents (60%) have over 11 years of experience as educators. The remaining participants have 3-5 years (15%) or 6-10 years (26%). The respondents were divided among the three cohorts as follows: Cohort 1 (18%), Cohort 2 (37%), and Cohort 3 (45%). A majority of the non-SS staff serve in two roles: teacher of a non-EOG/EOC course (56%), and teacher of a EOG/EOC class (46%). When asked if, given an opportunity to transfer to another position in the district, they would choose to stay at their current schools since SS began, the answers were almost evenly divided, with 53.4% responding yes and 47% responding no.

Rating-scale Results

The survey included six questions common to all surveys that asked the participants to rank the effectiveness of their schools in several areas, including increasing student achievement, collaborative efforts of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), flexibility in designing lesson plans, and input on curriculum and instructional decisions.

The results in Table 6 show that the principals believed their staffs' ability to improve student achievement increased after year one of the initiative, with 33% of principals rating them as very effective and 67% rating them as somewhat effective.

Table 6

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Ability of staff to improve student achievement during the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative".

	Very Effective %	Somewhat Effective %	A little Effective %	Not at all Effective %
Principals	20	50	30	0
SS Staff	28	56	16	0
Non-SS Staff	17	48	29	7

Principals, SS staff, and non-SS staff rating on the ability of staff to improve student achievement currently is reported in Table 7. The very effective rating was 10% higher than the rating principals gave their teachers after the first year of the initiative (see Table 6). The SS staff group and non-SS staff group showed similar increases in their perceptions from year one to today. The SS staff group had the highest rating, with 41% rating their staffs as very effective compared to the principals' rating of 33% and non-SS staff of 26.4%.

Table 7

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Ability of staff to improve student achievement currently."

	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	A little Effective	Not at all Effective
	%	%	%	%
Principals	33	67	0	0
SS Staff	41	47	13	0
Non-SS Staff	27	54	16	3

The three groups showed differences in how they view the effectiveness of the schools' Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction. Table 8 shows that the principal group gave the highest ratings of 56% very effective and 44% somewhat effective. The SS staff had ratings of 41% and 40%, while the non-SS staff groups' ratings were lower at 28% and 48.3%.

Table 8

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Effectiveness of school's Professional Learning Communities (PLC)."

	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	A little Effective	Not at all Effective
	%	%	%	%
Principals	56	44	0	0
SS Staff	41	41	13	6
Non-SS Staff	32	29	17	12

Next, the groups were asked how much input the teachers have in decision making processes involving curriculum and instruction for their schools. The responses

are shown in Table 9. The answers again varied by group. The non-SS staff group responded with the lowest ratings, with 28% responding that they have little or no input, and 32% responding that they have a great deal of input.

Table 9

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Input from teachers in decision making processes."

	Great Deal %	Some %	Very Little %	None %
Principals	44	56	0	0
SS Staff	66	25	0	9
Non-SS Staff	32	29	17	12

The groups were asked to rate the amount of flexibility that teachers have in designing lesson plans. As shown in Table 10, the majority of principals (67%) said teachers have a great deal of flexibility, compared to 52% of the SS group, and 49% of the non-SS group.

Table 10

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Flexibility in designing lessons."

	A great deal %	Some %	Very Little %	None %
Principals	67	22	11	0
SS Staff	52	35	7	6
Non-SS Staff	49	31	16	4

The SS staff and non-SS staff were asked to rate their ability to improve student achievement. Table 11 indicates that the SS staff rated themselves higher than the non-

SS staff, with 81% rating themselves very effective and 19% reporting somewhat effective compared to 61% and 38% for the non-SS staff.

Table 11

Percentage of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Ability to improve student achievement- Self Rated."

	Very Effective %	Somewhat Effective %	A little Effective %	Not at all Effective %
SS Staff	81	19	0	0
Non-SS Staff	55	34	1	0

Open-ended Survey Results

Each of the three groups was asked six open-ended questions regarding SS in their schools. The answers were analyzed for themes within each group and then across each group to compare similarities and differences.

The first question asked the respondents to describe some of the instructional decisions made by the leadership team that have had the biggest impact on student achievement. There were a total of 114 responses. Table 12 shows the most frequent answers among the three groups.

Table 12

Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Instructional Decisions"

Decision	Principal	SSI staff	Non-SSI
Increased/ new focus on reading	3	15	19
Increased use of data	3	8	7
Adjusting master schedule	4	9	5
Quality PD	3	10	6
Improving PLC's	2	8	8
Increase in tutoring options	0	6	5
Increase in technology	0	5	5
Freedom to design lesson plans	0	4	4
Use of facilitators/coaches	0	6	1
Increase in inquiry model	0	6	2

As the results show, all three groups rated the increased focus on reading as the number one decision that impacted student achievement. Respondents attributed growth to a variety of strategies, including Accelerated Reader, Reader's Workshop, guided reading, use of non-fiction text, Achieve 3000, and balanced literacy. The increased use of data to guide and adjust instruction, and providing staff with quality professional development were ranked high by all three groups. One non-SS staff member noted the value of "increased professional development conducted by our teachers, our experts.

This boosts credibility for the participants of the training and allows them to see that they can also become skilled on this particular 'strategy.'"

The impact of the schools' PLCs was frequently cited. One respondent stated that the positive change was due to the "focused, consistent work within PLCs. This work was led by the Academic Facilitator and administrators and helped us better understand the status of our teachers as well as what was needed to improve their practice."

Scheduling was noted as having a dual impact. First, respondents described the impact of adjusting the master schedule to be more flexible and better meet the needs of students. They also wrote about the importance of moving teachers to different positions. One principal wrote about the importance of "putting the right people in the right places – not just placing all strategic people in upper grades where scores might have big leaps more quickly." Other top responses included increased tutoring opportunities for students, increases in technology, freedom in designing their own lesson plans, increasing the use of the inquiry model, and use of Academic Facilitators and academic coaches.

The next question asked the participants what changes they would make to SSI. A total of 123 individuals responded. Table 13 shows the most frequent responses.

Table 13

Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Changes to SSI."

Changes	Principal	SSI Staff	Non-SSI
Offer bonuses to staff already in schools	0	1	9
Bonuses for all teachers who show growth	2	1	6
Change who is eligible for SS positions	2	9	16
Increase number of SS positions	3	10	18
Increase flexibility in SS hiring process	2	0	0
Make process more transparent	0	2	5
No changes needed	1	5	7

Overwhelmingly, the recommended changes have to do with bonuses that the SS staff received. Non-SS staffed respondents wrote about how teachers are selected to receive the bonuses. One participant wrote:

> The bonuses should be offered to teachers who have been effective at those schools. I have been doing the same job of the teachers that were strategically staffed and have not been rewarded for my efforts. As an EC teacher I am limited on the bonuses I can receive for student achievement. Both of my inclusion teachers from the last year were offered bonuses from the state to stay at my school for the next two years. This has not been offered to me.

The non-SS staff and the SS staff would like the following changes to be made: increase the number of teachers who receive bonuses, give bonuses to all teachers who show growth, give bonuses to teachers who are already in the school, and expand the program to include non-EOG teachers. The principal responses were focused more on increasing both the number of SS positions and the flexibility of when and how the SS is hired.

The three groups showed consistency when asked what they saw as the benefits of the SSI. Each group responded that the quality of teachers in the schools has improved.

The groups also agreed that the schools are now more focused and have a clearer vision. The SS staff and non-SS staff also noted that the quality of leadership of the SS principals has had a positive impact on their school. One SS staff member said:

> The biggest benefit is that a proven, high performance principal is in place in these buildings along with several staff members to support their growth efforts. This provides us with a leader who is instructionally focused and can maintain sight of what is necessary to improve teaching and learning at the school.

Other benefits mentioned are presented in Table 14 and include increased resources, bonuses for SS staff, a new sense of urgency to improve instruction, increased collaboration among staff, and the ability to remove weak or ineffective teachers.

Table 14

Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Benefits of SSI"

Benefits	Principal	SSI Staff	Non-SSI
Increase in effective teachers	3	14	13
Strong leadership principal	0	7	7
More focused vision/goals	3	2	4
Additional staff	0	0	8
Bonus money	0	5	4
Being able to remove weak teachers	2	0	3
Increased resources	1	1	7
Increased sense of urgency	1	2	4
Freedom and flexibility	0	4	8
No benefits	0	0	8

The participants were asked to describe the weaknesses of the SSI. The answers are highlighted in Table 15. A total of 118 individuals responded to the question.

Table 15

Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Weaknesses of SSI."

Weaknesses	Principal	SSI Staff	Non-SSI
Not all good teachers recognized with bonuses	2	7	8
Too much staff turnover	2	3	8
Staff leaving after SS commitment is over	3	4	4
Staff not understanding school setting	0	2	2
Low morale of staff	0	4	3
Favoritism of some staff	0	0	4
Finding effective teachers	2	0	2
Poor leadership	0	0	5
Reputation of being designated SSI school	0	0	3
Lack of support from district	2	1	1

The most frequent response from the three groups was that the program does not recognize and reward all good teachers. The SS and non-SS staff also noted that there was some favoritism among the SS staff, which impacted school morale. One respondent noted:

> I would say the one weakness that I have encountered was that there were some tensions in the beginning between the teachers that were already there and then when the Strategic Staff came in. Understandably the other teachers were upset that the Strategically Staffed teachers were coming in and receiving monetary bonus, while they have worked there for a number of years and not receiving anything.

One principal also noted the tension and said:

> I talked extensively with my SSI teachers before our arrival in our school in terms of coming to the school in a 'stealth fashion'- not coming in like they were going to be the saviors of student achievement. They needed (we all needed) to begin by building relationships with those that were already here at the school.

The groups identified staff turnover as another major weakness. This impacted the school due to the large number of new teachers each year, and the inability to retain the SS staff beyond their three year commitment. One non-SS staff member wrote "It keeps the school a revolving door. There is not dedication or commitment to the students. The teachers and administration get their money, and then they leave." Other noted weaknesses from the SS and non-SS staff included poor leadership, lack of freedom, and the negative reputation that comes with being labeled a SSI school.

The last two survey questions addressed the perceived internal and external barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in schools. The responses to internal barriers were extensive with limited overlap among the three groups. As shown in Table 16, the most frequent concern common to all three groups was student behavior.

Table 16

Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "Internal barriers to improving student achievement."

Internal Barriers	Principal	SSI Staff	Non-SSI
Too many weak teachers	2	6	6
Too many new staff members	2	5	3
Lack of staff buy-in	2	2	3
Student behavior problems	2	7	9
Not enough time	3	2	5
Class/school size	2	2	4
Parental involvement	1	1	8
Stress/low morale	2	2	9
ESL/EC support	0	2	5

Getting all staff members to support the vision and mission of the leadership team was also noted numerous times. One principal who described the challenge said that the "this too shall pass attitude among some of the entrenched staff. Possible expectation that I'll be somewhere else after three years and another philosophy will change things." A SS staff member agreed, and noted that "in order to improve student achievement, there needs to be a team of teachers who have a laser like focus on student achievement. Distractions of any kind are deadly and draining."

Time was another consistent barrier among the groups. Some respondents spoke about the lack of time during the school day to plan and complete paperwork. Principals spoke about time in regards to the three year commitment not being long enough and facing new challenges. As one principal stated, "This year we had to start all over again. Becoming a PreK-8 school has put us back where we started over 3 years ago. We have added so many new staff that we have had to rebuild our culture." SS and non-SS staff noted that disruptive students were not addressed effectively, and negatively impacted the classroom environment. Having too many weak teachers and new staff were also noted frequently among the groups.

One theme that emerged in both the internal and external barrier questions was parental involvement. One non-SS staff member expressed frustration, referring to "the attitude the parents pass on to the students. You can give the students all the resources in the world to help them learn, but you can't make them learn." Another SS member wrote a similar response citing the difficulty in making needed improvements because of "parents, communities, and poor role models. A culture of failure and ignorance persist despite the improvements made in school."

Table 17 shows that community support, living in poverty, language barriers, and high levels of transient students are concerns for the staff. Three responses were connected to the school or district: too much testing, changes to student assignment (e.g., changing to PreK-8), school/class size, lack of support for teachers, and the struggle to attract top teachers.

Table 17
Frequency of Principals, SS Staff, and Non-SS Staff for the Item "External barriers to increasing student achievement."

External Barriers	Principal	SSI Staff	Non-SSI
Parental involvement	2	5	18
Community involvement	2	4	5
Students living in poverty	2	4	7
School/class size	3	0	2
Transient student population	1	2	2
Language barriers	0	1	3
Too much testing	2	2	5
Failure to attract top teachers	1	2	3
Lack of support for teachers	1	1	3

The responses from the survey showed some consistencies among the three groups on impact and the benefits and weaknesses of the SSI. The three groups agreed that the increased focus on reading strategies has had the biggest impact on student achievement levels. The closed questions revealed that all three groups rated themselves relatively high on their ability to improve student achievement, and the input that teachers have on curriculum and instructional decisions.

4.1.4 Summary of Survey Results by Research Questions

The findings of each research question based on survey results are summarized in the next section.

1. What perceived impact did the SS and entire staff have on increasing student achievement?

Overall, the survey results from the three groups indicate that that the SSI has had a positive impact on student achievement and that the ability of the staff to improve student achievement increased after the first year of the SSI. One hundred percent of the principals ranked their current staff's ability to increase student achievement as "very effective" or "somewhat effective." The SS staff and non-SS staff gave similar rankings of 88% and 81% respectively. When asked to rate their own ability to increase student achievement, nearly 100% of the SS staff and non-SS staff rated themselves as "very effective" or "somewhat effective."

When asked about whether principals would rehire the same SS staff, the results were mixed with a majority stating that they would rehire some of the same individuals but not all. Four of the nine principals attributed the positive increases in student growth to the SS staff. The principals stated that the SS staff impacted student achievement by increasing the collaboration among teachers and leading and providing professional development and instructional support for the staff. The results of the survey indicate that none of the groups felt that the five allotted positions were enough to make the impact on student achievement that was needed.

2. What role do teachers have in school wide decision making processes in regards to student achievement?

The survey results suggest that overall most of the respondents feel that they have input in the decision making process. The principals gave the highest ranks with 100% of them indicating that the staff has "a great deal" or "some input." The non-Staff had the lowest rating with 12% answering that they have "no input" into decision making.

3. What does each group perceive as the benefits of SS?

The respondents answered the open ended questions with a variety of answers to the perceived benefits of SS. All three groups answered that the "increase in effective teachers" as the most frequent response. The two other most frequent answers for principals were more focused vision/goals, and being able to remove weak teachers. The SS staff most frequent answers were: strong leadership and principals, and bonus money. The non-SS staff responses included: additional staff, freedom and flexibility, and no benefits.

4. What does each group perceive as weaknesses of SS?

The survey results showed some consistency among the three groups with the top three answers being: staff leaving after SS commitment is over, not all good teachers recognized with bonus money, and too much staff turnover. Low morale was another one weakness that mentioned frequently by SS staff and non-SS staff. The non-SS staff differed from the other two groups with 5 respondents mentioning poor leadership as a weakness.

5. What does each group perceive as barriers to making greater gains in student achievement? (internal and external)

The groups did not show alignment in their responses to what they perceive as internal barriers to increasing student achievement. The principals cited a variety of

responses including; not enough time, too many weak teachers, too many new staff members, lack of staff buy-in, student behavior problems, class/school size, and stress/ low morale. The most frequent responses for the SS staff were: student behavior problems, too many weak teachers, and too many staff members. The non-SS staff top answers were: student behavior problems, parental involvement, and stress/ low morale.

In regards to external barriers, there was consistency among the three groups. All three groups believe that parental involvement, community involvement, and students living in poverty were major barriers. Other frequent responses included: too much testing and class size.

6. What changes would each group make to improve the SS?

Overwhelmingly the majority of the responses to what changes they would make to the SSI addressed who and how individuals received the SS bonuses. Specific changes that were frequently mentioned included: offer bonuses to staff already in the SS schools, offer more bonuses, and change who is eligible for the bonuses.

7. If given the opportunity, would teachers and principals make the same decisions about working in an SS school?

The non-SS staff responses on whether they would transfer if given an opportunity were split with 53% responding that they would remain in the their current school and 47% responding no they would transfer.

8. What factors/characteristics did principals use to select SS staff and teachers use to decide to accept a SS position?

The principals were given a list six options with an option of adding another answer regarding the factors they considered when hiring SS staff. The principals were able to choose more than one answer. The three most frequent answers included; previous EOG/EOC proficiency and growth scores (89%), they had worked with the teacher at another school (77%) and recommendations (67%).

The SS staff was asked to answer an open ended question on the factors they considered before accepting the SS position. The two most frequent responses were they wanted to work the principal of the school and the bonus money.

1. How effective are the PLCs in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?

Each of the three groups was asked to rank the effectiveness of the PLC's in helping teachers collaborate to improve student achievement. The principals gave the highest ratings with 100% answering "very effective" or "somewhat effective." The SS staff had 81% give the same rankings. The non-SS staff gave the lowest ranking with only 61% answering "very effective" or "somewhat effective" and 12% responding "not effective at all." It is worth noting that improving PLC's was one of the more frequent responses by SS staff and non-SS staff on an open ended questions about positive instructional changes made by the leadership team.

2. What level of flexibility do teachers have in designing lessons?

Each group was asked to rate the amount of flexibility teachers have in designing lesson plans. The principals gave the highest ratings with 67% answering "a great deal" compared to 53% of SS staff and 49% of non-SS staff. The non-SS staff respondents showed variance from the other two groups with 20% of them stating that they had "very little" or "none."

3. What instructional decisions have had the biggest impact on student achievement?

Each group was asked an open ended question to describe some of the instructional decisions that have had the biggest impact on student achievement that were made by the school leadership. The most frequent responses among the three groups included: increased/new focus on reading, increase use of data, quality professional development, and improving PLC's.

4.2 School Effectiveness Results

The following sections describe the results of the change in VAM and Days for the three cohorts. Each cohort will be presented separately, and then the results will be aggregated to examine all the cohorts together. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the outcomes, and nonparametric statistics were used to examine differences from year to year. Nonparametric statistics were used because of the small sample size for each cohort.

Cohort 1

Table 18 displays the minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations for the Cohort 1 schools (N=7) for the VAM and the Days outcome variables from 2008 to 2011. The 2008 school year serves as a baseline for the schools' data prior to the three years of being designated as Strategically Staffed. The means mathematics and reading VAM and Days increased every year, from 2008 to 2011.

Table 18

Cohort 1 2008 to 2011 Math and Reading VAM and Days Minimums, Maximums, Means, and Standard Deviations Values (N=7)

Subject	Measure	Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Math						
	VAM	2008	1.0	94.0	40.9	34.3
		2009	4.0	99.0	52.3	37.8
		2010	16.0	99.0	59.4	32.8
		2011	32.0	99.0	68.6	24.8
	Days	2008	165.0	202.0	177.3	12.9
		2009	164.0	215.0	184.1	17.3
		2010	174.0	210.0	185.3	12.5
		2011	176.0	215.0	189.3	13.7
Reading						
	VAM	2008	8	98	41.1	30.3
		2009	4	99	47.1	35.8
		2010	22	99	49.4	33.8
		2011	17	98	64.1	29.2
	Days	2008	175	189	179.7	4.5
		2009	172	195	180.9	7.7
		2010	178	193	181.7	6.0
		2011	177	188	182.1	4.0

The results of the significance change for the first year are reported in Table 19. There was a significant change for the first year in math, but there was not a significant change in reading. In math, the VAM scores increased for five of the seven schools and increased in Days for six of the seven schools. However in reading, there was not a significant change with only four of the seven schools increasing for both VAM and Days.

Table 19

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests for Cohort 1 for the Change in the First Year (2008 to 2009)

Subject	Measures	Increased	Decreased	Z	
Math	VAM	5	2	1.86	*
	Days	6	1	2.117	*
Reading	VAM	4	3	.51	ns
	Days	4	3	.61	ns

Note. * $p<.01$; ns=not statistically significant

For Cohort 1, four years of data were available for both VAM and Days. Friedman tests were used to examine the VAM and Days changes in rank across the four years. The results are shown in Table 20. In math, there was a significant change in the mean rank values for both the VAM and Days outcome variables, with mean values increasing from 2008 to 2011. In reading, the mean rank values were not statistically significant for either the VAM or Days outcome variables.

Table 20

Cohort 1 Freidman Results

		Mean Rank						
Subject	Measures	2008	2009	2010	2011	Chi-sq	*df*	
Math	VAM	1.4	2.1	2.7	3.7	12.5	3	**
	Days	1.1	2.4	2.5	3.9	16.8	3	**
Reading	VAM	2.1	2.7	2.6	3.0	2.0	3	ns
	Days	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.9	.82	3	ns

Cohort 2

The following table displays the minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations for the Cohort 2 schools (*N*=7) for the VAM and the Days outcome variables from 2009 to 2011. The 2009 school year served as a baseline. The schools in Cohort 2 completed the three year SSI at the end of the 2011-12 school year. The means for reading VAM increased each year with the Days increasing the first year and remaining the same the next two years.

Table 21

Cohort 2 2009 to 2011 Math and Reading VAM and Days Minimums, Maximums, Means, and Standard Deviations Values (N=7)

Subject	Measure	Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Math						
	VAM	2009	5.0	86.0	44.7	25.4
		2010	10.0	83.0	55.7	25.1
		2011	14.0	93.0	55.6	26.2
	Days	2009	165.0	191.0	178.3	7.8
		2010	172.0	186.0	180.3	4.7
		2011	171.0	196.0	182.0	8.0
Reading						
	VAM	2009	12	70	47.1	24.2
		2010	16	73	49.9	21.9
		2011	25	82	49.4	23.3
	Days	2009	175	182	179.1	2.9
		2010	177	182	179.7	1.8
		2011	178	183	180.0	1.8

The results from the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Cohort 2 for change in the first year (2009 to 2010) are reported in Table 22. Scores for VAM and Days increased

in five of the seven schools for math and reading during the first year of implementation, but there were no statistically significant changes for VAM and Days for math or reading

Table 22

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests for Cohort 2 for the Change in the First Year (2009to 2010)

Subject	Measures	Increased	Decreased	Tied	Z	
Math	VAM	5	2	0	1.18	ns
	Days	5	2	0	.93	ns
Reading	VAM	5	2	0	.51	ns
	Days	3	2	2	.27	ns

Note. * $p<.01$; ns=not statistically significant

For Cohort 2, three years of data were available for both VAM and Days. Friedman tests were used to examine the VAM and Days changes in rank across the three years. The mean rank values were not statistically significant for either the VAM or Days outcome variables for reading or math.

Table 23

Cohort 2 Friedman Results

		Mean Rank					
Subject	Measures	2009	2010	2011	Chi-sq	*df*	
Math	VAM	1.6	2.1	2.3	2.0	2	ns
	Days	1.6	2.1	2.4	2.3	2	ns
Reading	VAM	1.7	1.9	2.4	2.0	2	ns
	Days	1.9	1.9	2.2	.64	2	ns

Cohort 3

The following table displays the minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations for the Cohort 1 schools (*N*=5) for the VAM and the Days outcome variables from 2010 and 2011. The 2010 school year serves as a baseline for the schools data prior to being designated as Strategically Staffed in 2011. The means mathematics VAM and Days decreased between 2010 and 2011. The means reading showed small gains in both VAM and Days.

Table 24

Cohort 3 2010 to 2011 Math and Reading VAM and Days Minimums, Maximums, Means, and Standard Deviations Values (N=5)

Subject	Measure	Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Math						
	VAM	2010	39.0	74.0	54.6	15.2
		2011	6.0	82.0	46.8	34.0
	Days	2010	178.0	184.0	180.4	2.6
		2011	165.0	191.0	178.6	11.2
Reading						
	VAM	2010	12	70	47.1	24.2
		2011	16	73	49.9	21.9
	Days	2010	175	182	179.1	2.9
		2011	177	182	179.7	1.8

The results from the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Cohort 3 for change in the first year (2010 to 2011) are reported in Table 25. Mean scores for VAM and Days increased in two of the five schools for math, and three of the five schools for reading during the first year of implementation. There was no statistically significant change for VAM or Days in math and reading.

Table 25

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests for Cohort 3 for the Change in the First Year (2010 to 2011)

Subject	Measures	Increased	Decreased	Tied	Z	
Math	VAM	2	3	0	.67	ns
	Days	2	3	0	.54	ns
Reading	VAM	3	2	0	.14	ns
	Days	3	2	0	.54	ns

Note. * $p<.01$; ns=not statistically significant

All Cohorts

The descriptive statistics for all schools ($N=19$) using the VAM and Days values a year prior to and immediately after receiving the intervention are reported in Table 26.In math and reading, the VAM and Days mean values increased, but none of the changes were statistically significant. In math, the increase for VAM from the 46 percentile to the 52 percentile ($t=1.2$, $df=18$, $p=.23$) and increase in Days from 178 Days to 181 Days ($t=1.6$, $df=18$, $p=.12$) was not statistically significant. In reading, the increase for VAM from the 40 percentile to the 44 percentile ($t=.5$, $df=18$, $p=.62$) and increase in Days from 179 Days to 180 Days ($t=1.0$, $df=18$, $p=.33$) was not statistically significant

Table 26

Cohorts 1-3 2008 to 2011 Math and Reading VAM and Days Minimums, Maximums, Means, and Standard Deviations Values (N=19)

Subject	Measure	Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Math						
	VAM	Pre	1	94	45.9	26.3
		Post	4	99	52.1	30.9
	Days	Pre	165	202	178.5	8.9
		Post	164	215	181.3	11.9
Reading						
	VAM	Pre	4	98	40.3	28.3
		Post	4	99	43.7	27.1
	Days	Pre	175	189	178.9	3.6
		Post	172	195	179.7	4.7

4.3 Summary

The results of the school effectiveness data analysis indicate that the SSI schools saw some small positive change in the quality of instruction as it relates to VAM and Days. The mean in both reading and math did increase for each cohort over time; however, only the Cohort 1 math results showed any statistical significance.

Chapter Five will review the findings and the results of the study in relation to the research questions and previously discussed literature and studies. Explanations will be provided for trends and differences among the results. Lastly, recommendations for next steps will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose and findings of the study. The results are then discussed in relation to previous studies for commonalities and differences. The strengths and limitations of the study are also examined. Finally, recommendations for future research and implementation of similar initiatives are highlighted.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that SSI has had on improving student achievement as perceived by different stakeholders in the SSI schools. A mixed method approach was used to determine not only if the initiative has been successful as measured by VAM and Days data, but also to describe the factors that have the biggest impact on increasing student achievement, and the challenges the schools still face.

5.1 Findings

The findings from the survey revealed some similarities and differences among the principals, SS staff, and non-SS Staff in regard to the SSI. The principals expressed mixed feelings about whether they would rehire staff for the SS positions. A majority of the principals (76%) thought that the allotted SS positions were not enough to have a meaningful impact on increasing student achievement, and they expressed the need to

increase the number. SS staff and non-SS staff expressed similar opinions in the open-ended responses where they ranked the need to increase the number of staff members who receive incentives as a needed change and a weakness of the SSI.

Similarly, all three groups agreed that a major internal barrier of the SSI was that the SS schools faced high levels of teacher turnover each year and that the schools still had large numbers of weak or ineffective teachers. They expressed concern that as the three year commitment ended many of the SS staff and principals were leaving the school and creating more vacancies.

Similarities were also seen in the opinions of each group on which instructional decisions have had the biggest impact on student achievement. There was clear consensus on five responses: implementing new reading strategies or curricula, increased use of data, adjusting the master schedule, providing teachers with quality professional development, and improving the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The effectiveness of PLCs was reinforced in all three groups' responses; 79% of them agreed that their schools' PLCs were very or somewhat effective.

The results from the survey suggest that having a strong principal has a major impact in two ways. First, the responses from the SS staff indicate that knowing the principal as an effective leader was a major factor in their decision to go to the SS school. The leadership of the principal was also recognized by the SS staff and non-SS Staff as one of the main benefits of the SSI. Overall, 107 participants thought that their staffs were very effective (30%) or somewhat effective (53%) at improving student achievement levels.

The quantitative findings from the VAM and Days data suggest that the SSI has not had a significant impact on the effectiveness of teachers in math or reading over the duration of the initiative. While there was a statistically significant increase in math scores for VAM and Days for Cohort 1 after the first year, the data indicate that it was the only cohort that did so, and only for the first year. The school effectiveness data showed a pattern of positive increases in both VAM and Days for math and reading for Cohort 1 over the four year time period. The other two cohorts did not show consistent patterns. Cohort 2 showed an initial increase in both areas, but then showed little or no change. Cohort 3 had only two years of data and showed a negative change in math VAM and Days and only very small growth in reading VAM and Days.

5.2 Links to Previous Research

Many of the findings from this study align with research discussed earlier in this paper. Similar to the theories of Weber (Weber in Lemert, 2004), Johnson H. (2008) and Johnson O. (2008), the demographics of the neighborhood impact the schooling of students. Participants in this study agreed that parental involvement, students living in poverty, and lack of community support were the three largest external barriers they faced. One respondent wrote, "One third of our students live in houses where the parents are unable (due to education, language, or employment options) to help children with their school work. This is a huge problem and no resources have been allocated to address these challenges." Some of the participants stated that the stress of working with high percentages of disadvantaged students discourages high quality teachers coming to or staying at the school.

Previous research by Duke et al., (2007), Mac Iver (2004), Mac Iver and Balfanz (2010) and Weatherfield and Applefield (2004) found that many schools undergoing CSR reforms failed due to the lack of resources, lack of technical knowledge about effective curriculum and instruction, getting the staff to support the vision and mission of the school, and unstable operating environments (teacher and principal mobility). Based on the responses to the survey, it appears that most SS schools do not see lack of resources or technical knowledge as an issue. In fact, participants gave high ranks to quality of professional development, support from Academic Facilitators, and the increase in technology and other resources. Based on the survey results, a high number of SS staff are serving in Academic Facilitator positions. While some respondents voiced concerns that too many people that received bonuses while serving in non-teaching positions, the findings suggests that the Academic Facilitators have helped to provide the SS schools with curriculum and instructional support that they need. Having adequate instructional support in struggling schools is a positive difference between the findings in this study and previous research (Duke et al., 2007).

The findings of this study are aligned with the other two concerns: getting the staff to support the vision and mission of the school, and unstable operating environments (teacher and principal mobility). Respondents from all three groups stressed the difficulty of getting all staff members to support the changes that the principals attempted to implement. As already discussed, one of the most frequent noted weaknesses of the SSI was the high numbers of vacancies and teacher turnover.

The findings from this study suggest that the SSI has been successful in addressing many of the recommendations made by previous research. First, the surveys

show that the staffs at SS schools believe that they have strong principals leading the schools, that decisions are made based on data, and that they are building effective PLCs to increase collaboration among the staff. This is important, because previous research (Duke, 2006, Graczweseki et al., 2007, Rowan & Miller, 2007, and Wetherall & Applefield, 2004) suggests that not having a strong leader or effective PLCs are major reasons for the failure of school reform.

5.3 Explanation of Outcomes

The results indicate the SSI has shown some success in implementing the tenets of the SSI discussed earlier in the paper. The first tenet is that a great leader is needed, a principal with a proven track record of success in increasing student achievement. Also, great teachers will not go to a troubled school without a great leader as a principal (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). The results of this survey suggest that the district has had success with this goal given the consistent number of responses from SS staff that they moved to the SS school because of the principal. The SS staff and non-SS staff both mentioned strong leadership as the most frequent response to the survey item that asked the strengths of SSI.

The second tenet of the SSI states that "A team needs to go to the school so a person is not alone in taking on this challenging assignment; there is strength and support in numbers (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). Based on the findings of the survey and VAM and Days data, it does not appear that the limited allotments given to principals have had as much of an impact on student achievement as the district had hoped.

The survey results suggest that the third tenet of removing staff members who are not supportive has not been as easy to accomplish. Based on the responses to the survey,

it appears that there are still teachers who have not supported the new vision or mission of the school or are not effective in the schools. This could be due to the difficulty that the schools have had in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers. Some schools have had to keep weak teachers because they already have so many other vacancies.

The next SSI tenet, that "principals must be given the time and authority to reform the school, and be freed from the district list of non- negotiables that constrain autonomy (Travers & Christiansen, 2010) appears to be somewhat successful. Several individuals from each group commented that three years was not enough time to make the necessary changes; they also mentioned the lack of truefreedom and flexibility from district mandates. On the other hand, SS staff and non-SS staff wrote about the increased flexibility in writing lesson plans and moving away from the district mandated reading program that they viewed as ineffective.

The last tenet of SSI states that "not all job assignments are equal in difficulty and compensation should be varied to match" (Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

This tenet did not align with the opinions of the survey respondents. All three groups stated that a weakness of the SSI was that there are not enough SS positions, and that how individuals are chosen needs to change. Teachers of non-EOG courses expressed great frustration at not being eligible for incentives. Teachers who were at the school before the school was designated as SSI believe that they deserve bonuses as well.

A review of the results reveals a difference between the schools' effectiveness as determined by the quantitative VAM and Days data and the results of the survey. The school effectiveness data suggest that the tenets of the SSI have had no significant impact on improving the effectiveness at the school. However, the results from the survey

suggest that the individuals working in the school have seen positive changes in teacher effectiveness. The differences may be a result of several factors. First, the design of the VAM and Days ranks the schools in the district among themselves. Although a school may show positive growth, a comparison with other schools will result in a lower scale score. The other factor is time. Research discussed earlier suggests that comprehensive school reform takes a minimum of three years, and in most places, much longer (Duke, 2006). The data collected for this study included four years of data for Cohort 1 and only two years for Cohort 3. It may be that the impact of the initiative has not yet resulted in an increase in VAM or Days.

The lack of improvement in the VAM and Days scores could also be a result of the high teacher turnover rates that were mentioned in the survey. Constantly hiring and training new teachers impacts a school and PLC's ability to move forward with changes as fast as they would like. It is also worth noting that the ABC district has had a policy of displacing teachers each year from schools with overages to schools with vacancies.

The survey revealed some differences among the three groups. These differences were most apparent when respondents were asked about the benefits and weaknesses of the SSI. Non-SS staff members were much more likely to express frustration over not receiving bonuses, having feelings of being underappreciated, or suffering from low morale. The SS group included a high number of Academic Facilitators (AF), which could explain the differences in ranking the importance of Academic Facilitators and coaches as effective change agents.

Results also revealed a marked difference in how the SS staff and non- SS staff viewed the leadership team. Non-SS staff was more likely to view the leadership team as

a weakness of the SSI. This could be because many of the SS staff were chosen by their principals to go to the school and thus feel supported by them. Again, a higher level of AFs and Assistant Principals in the SS group also can affect the results because at many schools, they are part of the leadership team and are not likely to view themselves as a weakness.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations

The findings of this study have the potential to guide reform efforts in the ABC school district and beyond, as educational leaders weigh the financial costs of the SSI against student outcomes and perceived benefits. The design of this study expanded the knowledge on the SSI regarding what is and is not working from the viewpoint of different stakeholders in each school. This study included the perspectives of stakeholders that had not been included in any previous research. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher was able to provide a more thorough explanation of the impact of the SSI. The role of the researcher as a principal in the ABC district ended up being an advantage because of the personal connections to district leaders who supported the research and helped to identify eligible participants and data that was needed.

The study is limited in scope to only one school district and a small percentage of people within the district, but it does include the individuals who were most directly affected by the SSI. Although 32 out of 37 eligible participants responded from the SS staffing group, there were no respondents from Cohort 1. The lack of responses from Cohort 1 impacted the researcher's ability to look at differences among the cohorts. The other two groups had almost equal representation from each cohort. Another limitation to

this study is that only non-SS staff that remained at the school for the duration of the initiative were included. The decision to exclude those staff members who left was made to ensure that the responses reflected changes over the years, but it is important to realize that excluding those who left may skew the results.

Causal inferences will be limited. This study provides a description of the SSI schools, but any changes at the SSI schools could be due to factors not considered in this study. It is worth noting that the ABC district has faced great budget woes over the past three years. The SSI schools were impacted by budget cuts, staff layoffs, and increases in the number of high poverty students.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, there are several recommendations for future studies and for the policy makers of the ABC school district. First, based on the responses of the survey, district officials should consider developing a longitudinal plan for retaining effective teachers at the schools during and beyond the three year commitment. It is clear from the results of this study that implementing and sustaining the reform efforts cannot be accomplished with just a three year plan. The longitudinal plan could also incorporate strategies to provide extra support to teachers in these schools, especially new teachers. One idea would be to provide paid professional development opportunities to all teachers in SSI schools. This would be an incentive to remain at the school and provide them with additional strategies and support to be successful during the school year.

Another recommendation is to take a closer look at the reading programs that the SS schools have implemented to see if there is one program that is most effective for the

challenges these schools face. Given the large number of strategies and programs that are used, an investigation of their relative effectiveness would be worthwhile.

The last recommendation is to look in depth at the individuals who chose to leave and their reasons for doing so. The results from this study indicate that about half of the non- SS staff would transfer out of their SS schools if given the opportunity, and that the schools face high levels of teacher mobility. Understanding the reasons why some teachers stay while others choose to leave could lead to policy or school level initiatives to increase the stability of the staff.

5.6 Conclusion

The results from this study exemplify the complexities that school leaders face in executing meaningful reform. Despite, the careful planning and focused alignment to previous research, ABC district is still struggling to implement the SSI in a way that results in high levels of change in student achievement and teacher effectiveness. School leaders, however, should not dismiss the efforts of the ABC district. It is important to remember that only one of the cohorts studied had completed the three year cycle. The survey results from this study suggest that stakeholders can clearly describe positive changes that the SS schools have seen as a result of the SSI and very few respondents believe that the initiative should end.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Principals

Closed Questions

1. Describe your Strategic Staffing status by choosing the category that best describes your current employment.
2. Identify your Strategic Staffing Cohort.
3. How many years' experience do you have as a principal?
4. How would you rate the ability of your Strategically Staffed teachers to improve student achievement?
5. How would you rate the overall ability of your Strategically Staffed teachers to improve student achievement?
6. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?
7. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?
8. How effective are your school's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?
9. How much input do teachers have in decision making processes involving curriculum and instructional decisions for the school?
10. How much flexibility do teachers have in designing their lessons?

Open-ended Questions

1. Which schools did you previously serve as a principal?

2. What factors did you consider when deciding which teachers to hire strategically?

3. What data sources did you use to hire them?

4. Would you rehire the Strategically Staffed teachers you hired? Why or why not?

5. Describe the impact the Strategically Staffed teachers had on student achievement.

6. Were the 5 allotted positions given for Strategically Staffed teachers enough to have an impact on student achievement? If not, how many more would you recommend?

7. Describe some of the instructional decisions that have had the biggest impact on student achievement that you made as a Strategically Staffed Principal.

8. What changes would you make to Strategic Staffing Initiative?

9. What are the benefits of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

10. What are the weaknesses of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

11. What do you perceive as internal barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

12. What do you perceive as external barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

Staff: Non-strategically Staffed

Closed Questions

1. How many years' experience do you have as an educator?
2. Identify your school's Strategic Staffing cohort?
3. What grades/roles have you taught/held in the last three years?
4. How would you rate your ability to improve student achievement?
5. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?
6. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?
7. How effective are your school's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?
8. How much input do you have in decision making processes involving curriculum and instructional decisions for the school?
9. How much flexibility do you have in designing their lessons?
10. If given an opportunity to transfer to another position in the district, would you have chosen to stay at your current school since the Strategic Staffing Initiative began?

Open-ended Questions

1. Describe some of the instructional decisions that have had the biggest impact on student achievement that you made as a Strategically Staffed

2. What changes would you make to Strategic Staffing Initiative?

3. What are the benefits of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

4. What are the weaknesses of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

5. What do you perceive as internal barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

6. What do you perceive as external barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

Teachers: Strategically Staffed

Closed Questions

1. How many years' experience do you have as an educator?

2. Describe your Strategic Staffing Status by choosing the category that best describes your current employment.

3. Identify your school's Strategic Staffing cohort?

4. What grades/roles have you taught/held in the last three years?

5. How would you rate your ability to improve student achievement?

6. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?

7. How would you rate the overall ability of your entire staff to improve student achievement in the first year of the Strategically Staffed Initiative?

8. How effective are your school's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?

9. How much input do you have in decision making processes involving curriculum and instructional decisions for the school?

10. How much flexibility do you have in designing their lessons?

Open-ended Questions

1. Why did you decide to move to a Strategically Staffed school?

2. What factors impacted your decision to accept a Strategically Staffed position?

3. What role do you have in school-wide decision making in regards to improving student achievement?

4. What changes would you make to the Strategic Staffing Initiative?

5. Describe some of the instructional decisions that have had the biggest impact on student achievement that you made as a Strategically Staffed

6. What changes would you make to Strategic Staffing Initiative?

7. What are the benefits of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

8. What are the weaknesses of Strategic Staffing Initiative?

9. What do you perceive as internal barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

10. What do you perceive as external barriers to making greater gains in student achievement in your school?

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTION AND SURVEY ALIGNMENT

Table 27

Crosswalk of Research Questions and Surveys

	Principal	Non-StrategicallyStaffed	StrategicallyStaffed
1. What is the perception of the groups about the Strategic Staffed Initiative as it relates to the aim to increase student achievement in their school?	5,6,7	6,7,8	8,9
2. What perceived impact did the SS staff have on increasing student achievement?	11,12,13,14	13	15
3. What role do teachers have in school-wide decision making process in regard to student achievement?	9,10	10,11	11,12
4. What impact does the schools PLC have in helping teachers collaborate to improve instruction?	8	9	10
5. What does each group perceive as the benefits of SSI?	17	15	17
6. What does each group perceive as weaknesses of SSI?	18	16	18
7. What does each group perceive as barriers to making greater gains in student achievement (internal and external)?	19,20	17,18	19,20
8. What changes would each group make to improve the SSI?	16	14	16
9. What factors/ characteristics did principals use to select SS staff and teachers use to decide to accept a SS position?	11		12,13