

A CASE STUDY OF THE STRATEGIC STAFFING INITIATIVE USED IN
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

KENDRA D. MARCH. A case study of the strategic staffing initiative used in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. (Under the direction of Dr. DAVID DUNAWAY)

Accountability standards challenge schools to provide quality education for all students and to ensure that all students are on grade level by the end of the school year. If schools fall short of this challenge failing to make at least one year of progress, schools are at risk of being identified as low performing. In this age of accountability, schools across the country are seeking effective reform strategies to turn around low performing schools. The Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) is a reform model that was instituted in 2008-2009 school year in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System. The initiative was implemented to improve student achievement in six low performing elementary schools and one low performing middle school

This mixed methods study examined the effects of the SSI at six elementary schools in cohort 1 of the initiative over three school years (2008 – 2009 to 2011-2012). The middle school was not included in this study. The six participating schools were paired with six non-participating schools with similar demographics. The schools were compared using the North Carolina End of Grade school composite data and adequate yearly progress data. Stakeholder satisfaction survey data were also examined to determine if satisfaction improved over three years.

The SSI focuses on the effective use of time, personnel and resources with the principal serving as the major impetus for change. Data revealed that SSI schools outperformed the comparison schools in the areas of student achievement, growth measures and adequate yearly progress. The student achievement data varies from year

to year as did adequate yearly progress. The SSI is a unique reform model in that the focus is on leadership as opposed to curriculum programs. Selected leaders are given freedom and flexibility to make decisions related to time, personnel and resources based on the needs of students.

Implications for practitioners include assigning hiring high performance leaders for low performing schools. This study reveals that if leaders are carefully selected and given the freedom and flexibility to make decisions regarding time, personnel and resources, there is an opportunity to raise student achievement and turn around a low performing school. This study also provides implications for other industries looking to turn around low performing organizations. This initiative could be replicated in educational settings or other settings seeking reform. Further research exploring this model in other educational settings including rural school districts and with middle or high schools would add to the current body of research. Further research is also needed on the SSI in other industries and organizations.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of my big brother, Kerry Doran March; my paternal and maternal grandparents, Jesse and Ella March and Thomas and Millie Rhynehardt; and my niece, Jaida Monique Bray.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Overview	1
The Evolution of Education Reform	3
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	4
Statement of the Problem	5
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Strategic Staffing Initiative	6
The Strategic Staffing Initiative	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Significance of the Study	10
Delimitations of the Study	10
Limitations of the Study	11
Assumptions	12
Summary	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Introduction	14
School Reform Efforts in the United States	14
Definition of the Tenth Amendment to the American Constitution	14
Equity-Based Reform	15
Standards-Based Reform	20
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act	26

Race to the Top	27
Comprehensive School Reform	29
Direct Instruction	32
School Development Program	32
Success for All	33
School Reform Efforts in North Carolina	34
School Reform Efforts in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	35
Strategic Staffing Initiative	38
Personnel	39
Time	40
Monetary Resources	40
Formative Research on Strategic Staffing Initiative	42
Summary of Formative Research	43
Summary	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	45
Research Design	45
Research Questions	46
Procedures	47
Participants and Setting	47
Data Collection	51
Instrumentation	52
Data Analysis	53
Summary	53

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS	55
Introduction	55
Description of Schools	56
Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools	57
Bruns and Walter G. Byers Elementary Schools	57
Devonshire and Hidden Valley Elementary Schools	58
Reid Park and Billingsville Elementary Schools	58
Sterling and Highland Renaissance Elementary Schools	59
Westerly Hills and Sedgefield Elementary Schools	59
Description of Students	60
Description of Staff	60
Description of Parents	61
Quantitative Results	61
Bruns Avenue and Walter G. Byers Elementary Schools	61
Devonshire and Hidden Valley Elementary Schools	64
Reid Park and Billingsville Elementary Schools	66
Sterling and Highland Elementary Schools	67
Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools	69
Westerly Hills and Sedgefield Elementary Schools	71
Achievement Gains and Losses	73
School Performance Data	75
Overall Growth Summary	76
Adequate Yearly Progress	77

Summary of AYP	79
Student Attendance and Suspension	80
Student Attendance	81
Suspension Summary	81
Parent Satisfaction Survey	82
Summary of Parent Satisfaction	85
Student Satisfaction Survey	85
Summary of Student Survey	88
Staff Satisfaction Survey	88
2008-2009 Staff Survey Results	88
2009-2010 Staff Survey Results	91
2010-2011 Staff Survey Results	91
Summary of Staff Satisfaction Surveys	93
Autoethnography of a Strategic Staffing Principal	93
Background	94
The Work Begins	94
Reflective Assessment of 5 Tenets of SSI	97
Transformational Leadership	97
Building and Hiring a Leadership Team	98
Flexibility to Remove Staff	99
Time and Authority to Reform the School	99
Differentiated Compensation	100
Analysis of Years One Through Three	101

Year One	101
Year Two	101
Year Three	102
Chapter Summary	103
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL THOUGHTS	104
Discussion	104
Examination of the Strategic Staffing Initiative	104
Student Achievement	105
Adequate Yearly Progress	105
Growth	106
Attendance and Suspension	108
Impact of Collaborative Culture	108
Parent Satisfaction	110
Student Satisfaction	110
Staff Satisfaction	111
Autoethnography of a SSI Principal	112
Implications for Practice	113
Recommendations for Future Research	114
Final Thoughts	115
REFERENCES	116

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: SSI and Non-SSI Schools	48
TABLE 2: SSI and Non-SSI Schools	56
TABLE 3: Reading and math scores for Bruns Avenue Elementary School and Walter G. Byers Elementary School	63
TABLE 4: Reading and math scores for Devonshire Elementary School and Hidden Valley Elementary School	65
TABLE 5: Reading and math scores for Reid Park Elementary School and Billingsville Elementary School:	67
TABLE 6: Reading and math scores for Sterling Elementary School and Highland Elementary School	68
TABLE 7: Reading and math scores for Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools	70
TABLE 8: Reading and math scores for Westerly Hills Elementary School and Sedgefield Elementary School	72
TABLE 9: Achievement gains and losses	74
TABLE 10: Achievement gains and losses	75
TABLE 11: School performance data	76
TABLE 12: Adequate Yearly Progress	79
TABLE 13: School suspensions	81
TABLE 14: Parent satisfaction survey	83
TABLE 15: Student satisfaction survey	87
TABLE 16: Staff survey questions 2008-2009; 2009-2010; 2010-2011	89
TABLE 17: Staff survey results 2008-2009 (Results represent the mean score for Teachers and Instructional Assistants)	90
TABLE 18: Staff survey results 2010-2011 (Results are the mean score for Teacher Assistances & Teachers)	92

TABLE 19: Three year plan

96

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: The Four Intervention models	28
FIGURE 2: Reading and math scores for Bruns Avenue Elementary School and Walter G. Byers Elementary School	63
FIGURE 3: Reading and math scores for Devonshire Elementary School and Hidden Valley Elementary School	65
FIGURE 4: Reading and math scores for Reid Park Elementary School and Billingsville Elementary School	67
FIGURE 5: Reading and math scores for Sterling Elementary School and Highland Elementary School	69
FIGURE 6: Reading and math scores for Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools	71
FIGURE 7: Reading and math scores for Westerly Hills Elementary School and Sedgefield Elementary School	73

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

While Americans have remained supportive of public education, they have also remained steadfast in questioning its goals, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. The debate over effective teaching methods has raged since the beginning of the free school movement in the 1960s (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

John Locke (1642) shared his viewpoint on education in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke believed that the mind was a “blank slate” that is filled throughout life as individuals garner new experiences (Woolhouse & Woolhouse, 1971). Locke’s essay served as a foundational piece for empiricism (Woolhouse & Woolhouse, 1971).

Benjamin Franklin followed Locke with the development of the American Philosophical Society. The members of the society sought to promote scholarly research and publications, and included a number of prominent participants, including George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, James Madison, and John Marshall (Franklin & Oberg, 2009). Benjamin Franklin viewed school reform through the “European Enlightenment” lens, and believed that education should center upon student-led experiments and individual experiences (Tyack, James & Benevot, 1995). During the Industrial Revolution, school reform focused on compulsory attendance, professional

development, national testing for all students, and the creation of a national curriculum (Faler, 1974).

Jack Jennings (2011), President and CEO of the Center on Education Policy, shared his views on education reform: “I believe that American school reform has not been bold enough or comprehensive enough to substantially improve public education” (Jennings, p. 5).

President Barack Obama (2011) shared similar sentiments in his State of the Union address:

Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree. And so the question is whether all of us—as citizens, and as parents—are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed.

In the early 1900s, business leaders began to have a voice in school reform. For example, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and other business leaders formed the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913 to support public education for all, without distinction of race, sex, or creed (Chernow, 2007). The group members were not comfortable with public education for white males only, and worked to reform the system so that it provided a more inclusive environment. Between 1900 and 1920, the Rockefeller Foundation spent more on public education than local, state, or national government agencies combined (Chernow, 2007).

The Evolution of Education Reform.

As the country continued to evolve, school reform efforts occurred alongside key historical changes (Peterson, 1985). Shortly after the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s, school reform initiatives focused on meeting the needs of immigrant children (Rothman, 2001). The Baby Boom of the 1950s brought a burgeoning number of students to public schools across the country (Jones, 1980). A decade later, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s turned the focus of school reform to equal education for all (Weiner, 1993).

Public reports on education have had a significant impact on school reform efforts (Cross, 1984). For example, in 1966, James Coleman, under the authority of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, studied 600,000 children in 4,000 schools across the nation (Coleman, 1966). The *Coleman Report* concluded that the minority poor were educationally disadvantaged and proposed that desegregation through busing was the best solution to closing the gap between Caucasian affluent and middle class students and minority poor students (Jencks, 1972).

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, charter by President Ronald Regan, published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Gardner, et al., 1983). The publication of this report is a landmark event in American education history, as it spurred school reform efforts across the country (Gardner, Lawson, Baker, 1983). The report stated that American schools were failing and inspired a number of key local, state, and federal school reform efforts (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

As a result of the Nation at Risk report, school reform efforts focused primarily on individual programs like Success for All, Reading Recovery, and Direct Instruction

(Adams & Engelmann, 1996; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Pinnell, 1989). While these programs achieved improved student achievement results in some schools across the country, they provided insufficient evidence of national progress (Datnow, 2000). As a result, policymakers turned their focus to school reform efforts with high-quality evidence of effectiveness (Datnow, 2000) that concentrated on school-wide initiatives instead of individual programs (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002).

This era of comprehensive school reform eventually fell to the wayside as the standards-based reform movement emerged in the 1980s. The standards-based reform movement brought with it an increased emphasis on standardized tests as a measure of student achievement, rewards for schools that achieved high standardized test scores, and sanctions for schools that produced failing scores (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Darling-Hammond argued that the accountability system was not a true reform movement and asserted that more gains could result from investments in teacher knowledge and skills, and the reorganization of schools to provide greater support for teacher and student learning.

While efforts to reform the public school system have varied throughout the years, one thing has remained constant--a pervasive gap in student achievement between minority and majority groups. Such was the case with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools which provide the focus for this study.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System (CMS) has a history of implementing school reform efforts that focused on teachers, leadership, and data. In 2009, CMS developed the Charlotte Teachers Institute, modeled after the Yale Teachers Institute, as

part of an effort to improve teaching in schools performing at all levels (Charlotte Teachers' Institute, 2013). The institute provided intense professional development on research-based best practices for the classroom. The district also participated in a variety of initiatives to bring emerging leaders to the district, including New Leaders for New Schools, a program designed to bring 50 new principals to high needs schools by 2014, and Winthrop University's Leaders for Tomorrow program, an initiative designed to train teachers for a principalship. Such policy decisions in CMS have relied on data from the district's school improvement plans, school progress reports, and school quality reviews. Most recently, CMS has used the Strategic Staffing Initiative as a reform strategy (Charlotte Teachers' Institute, 2013).

This study examined the Strategic Staffing Initiative in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system in Charlotte, North Carolina. While CMS has implemented many school reform initiatives throughout the years, such as reconstitution, extended calendar, school closure, and reconfigured grade spans. This study focused solely on the reform strategy known as the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) implemented in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools from the 2008–2009 academic year to the 2010–2011 academic school year.

Statement of the Problem

Under the enforcement of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Bush (2001), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and the administration of Race to the Top (RTT), states and districts had a great opportunity to reinvent their educational institutions to improve student achievement. Unfortunately, these opportunities led to a number of significant problems. Federal and state agencies began

to hold schools across the country to a high level of accountability and challenged school administrators to improve student achievement or face sanctions. Sanctions involved the replacement of the target school's principal and staff, and the reorganization of the school's instructional program (Duke, 2006).

Failure to improve student achievement resulted in threatened sanctions which created a problem for many school districts. Superintendents had to lead their school districts to improved student achievement to avoid punitive action and were accountable for student achievement in their district schools (Duke, 2006). Superintendents were instrumental in setting the path for the district, and principals provided leadership on the school level.

Research on the effects of leadership on achievement taking place during the NCLB-era showed that effective school leadership positively impacts student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Duke (2004) defined turnaround schools as having turnaround principals who successfully changed a downward spiral in student achievement to an upward spiral. The paragraphs that follow discuss the efforts of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to utilize this leadership-effect research.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Strategic Staffing Initiative

CMS is a consolidated city-county district and represents North Carolina's second largest school district. CMS enrolled 140,000 students in grades Pre-K – 12. While CMS has a national reputation for high student achievement, more than half of its failing students are concentrated in a third of the district's schools. In 2005, Wake County Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr. charged CMS with academic genocide against at risk, low-income students in low scoring high schools (*Hoke County Board of*

Education et al. and Asheville City Board of Education et al. v. State of North Carolina State Board of Education, 1158). After the ruling, CMS leaders recognized the need for an innovative strategy to reform schools.

According to CMS's internal publication on strategic staffing, *Strategic Staffing: A Moral Thing to Do* (Charlotte- Mecklenburg Schools, 2009), CMS Superintendent Dr. Peter Gorman requested that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education support board policy that gave the superintendent authority to reassign teachers against their will. The board did not approve the request, and the superintendent shifted his strategy. He developed a staffing model that provided financial incentives to teachers who moved from a high-performing school to a low-performing school. The plan was not successful. According to CMS Superintendent Dr. Peter Gorman, "[I]ncentives went unused and no strategic system was used to determine who was eligible for bonuses" (Strategic Staffing, 2009, p. 2). To address this issue, CMS developed a second plan, the Strategic Staffing Initiative, designed to entice high-performing principals to move to low-performing schools.

The Strategic Staffing Initiative

CMS leaders focused on improving one third of the district's 165 schools with low student performance. The first step was to analyze the characteristics and practices of the low-performing schools and develop a turnaround strategy (Clark, 2012). CMS administrators collaborated with the Aspen Institute Superintendents Network (AISN); the New York City Department of Education; Denver Public Schools; Justine Hastings of Yale University; and Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education to develop a plan. Their

collaboration resulted in the Strategic Staffing Initiative. The Strategic Staffing Initiative draws on five tenets (Clark, 2012):

1. Schools need a great leader with a proven record of success in increasing student achievement. Great teachers will not go to a troubled school if a great leader is not in place as principal.
2. The district should send in a team to initiate reform efforts, so that one person is not solely responsible for implementing challenging reform efforts. There is strength and support in numbers.
3. Administrators should remove from the school any staff members who are not supportive of reform efforts.
4. Principals must have the time and authority to reform the school, and be free from the district's list of non-negotiable items that constrain autonomy.
5. Not all job assignments are equal in difficulty and districts should vary compensation to match individual duties (p. 18).

In summary, as school leaders continue to face the challenge of turning around low-performing schools under the threat of sanctions, there is a need for research-based models to inform their reform efforts. This study will add to the existing body of literature on effective school reform strategies by determining its effects on student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the Strategic Staffing Initiative employed by CMS and its impact on low-performing schools. The strategic staffing model seeks to capitalize on the skills and experience of school leaders and specific instructional and

non-instructional staff, including teachers, assistant principals, academic facilitators, and behavior management technicians, to improve student achievement in schools identified as low-performing according to the North Carolina accountability standards. In 2000, the Leadership for Learning Institute of the American Association of School Administrators and Education Resource Strategies examined the Strategic Staffing Model. Their subsequent publication, *The Strategic School*, described initiatives designed to maximize the use of human resources, time, and money in an effort to address the lack of student achievement in today's public schools. The researchers derived data for the study from elementary, middle, and high schools in Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, New York, and California (Miles & Frank, 2008).

In the present study, the researcher utilized *The Strategic School* as a resource to examine data from the first cohort of elementary schools that participated in the Strategic Staffing Initiative. Schools in the first cohort of the initiative included Briarwood Elementary School, Bruns Avenue Elementary School, Devonshire Elementary School, Ranson Middle School, Reid Park Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, and Westerly Hills Elementary School. This longitudinal study compared the impact of SSI on student achievement from the 2008-2009 school year through the cohort's goal year, 2010-2011.

Data from the Strategic Staffing Initiative provided by CMS included student achievement data, along with information on staff morale and stakeholder satisfaction. Student achievement data was used to indicate to the researcher whether SSI actually helped to improve student achievement and increase to high growth, according to the North Carolina accountability standards.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study can serve as a resource for struggling schools and school districts faced with low student achievement. Aspiring and practicing superintendents can use this data to guide their use of the Strategic Staffing Initiative as a part of their efforts to improve mediocre to low-performing schools. This study also has significance for supporting principals working to turn around failing schools. The ideas behind strategic staffing need not be limited to district initiatives. Principals who understand the reform initiative can replicate specific strategies in schools across the nation.

Researchers may also use the knowledge gained from this study as a guide in developing educational preparation programs at colleges and universities. Colleges and universities have the responsibility to prepare administrators to be innovative and creative in their attempts to raise and maintain student achievement levels. Aspiring principals could use the best practices discussed in this study to lead school reform efforts.

The Strategic Staffing Initiative also has significance beyond the field of education. Strategic Staffing models began in the fields of business and technology. Results from this model can aid in the development of a guiding framework for corporations and educational institutions to improve workplace morale, create an optimal work environment, and increase productivity and positive outcomes.

Delimitations of the Study

The term *delimitation* refers to the characteristics of the study that could limit its scope, including both exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made throughout the study (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The current study included a number of delimitations. First, the researcher restricted collection of survey data to six elementary schools in the

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district, and the sample included only students in grades 3, 4, and 5. Additionally, the researcher did not directly collect any achievement or survey data, but gathered all information from archived data specifically focused on the Strategic Staffing Initiative. Last, because educational leaders implemented this reform model in six elementary schools in one suburban school district in North Carolina, the study has limited generalizability to other school districts throughout the country.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout the research process, a number of uncontrollable factors arose that shaped the results of the present study and resulted in key limitations. First, as mentioned above, this longitudinal study focused on six urban elementary schools in a county school district in Charlotte, North Carolina. During the research process, the author also served as the principal of one of the schools. This dual role serves as a limitation.

The CMS Accountability Department randomly selected parents of fifth grade students from each school to complete the parent surveys for the Strategic Staffing Initiative. The selection was random and Accountability Department representatives instructed school leaders to forward the survey to the identified parents. Similarly, only fifth grade students from each school received the student survey. All fifth grades students enrolled in the school at that time had an opportunity to complete the survey.

All certified and classified employees of each school were given the opportunity to complete the staff survey. Due to teacher turnover, not all staff members who completed the survey at the end of the study were on staff the year prior to the implementation of the SSI. Additionally, some staff members were not on staff for the length of the entire longitudinal study.

The fact that all survey data were self-reported also serves as a limitation. Although the surveyors guaranteed anonymity, some staff, students, and parents may have believed otherwise and failed to respond truthfully out of fear of retaliation. Any inaccurate responses could result in skewed data.

A final limitation resulted from the fact that the surveyors paired six elementary schools in the study with six elementary schools with similar demographics, size, and socioeconomic status, based on their free and reduced lunch status (FRL). Three of the six comparison schools had a new principal for 2008-2009 school year as opposed to the six SSI principals who remained in their current schools throughout the duration of the study.

Assumptions

Assumptions often are difficult to verify empirically, and have the potential to cloud the lens through which the researcher reviews and analyzes relevant data. A number of assumptions played a role in the current study.

First, the researcher assumed that the goal of the superintendent in the study was to raise student achievement in the six elementary schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The researcher also assumed that the superintendent's efforts were as transparent as they appeared, and that there were no ulterior motives behind his efforts. Additionally, the researcher presumed that the six principals in the study genuinely sought to raise student achievement in the six elementary schools in the study. Although all principals in the SSI schools received a financial incentive to lead the school, the researcher supposed that the financial incentive was a secondary motivating factor.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of school reform and a statement of the problem of turning around low performing schools. It also detailed the purpose of the study, its significance, and the ways the results will add to the existing body of literature. The chapter also includes a discussion of the delimitations and limitations of the study, as well as relevant assumptions.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on school reform. The chapter focuses on the history of school reform, the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model, and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). The chapter reviews the role of the State Board of Education, as well as that of local boards of education and the superintendent. The chapter also includes a review of the Strategic Staffing Initiative and details the results of an interim study of the initiative used in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Chapter 3 details the research design, research questions, and procedures used in the present study, and includes a description of the schools, staff, and parents involved in the inquiry. The chapter also addresses how the researcher collected and analyzed relevant data.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Elmore (2002), limited research exists that explores effective strategies and philosophies on redesigning or turning around low-performing schools, and a review of the literature revealed little empirical research on reform. This chapter reviews school reform efforts in the United States, school reform efforts in North Carolina, and school reform in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System, focusing specifically on the district's strategic staffing model.

School Reform Efforts in the United States

Definition of the Tenth Amendment to the American Constitution

The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states that, "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people" (U.S. Const. amend X). Despite the comprehensive nature of the document, the U.S. Constitution does not contain any explicit mention of education. Throughout the past century, a number of court cases have served to define the educational rights of U.S. citizens. In *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* (1973), for example, parents argued that education was a fundamental right and that a financing system for public education based on property taxes led to inequities in economically disparate districts. The parents asserted that the practice was, therefore, unconstitutional. The Supreme Court ruled as follows:

The Texas system does not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Though concededly imperfect, the system bears a rational relationship to a legitimate state purpose. While assuring a basic education for every child in the State, it permits and encourages participation in and significant control of each district's schools at the local level (p.44-53).

This suit is recognized as a landmark decision and supported the spirit of the 10th amendment. This court decision further empowered states to make decisions regarding education. In this case, specifically, the Court ruled that, states were not required to subsidize poorer school districts. Despite the clarity of the 10th amendment and the support of *San Antonio v. Rodriguez (1973)* in respecting states' rights, there is a history of the federal government's involvement in education reform specifying requirements to federal programs such as Title 1. States who accepted federal dollars were required to accept the expectations as well.

When looking at the federal government's involvement in education reform, the efforts can be divided into two categories. Equity-based reform efforts attempted to improve education for all students. Standards based reform efforts attempted to improve education by holding schools accountable for reaching standards. Both reform efforts are discussed below.

Equity-Based Reform

In 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau Act was established to address the issue of education for recently emancipated slaves (Cimbala & Miller, 1999). This Act was one of the first examples of a federal educational enterprise that targeted a specific group.

The Act identified three areas of federal aid for the educational initiative (Cimbala & Miller, 1999):

- (1) aid to raise the educational level of the most disadvantaged members of society,
- (2) the promotion of economic (or “manpower”) development through the expansion of access to learning, and
- (3) the assimilation of new citizens into American society to provide productive labor as well as social interaction.

One hundred years later, the Civil Rights movement focused on the abolishment of separate but equal education in favor of desegregation. This movement had a major impact on public education, and created a struggle between state and federal agencies. At the time, most states, particularly those in the south, resented the federal government’s mandate that they desegregate public spaces following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 (Orfield, 1969). In the *Brown v. Board of Education*, the lawyers for the plaintiffs consolidated several discrimination cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. In each case, African American children were denied access to public schools because of their race (Patterson & Freehling, 2001). The plaintiffs alleged that this practice was unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which stated:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person

of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws (U.S. Const. amend. XIV).

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the race-based segregation of children into separate but equal public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and was unconstitutional.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government designed a variety of programs to provide equal access to education for minority, poor, or female children, as well as children with disabilities or Limited English Proficiency. The federal government stepped in because state governments historically had not ensured this equal access (Jennings, 2011). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially eliminated the legal sanction of, race-based discrimination, including separate schooling for White and Black children (U.S. Congress, 1964).

In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). This was the federal government's first major federal education initiative, and its impact people throughout the nation felt its impact immediately (Kirby Naftel, Berends, & McCombs, 2001). The ESEA worked to

[P]rovide financial assistance...to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families; and to expand and improve their educational programs by various means ... which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children. (PL 89-10, Section 201)

According to the Congressional Budget Office (1993), this federal legislation has funded a wide range of programs from special education to educational technology for over three decades.

The Coleman Report, emerged as a document of great importance in the midst of spirited conversation related to equity in education. *The Coleman Report* was one of the largest pieces of social science research, and targeted 600,000 children in 4,000 schools nationally (Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). In 1966, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned sociologist James Coleman and several other scholars to research educational equality in the nation's schools. The resulting report was over 700 pages. Coleman concluded that when there were pockets of low-income students concentrated in one school, it negatively affected student achievement (Cain & Watts, 1970). He further argued that parental socioeconomic status had more of a direct impact on student achievement than the amount of funding a school received (Cain & Watts, 1970). The report effectively identified poverty, a factor in low student achievement.

Coleman concluded that family background was the major determinant of student achievement (Lezotte, 2009). His recommendations came at a time when the nation was divided on issues related to race relations and equality (Cain & Watts, 1970). His recommendations fed the desegregation movement and served as a major impetus for the institution of busing (Meier, 1967). *The Coleman Report* serves as one of the most important education studies of the 20th century.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 resulted in a number of additional federal acts related to education. For example, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 forbade recipients of federal aid to discriminate against girls and women (Sangree, 1999).

Later, in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) several Chinese American students sued their school in San Francisco for failing to provide appropriate support for students who were unable to speak English. The plaintiffs argued that they were entitled to those rights under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students:

The failure of the San Francisco school system to provide English language instruction to approximately 1,800 students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak English, or to provide them with other adequate instructional procedures, denies them a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program and thus violates 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination based "on the ground of race, color, or national origin," in "any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," and the implementing regulations of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (p. 565).

In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) provided students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education. This law was unique in that it obligated school districts to pay for a full range of educational services for students with disabilities (Turnbull, 1993).

While these federal acts worked to increase access to educational opportunities for minority and female students, as well as students with disabilities and those limited English proficiency, the legislation did not have a broad impact on education across the nation (Jennings, 2011). The lack of broad impact spurred standard- based reform efforts.

Standards-Based Reform

The use of defined standards and state-designed assessments to measure students based on the standards developed in the 1970s, and continues to gain momentum in today's public education arena. According to Jennings (2011), the initial purpose of standards-based reform efforts was to identify the subject areas in which students should be proficient and measure students' performance and progress towards those goals. This movement transformed into test-driven accountability initiatives as district, state, and federal agencies applied consequences to schools whose students did not meet standards of mastery (Jennings, 2011).

In 1976, McLaughlin published a study charging that state and federal agencies had not distributed Title I funds equitably, and that funds had actually gone to initiatives in suburban districts instead of the low-income districts that the funds were meant to support. In response to this study, the Nixon administration began to focus on the effectiveness of programs receiving federal funds (Metcalf, 1983). They found that data collection was inadequate at the school, district, and state level, and therefore, the effectiveness of the program was difficult to measure. They also found very few attempts to document expenditures related to classroom instruction and student achievement. The federal government did not require this information, so state and local agencies did not collect the data (McLaughlin, 1976). Following this review, the federal government began to require that program leaders demonstrate the achievement of specified goals in comparison to similar local, national, and international programs.

While the Nixon administration played a key role in standards-based reform, the Carter administration spearheaded the accountability movement. During this time, school

leadership was being influenced by local business leaders. Business leaders were accustomed to outcome measures. Also during this time states were holding students and teachers accountable through basic skills testing outcomes (Stephens, 1983). The basic skills tests provided outcome measures with which business leaders were comfortable.

The accountability movement also influenced fiscal management. The federal government closely monitored state school budgets for “waste” or other examples of fiscal mismanagement (Stephens, 1983).

During this time, a group of educators, citizens, and policy makers led by Ron Edmonds, Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, came together to develop new school reform initiatives based on research which keyed on schools in urban areas who had high levels of achievement and high levels of poverty. Their combined efforts eventually developed into the effective schools movement. According to Edmonds, 1979:

[I]t seems to me, therefore, that what is left of this discussion are three declarative statements: (a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; (b) We already know more than we need to do that; and (c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far (p.23).

In his article *Programs of School Improvement: An Overview*, Edmonds (1982) identified characteristics or correlates of effective schools, such as strong principal leadership, a clear, comprehensive instructional focus, a safe and orderly environment, high expectations for all students, and use of assessment to measure student achievement.

As noted above Edmonds and Brookover based these correlates on documented successes of effective schools and used them to bring about school-wide reform (Bliss, Firestone, Richards, 1990). The effective schools movement provided correlates to the state that could be used as tools that were measureable to as the federal government began to hold them more accountable for student achievement.

The Reagan administration continued the accountability movement and furthered efforts to transfer responsibility of education back to the states by making federal budget cuts and mandating a deep scale back of federal programs (Reagan & Sanzone, 1981). These efforts stalled, however, after the publication of the landmark study, *A Nation at Risk*, which highlighted low student achievement in the United States (Gardner, 1983).

President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983). The Commission, led by David Gardner, consisted of 18 members of the private sector, government, and education. The report claimed that American schools were failing:

The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (p. 9).

This report was the impetus for a number of local, state, and federal reforms (Gardner, 1983).

Despite their previous focus on deregulating public education and reducing spending, the Reagan administration could not ignore the report and for public schools

throughout the nation, access to federal funding suddenly depended upon data from standardized testing. The federal government required that schools receiving aid demonstrate the achievement of academic standards to receive continued federal aid (Reagan & Sanzone, 1981). This result eventually led to nationwide standardized testing.

In the late 1980s, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics developed a set of national standards for mathematics. President George H. W. Bush sought to use the same approach to develop national standards for other subjects. This effort proved unsuccessful, and President Bill Clinton later encouraged states to develop their own standards (McLaughlin, 1995).

In 1994, President Clinton signed the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), which made three major changes to the original ESEA. The Act mandated the addition of reading and math standards to assessments of student progress and provided specific accountability measures. The IASA reduced the poverty threshold from 75% to 50%, and the federal government made provisions to dispense funds at the school-wide level. Lastly, the IASA gave more local control to states and provided state leaders the option of waiving federal requirements (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). The reauthorized Title I legislation challenged states to meet four significant demands: raise academic standards, build the capacity of teachers and schools, develop challenging assessments, ensure school and district accountability, include all children, and develop coordinated systemic reforms (Short, 1997). As a result, school leaders looked to school-wide initiatives which affected all students instead of programs targeted at small groups of underachievers. According to Borman (2002), this shift transformed Title I from a supplemental remedial program to the "key driver of the standards-based, school-wide reform movement" (p.

246). In 1998, Congress initiated the Comprehensive School Reform Program, which provided financial incentives that encouraged schools to develop comprehensive, scientifically-based school reform initiatives (Borman, 2002).

When President George W. Bush took office 2001, most states were in the process of developing and implementing state standards and aligned assessments (Mathis, 2003). Three days after his inauguration, President Bush signed legislation that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The revised legislation, titled the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), was a 1,100 page document that covered a wide variety of educational issues. The Act mandated that schools make adequate yearly progress or face sanctions. Each state had to identify and utilize a standardized test to measure academic progress according to specific academic learning standards. States also had to show a decrease in the achievement gap among student subgroups and a decrease in the high school dropout rate. According to Jennings (2011), this Act served as a “turning point for the standards movement”(p. 5).

According to NCLB, schools that consistently failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) had to identify and execute plans to address the areas of failure. Each year that a school failed to meet AYP, the sanctions become more severe. If a school did not meet AYP for five years in a row, it became eligible for restructuring, which gave the school district the autonomy to replace or dismiss the staff or redesign and restructure the governance of the school (Jennings, 2011)

With large bipartisan support Congress designed NCLB to provide a comprehensive education strategy focused on standards, with assessments developed to determine whether students were meeting established standards. The Act also provided

an accountability arm to hold schools accountable for helping students reach those standards.

There were several benefits with the standards movement. First, the standards movement provided clear expectations by publicizing state academic standards (Peterson & West, 2003). The standards movement also promoted greater equity, as it held all students within a state to the same academic standards (Mathis, 2003). In a further effort to coordinate myriad standards across states, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee & Wilson, 2010).

A downside of the standards movement is that it has become driven by and focused on statewide assessments. (Peterson & West, 2003). Lee (2008) described a new school culture where state testing drove the actions of both teachers and students. Peterson & West (2003) noted that according to NCLB, states could categorize schools as failing even if only one group fell short of achievement targets.

In 2009, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, announced a \$3.5 billion dollar budget for Title I School Improvement grants designed to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools.

If we are to put an end to stubborn cycles of poverty and social failure, and put our country on track for long-term economic prosperity, we must address the needs of children who have long been ignored and marginalized in chronically low-achieving schools. States and school districts have an opportunity to put unprecedented resources toward reforms that would increase graduation rates,

reduce dropout rates and improve teacher quality for all students, and particularly for children who most need good teaching in order to catch up (p. 1).

Ideally, states would use these funds to identify and serve their lowest performing Title I schools, support reform efforts with research-based interventions, provide sufficient resources to facilitate identified interventions, and provide a measurement of the results. Duncan sought to turn around 5,000 of the lowest performing schools in five years, to dramatically decrease the dropout rate, improve high school graduation rates, and increase the number of students prepared for college and the workplace (U. S. Department of Education, 2008). Two examples of such school improvement grants are the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and Race to the Top.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was an economic stimulus package enacted in response to the 2000 recession. While the primary purpose was to create jobs, the secondary objective was to provide direct spending to infrastructure, education, health, and energy (Lodge, 2010). Lodge also explained that the ARRA stimulus package cost an estimated \$787 billion, a figure later revised to \$831 billion between 2009 and 2019. The rationale for ARRA was that the government should increase public spending to decrease the need for additional private spending to save jobs. Through the ARRA, the government devoted approximately \$53 billion to education and training.

Race to the Top

Race to the Top (2009) was an initiative that offered incentives to states that developed innovative reform strategies to improve student achievement. There initiative included four key areas:

- the development of rigorous standards and assessments,
- the adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress,
- support to help teachers and school leaders become more effective, and
- resources for the rigorous interventions needed to turn around the lowest-performing schools (Obama, 2009).

At the time of the present study, President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative had provided over \$4 billion to 19 states. According to Manna & Ryan (2011), these states served 22 million students and employed 1.5 million teachers in 42,000 schools representing 45% of all K-12 students and 42% of all low-income students nationwide.

The Obama administration offered four overarching strategies for school reform: restart, transformation, school closures, and turnaround. The U.S. Department of Education provided \$4 billion for this effort. To qualify for the grant funds, states had to identify their lowest-performing schools in economically challenged communities and use one of the models above to improve student achievement (Duncan, 2009). In the application, districts had to choose one of the four interventions.

Turnaround Model	Restart Model	School Closure Model	Transformational Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the principal • Replace at least 50 percent of the school's staff • Adopt a new governance structure • Implement a new or revised instructional program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close failing schools • Reopen schools under charter school management with a rigorous review process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close failing schools • Enroll students who attended that school in a high-achieving school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts would address four specific areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Develop teacher and school leader effectiveness 2) Implement comprehensive instructional reform model 3) Extend learning and teacher planning time and create a community oriented school 4) provide operating flexibility and sustained support

U. S. Department of Education, 2008

Figure 1: The Four Intervention models

As Figure 1 indicates, in the Restart Model, schools are converted or closed and later reopen under a charter or education management organization. The new organization undergoes a stringent review process before the state grants control of the school. In the School Closure Model, the state or district closes low-performing schools, and students enroll in other high-achieving schools in their district (Waddell, 2011). The Transformation Model changes the school in one of four ways: replacing the building principal, implementing comprehensive instructional reforms, increasing learning time and community support, and providing operational flexibility and sustained support (Crossley & Corbyn, 2010). The Turnaround Model replaces the principal and 50% of the school staff. The newly hired principal receives operational flexibility regarding

issues related to staffing, calendars, time, and budgeting. The goal is to develop a comprehensive approach to improving student achievement (Murphy & Meyers, 2009). The NCLB legislation brought Title I and Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) under the same legislation (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). Comprehensive school reform is discussed in detail below.

Comprehensive School Reform

The basic principle of CSR was that to improve student achievement, a school must abandon the fragmented approach and dramatically change the school from top to bottom (Slavin, 2008). CSR called for efficient school management, ongoing staff development, frequent student assessment, and increased parent involvement (Hertling, 2000). During this growing movement of school reform, district leaders sought scientifically-based school reform initiative. The U.S. Department of Education uses 11 components to define CSR. According to this model, comprehensive school reform efforts

1. employ proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management based on scientifically-based research and effective practices that schools have replicated successfully;
2. integrates instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management;
3. provides high-quality and continuous professional development and training for teachers and staff;
4. includes measurable goals for student academic achievement and establishes benchmarks for meeting those goals;

5. garners the support of teachers, principals, administrators, and other staff throughout the school;
6. provides support for teachers, principals, administrators, and other school staff by creating shared leadership and a broad base of responsibility for reform efforts;
7. provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities;
8. uses high-quality external technical support and assistance from an entity that has experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement;
9. includes a plan for the annual evaluation of the reforms and any improvements in student achievement;
10. identifies federal, state, local, and private financial and other resources that schools can use to coordinate services that support and sustain the school reform effort; and
11. meets one of the following requirements:
 - a. the program improves the academic achievement of participating students, as indicated by scientifically-based research; *or*
 - b. the program has demonstrated strong evidence that it will significantly improve the academic achievement of participating children. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 5-11)

CSR is one of many school improvement efforts designed to address the bleak data reported in *A Nation at Risk*. CSR emphasizes school-wide improvements, including initiatives that address school operations, curriculum, leadership, and governance (Slavin,

2008). At the heart of CSR is the idea that school leaders can improve student achievement by focusing on the whole school, instead of on individual programs that target specific groups of students (Rothberg, Harvey, & Warner, 1993). Elements of school-wide improvement include effective school management, ongoing professional development, formative assessments, and parent involvement (Slavin, 2008).

Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown (2003) conducted a meta-analysis on the achievement effects of the 29 most widely implemented comprehensive school reform initiatives. They found that the overall effects of CSR are “statistically significant, meaningful, and appear to be greater than the effects of other interventions that have been designed to serve similar purposes” (p.132). They also found that students attending schools using CSR initiatives score higher on achievement tests than other students at non-CSR schools. The authors found that these programs had clearly established effects and helped to improve students’ achievement tests scores. It is important to note that CSR was still emerging at the time of the study, and there were clear limitations of the overall quality and quantity of studies.

Despite the relative success of Comprehensive School Reform, the federal government has not provided financial support for the CSR program since 2007. Research indicates that while federal funding eliminated financial support, local school districts reallocated funds to implement school reform models of their own choosing. Overall, CSR initiatives have had a positive increase on student achievement, regardless of students’ income level, when implemented over time with fidelity for at least five years (McChesney & Hertling, 2000).

School districts across the nation are diverse and schools within each district represent a diverse student population with myriad needs. Within the classroom, students demonstrate unique needs academic needs. The meta-analysis indicate that a successful CSR program using scientifically-based strategies of Direct Instruction, the School Development Program and Success For All can increase student achievement across many classrooms, schools, and districts (Borman, et al., 2003). Below is a discussion of these three CSR models.

Direct Instruction

Dr. Siegfried Engelmann developed the practice of direct instruction (DI) in 1968 to help students achieve early mastery of basic skills (Carnine, 1997). The field-tested curriculum includes reading, language arts, and math. (Adams & Engelmann, 1996). Direct Instruction is an approach to teaching. It is skills-oriented, and the teaching practices it implies are teacher-directed. It emphasizes the use of small-group, face-to-face instruction by teachers and aides using carefully articulated lessons in which cognitive skills are broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly (Carnine, 2000). Ability grouping, frequent assessment, and fast-paced teacher-directed instruction are the hallmarks of the program (Carnine, 1997). Research shows that DI has a positive impact on vocabulary, oral reading, and achievement gains in reading (Mac Iver & Kemper).

School Development Program

The School Development Program was designed to put the child at the center of the educational process (Haynes & Hamilton-Lee, 1988). The characteristics of the program include positive student teacher relationships, mental health and child

development, and effective planning and problem solving (Haynes & Hamilton-Lee, 1988). Administrators have implemented the program in 1,150 schools in 35 school districts in 25 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, England, and Ireland (Lunenburg, 2011). Studies have shown that students who participated in the program experienced demonstrate gains in achievement, attendance, and behavior (Lunenburg, 2011).

Success for All

Success for All emerged in 1987 as a curriculum focused on intensive reading instruction provided to a small clusters of ability-grouped students for a 90-minute reading period. The program included ongoing assessments every eight weeks, cooperative learning strategies, tutoring, and a family support team to increase parental involvement (Madden, 1991). Borman and Hewes (2002) studied the long-term impact and cost effectiveness of the Success for All program. They found that students who participated in the Success for All Program completed 8th grade at a younger age, experienced better achievement outcomes than students who did not participate in the program, and had fewer special education placements and fewer retentions.

During the 1990s, Title I school-wide programs grew widely across the country (Ross & Casey, 1998). In 1991, only 10% of the eligible Title I schools operated school-wide program. This figure increased to 50% by 1996 (Wong & Meyer, 1998). Studies showed that school-wide reforms did not result in evidence of positive achievement effects (Wong & Meyer, 1998). The Congressionally-mandated Prospects study evaluated the overall impact of Title I services and found a pervasive need for research-based school improvement models that positively impacted the achievement of at-risk

students in high-poverty schools (Borman, D'Agostino, Wong, & Hedges, 1998; Puma, Karweit, Price, Ricciuti, Thompson, & Vaden-Kiernan, 1997).

School Reform Efforts in North Carolina

The Accountability of Public Education school reform model, developed in the 1990s, played a significant role in organizing North Carolina's school reform efforts. At the time of its development, state leaders across the country struggled to develop a model that measured students' growth could from year to year and evaluated individual school performance. In North Carolina, state leaders developed such a model and used it to identify effective strategies for improving school and student performance (Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, 2008).

In 2008, state leaders developed a comprehensive initiative to redefine the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, the student assessment model, and the school accountability model. With the development of the Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE), North Carolina became the first state in the nation to address learning standards, student assessments, and school accountability at the same time (Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, 2008).

There initiative had three primary goals:

1. identifying key subject areas and concepts that students needed to master;
2. redesigning state testing to include more open-ended questions, increased use of technology, and real world applications; and
3. designing a new accountability model to provide more relevant and meaningful data for student, parents, educators and the community (Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, 2008.).

School Reform Efforts in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

In 1971, CMS came to the forefront of school reform news with the landmark Supreme Court decision *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* (1970), which paved the way for the use of busing as a means of desegregating schools. This case was a part of a much larger school reform initiative that included improving curriculum standards, developing International Baccalaureate programs, improving school accountability measures, by providing financial incentives for teachers, and establishing stronger discipline standards (Smith & Mickelson, 2000). The district began to publish “school report cards” in the local paper, *The Charlotte Observer*. Community leaders designed these efforts to get the community involved in school reform and to support Superintendent John Murphy’s efforts to create a world class school district (Smith & Mickelson, 2000). With new initiatives in place, a number of students thrived; however, many students continued to struggle. In 1994, parents, students, and school boards from five low-income counties (Cumberland, Halifax, Hoke, Robeson, and Vance) filed suit against the North Carolina State Board of Education alleging that the state did not provide enough money to provide their children with a sound basic education. Six additional urban school districts asked to join the case and were included as plaintiffs. They were: Asheville City, Buncombe, Durham, Wake, Winston-Forsyth, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (*Leandro v. State of North Carolina*, 1997). In its opinion, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that the North Carolina Constitution “guarantees every child of this state an opportunity to receive a sound basic education in our public schools” (p. 8). The court defined a sound basic education as one that ensured students had:

(1) sufficient ability to read, write, and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society; (2) sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices with regard to issues that affect the student personally or affect the student's community, state, and nation; (3) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to successfully engage in post-secondary education or vocational training; and (4) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in further formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society (p. 8).

The North Carolina Supreme Court remanded to Superior Court where Judge Howard Manning conducted a trial to determine if the state had failed to meet its constitutional responsibility. Judge Manning concluded that 1) every child was entitled to have a competent teacher; 2) every school was entitled to a competent principal; and 3) every school district needed the resources necessary to provide adequate support to students, teachers, and principals. In addition to Judge Manning's key decision, the case also brought attention to schools with large numbers of at-risk students who were failing. CMS was not immune to the criticism. Judge Manning Jr. accused CMS of academic genocide against at-risk, low-income students in low-scoring high schools (Mickelson and Southworth, 2005). The dismantling of the busing program and the 2002 pupil reassignment plan had created schools with large concentration of low-income students. Judge Manning threatened to close four of the lowest performing high schools including

Garinger, Waddell, West Charlotte, and West Mecklenburg (Mickelson & Southworth, 2005).

In 2007, CMS created the Achievement Zone, an initiative designed to provide intensive support and intervention to a select group of highly-challenged schools. Schools in the Achievement Zone received additional school staffing and employed a highly-focused, data-driven approach (Mickelson, 2003). These schools faced a number of challenges, including a high number of Limited English Proficiency students, a high number of Exceptional Children, a high number of students receiving Free and Reduced lunch, a high number of students with significant unexcused absenteeism, and high suspension rates.

The schools also encountered a number of challenges with their teacher population, as these educators had limited experience, high turnover rates, and high absenteeism (Mickelson and Southworth, 2005). The Achievement Zone included two elementary schools (Billingsville Elementary School and Shamrock Gardens Elementary School) Four middle schools (Bishop Spaugh Community Academy, Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, Sedgefield Middle School, and Wilson Middle School) were the feeder schools. The four high schools that Judge Manning targeted for closure (Garinger Traditional High School, Waddell High School, West Charlotte High School, and West Mecklenburg High School) were direct feeders from the middle schools.

Despite its merits, the Achievement Zone approach to turning around low-performing schools was not entirely successful. Principals did not gain any additional authority over curriculum, staff evaluations, time, or budgets. While the initiative did provide additional central office staff to support the effort, there were insufficient human

resources available to meet the socio-emotional needs of the at-risk students. The district provided financial incentives to attract high-quality teachers to Achievement Zone schools, but district leaders lacked the authority to remove ineffective teachers (Smith & Mickelson, 2000).

The district carefully examined the Achievement Zone approach. The district looked at the weaknesses of the approach in an attempt to make positive changes. The result was the Strategic Staffing Initiative. The initiative is discussed below.

Strategic Staffing Initiative

The Strategic Staffing Initiative is a school-wide reform model that focuses on principal leadership, a team approach, removal of ineffective staff, increased principal autonomy, and financial incentives. Travers and Christiansen (2010) described the Strategic Staffing model as a “critical and hard-hitting component of the district-wide turnaround approach”. The initiative, as paraphrased, includes five basic tenets:

1. Schools need a great leader with a proven track record of success in increasing student achievement. Great teachers will not go to a troubled school if a great leader is not in place as principal.
2. The district should send in a team to initiate reform efforts, so that one person is not solely responsible for implementing challenging reform efforts. There is strength and support in numbers.
3. Administrators should remove from the school any staff members who are not supportive of reform efforts.
4. Principals must have the time and authority to reform the school, and be free from the district’s list of non-negotiable items that constrain autonomy.

5. Not all job assignments are equal in difficulty and compensation should be varied to match.

Personnel

The Strategic Staffing Initiative district level team concluded that to improve student achievement, schools need strong leaders and effective teachers with the expertise and resources to positively impact the achievement of low-performing students, collaborative teacher teams, and the removal of teachers who hindered school reform efforts (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). The team selected key staff members needed on the Cohort I Strategic Staffing Team listed below:

- Principal
- Assistant principal
- Literacy facilitator
- Behavior management technician (only at schools that lacked this position)
- Up to five teachers with proven success

Once the district level team determined the personnel needs of the SSI schools, clear definitions were shared to describe expectations. Below is the rationale for all personnel eligible for consideration by each SSI principal.

Principal, assistant principal and literacy facilitator. The Strategic Staffing Team decided that principals needed to “show gains in student achievement that surpassed a year’s worth of growth in a year’s worth of instruction” (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). The team required a three-year commitment from all participating principals, assistant principals, and literacy facilitators. The Strategic Staffing Team concluded that assistant principals and literacy facilitators were instrumental in facilitating the collaboration

needed to improve instruction. While participating principals had the autonomy to select their own team members, the team emphasized that the positions should go to “people who shared the principals’ philosophy and could immediately begin implementing his/her approach” (Travers & Christiansen, 2010, Teachers).

Eligible teachers had to demonstrate a proven record of success through past summative evaluations and a clear growth in student achievement. Like principals, teachers also had to make a three-year commitment to the program. Principals also had the authority to ask up to five teachers to leave the school with the support of the superintendent.

Time

One of the important aspects of the Strategic Staffing Model is that principals must receive the “time and authority to reform the school and be freed from the school district lists of non-negotiables that constrain autonomy”. (Clark, 2012). Principals had “freedom and flexibility with accountability”. (p.18), and the autonomy to make decisions related to time and scheduling.

Monetary Resources

The Strategic Staffing Team recognized that compensation mattered. As such, participants in the Strategic Staffing Model received financial incentives. Principals and assistant principals received a 10% pay supplement to their base salary. Teachers and facilitators received a \$10,000 bonus the first year and \$5,000 for each additional year in the three-year commitment (Travers & Christiansen, 2008).

The Strategic Staffing Initiative is a unique approach to school reform that focuses on school leadership instead of student groups, programs, or standards. For

years, researchers have attempted to measure the impact of school leadership on student achievement and school reform. Hallinger (2009), for example, reviewed two decades of research on the impact of school leadership on student achievement. Hallinger made two important claims: 1) school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a school related factor to what students learn at school, and 2) the effects of school leadership on student achievement are greater in low-performing schools. Furthermore, he reported that there are no documented instances of schools turning around without powerful school leadership.

He warned against focusing on specific leadership styles, and asserted that effective school leadership helps set the direction for schools and encourages members of the school community to move in that direction. While leadership is both simple and complex, effective school leaders define the school's mission, manage the instructional program, and promote a positive learning environment (Hallinger, 2009).

The Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropic organization that seeks to improve education and enrichment opportunities for disadvantaged children, spent over six years studying the impact of school leadership on student achievement and reported their findings in the *Leadership Influences Student Learning* report (Leithwood, et al., 2010). According to Leithwood et al., effective leaders set clear and common goals and work collaboratively with school personnel to reach those goals, share leadership and create strong working relationships with staff, and ask for input from a wide variety of stakeholders.

Formative Research on Strategic Staffing Initiative

During the 2008-2009 school year, the Strategic Staffing Initiative included one cohort (Cohort 1) with six elementary schools and one middle school. Principals assumed leadership of their schools in July of 2008.

The Office of Accountability of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools studied the effectiveness of the Strategic Staffing Schools in year one. The study, conducted by Pulliam, Tingle, and Schoeneberger (2010), employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the impact of the SSI on students in the first cohort of schools. The researchers examined data on student achievement and student attendance and suspension, along with the results from teacher surveys and principal interviews.

Seven schools participated in the study: Briarwood Elementary, Bruns Avenue Elementary, Devonshire Elementary School, Reid Park Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, Westerly Hills Elementary School, and Ranson Middle School. The researchers paired each school with a school with similar demographics to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategic Staffing Model.

The study revealed several areas where SSI schools statistically outperformed the paired school without the SSI interventions. For example, Devonshire Elementary School outperformed its paired school in grade 3rd math, and Sterling Elementary School outperformed its paired school in 5th grade math. All SSI schools demonstrated between 1 and 14 percentile points in proficiency in reading (Pulliam, Tingle, & Schoeneberger, 2010). Examinations of individual student performance revealed that a significantly higher number of students scored at or above grade level at Devonshire Elementary

School, Sterling Elementary School, and Ranson Middle School than at the paired schools according to Pulliam et al.

Two schools, Bruns Avenue Elementary School and Reid Park Elementary School, had a statistically negative difference (Pulliam, Tingle, & Schoeneberger, 2010). Pulliam et al. found evidence that the SSI had a positive impact on student achievement. The authors also found a decrease in suspensions at both the Strategic Schools and the paired schools (Pulliam, Tingle, & Schoeneberger, 2010).

Summary of Formative Research

Based on the results of the study, after one year, the Strategic Staffing Initiative had a positive effect on student achievement and culture at the target schools. Quantitative results revealed that all schools experienced an increase in student achievement in reading and math, but showed only minimal impact on absenteeism or suspensions (Pulliam, Tingle, & Schoeneberger, 2010). Qualitative results showed that Westerly Hills had the highest average mean scores on staff surveys. Principal interview results showed a varied style of leadership among principals. Principals identified discipline and student achievement as the two major challenges.

Summary

Despite the 10th amendment's assertion that education is the responsibility of the state, the federal government has a long history as an active participant in public school reform movements. Federal school reform efforts typically have involved equity-based or standards-based initiatives. In North Carolina school reform efforts, however, have been largely standards-based initiatives. CMS representatives have also focused their efforts on standards-based reform. The district's most recent effort, the Strategic Staffing

Initiative, used a school-wide approach that focused on leadership to use staff, time, and resources strategically to turn around low-performing schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' implementation of the Strategic Staffing Initiative presented an ideal opportunity to explore the execution of a promising school reform model. To this end, the researcher employed a mixed methodology approach to examine the impact of the initiative on student achievement, attendance and suspension and to appraise parent, student and staff satisfaction based on survey data and an auto-ethnography of a SSI principal.

In mixed methods research, the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Mixed methods research designs provide multiple ways of seeing and hearing, alternate means of making sense of a research question, and diverse perspectives about which findings are important or significant (Greene, 2007).

According to Denscombe (2008), mixed method research increases validity and reliability of results. Using the mixed method approach, the researcher can strengthen areas of weakness in a single method approach by combining quantitative and qualitative data to fill gaps in information, answer key questions, and provide a clearer picture of the subject of one's research (Jick, 1979). Mixed method research helps to provide a more complete answer to a question that the researcher cannot answer using a single approach.

Mixed methods allow the researcher to examine an issue using both numbers and words. This approach brings together quantitative and qualitative data to tell a unique story.

The present mixed methodology study used purposive sampling, which involves the selection of a sample for a specific purpose, as opposed to random selection (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The researcher purposefully selected the sample for this study with the hopes that it would aid in the examination of SSI's impact on selected schools. An auto-ethnography was also part of the mixed method research. Auto-ethnographies add a product with process to not only tell a story but analyze it (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011).

Each SSI school was paired with a non-SSI school with similar socioeconomic status, based on free and reduced lunch status (FRL). This study compared six elementary schools classified as SSI to six schools without this designation. The first SSI cohort included one middle school. This case study is a mixed methods analysis of respondents' perceptions of the SSI's effectiveness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools from 2008-2009 through 2010-2011. This longitudinal study determined whether SSI resulted in improvements in student achievement, attendance, suspensions and stakeholder satisfaction over the three years of its implementation (from 2008 through 2011).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What has been the impact of SSI on student achievement within the target schools?

2. Did the SSI lead to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability Standards within three years?
3. How did the attitudes of each school's staff, parents, and students change over three years of the SSI's implementation?
4. How did student achievement levels in the SSI schools compare to student achievement in the non-SSI schools during the same time period?

Procedures

Participants and Setting

According to the CMS website, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is a consolidated school district that enrolled approximately 140,000 students in grades pre-kindergarten to grade 12 at the beginning of the 2012 academic school year. CMS is the 18th largest school district in the United States and the second largest in North Carolina. The district has 178 schools, including 100 elementary schools, 36 middle schools, 36 high schools, 5 pre-kindergarten schools/centers, and four alternative schools. Sixty percent of students in CMS are economically disadvantaged (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2009).

CMS is home to a diverse population of students who speak over 162 different languages and hail from 160 different countries. The student racial make-up includes 32% White, 42% African American, 18% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 3% Native American/Multiracial students. CMS has 18,000 full-time employees with an annual budget of approximately \$1.2 billion (p.1). The chart below identifies the SSI and non-SSI schools compared and analyzed during this study.

Table 1: SSI and Non-SSI Schools

SSI School	FRL (%)	Enrolled	Non-SSI School	FRL (%)	Enrolled
Briarwood	86.0	622	Winterfield	88.0	600
Bruns Avenue	95.7	536	Walter G. Byers	95.8	404
Devonshire	93.0	574	Hidden Valley	90.5	528
Reid Park	92.9	577	Billingsville	93.4	396
Sterling	87.6	582	Highland Renaissance	88.8	606
Westerly Hills	89.9	345	Sedgefield	88.5	442

The researcher paired each SSI school with a similar school that did not participate in the initiative. The matching criteria included similar Social Economic Status (SES). Identifying non-SSI schools proved a challenge in the beginning of the research process. The SSI schools were very unique, and it was hard to find similar schools to match their characteristics. Each SSI and non SSI school received Title One funding. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of each school and its staff, students, and parents. The SSI is discussed first followed by discussion of its paired schools.

Briarwood is a 622 pupil size elementary school in northeast Charlotte, NC. It is located in the university area near UNC Charlotte. It had a 5 to 1 computer to student ratio. It boasts of partnerships with Visiting International Faculty and Teach For America to support student achievement. Briarwood had 23 AYP goals and utilized the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Its paired school was Winterfield.

Winterfield is a 600 size elementary school in central Charlotte near Sharon Amity and Central Avenue. It had a 5 to 1 ratio of computers to students. Winterfield has a two year looping class assignment process that allows student to remain with same

teacher two years in a row. It had 21 AYP goals. A new principal was assigned to Winterfield in 2010.

Bruns Avenue has an enrollment of 536. It is located near uptown only miles away from Johnson C. Smith University. It had a 5 to 1 computer to student ratio. Bruns Ave had several partnerships including the Charlotte Business Council and the Charlotte Bobcats. The use of Prescriptive Instruction, an online instructional program was prevalent across grades kindergarten through five. It boasts of PTA membership rising to 400 in 2008-2009 and continued to seek opportunities to actively engage all parents. Its paired school was Walter G. Byers elementary school.

Walter G. Byers (Byers) has an enrollment of 404 students. Byers is located in uptown west Charlotte in the Greenville community. Byers had 13 AYP goals with a very transient student population. Its partnership with A Child's Place offers needed support for all families. A new principal was assigned to Byers in 2010 and it became a SSI school in 2011.

Devonshire is a 574 size school. It is located in north Charlotte in the Barringer community. It had a 5 to 1 computer to student ratio and had 23 AYP goals. Devonshire boasts of strong partnerships such as Allegro Foundation, The Thompson Center and Smith and Barney. Devonshire implemented same gender classes for third grade students, the first year of state standardized testing. Its paired school was Hidden Valley elementary.

Hidden Valley elementary has an enrollment of 528. It is located in the Hidden Valley in north Charlotte. It had a 4 to 1 ratio of computers to student enrollment. Hidden Valley participated in the Prime Time extended day and had 21 AYP goals.

Along with a strong relationship with the historic neighborhood and a laser like focus on student achievement, Hidden Valley elementary believes all children can be successful.

Reid Park is a 577 size K-5 elementary school located in southwest Charlotte only miles away from the Charlotte-Douglas airport. Students at Reid Park wear uniforms and participate in PBIS. Reid Park was once the sister school to Amay James. Reid Park housed the 4-5 grades and Amay James housed Pre-K -3 grades. Reid Park had also previously served a magnet program. It had a 5 to 1 computer to student ratio and 17 AYP goals. Reid Park participated in the Leadership for Educators' Advanced Performance (LEAP) initiative and has had several Teach for America teachers on staff. Its paired school was Billingsville elementary.

Billingsville is a 396 size school located in Grier Heights community. Billingsville was once a Montessori magnet school. In 2005-2006 Billingsville reopened as a traditional program in a new facility. It had many partnerships such as Selwyn elementary school PTA and Queens University. With 17 AYP goals and a 3 to 1 computer to student ratio, Billingsville also participated in a school-wide Extended Day pilot. A new principal was assigned to Billingsville in 2010.

Sterling is a K-5 Padeia elementary school with an enrollment of 582. The Padeia philosophy promotes collaboration and intellectual dialogue through written student text to strengthen socialization of values and ideas. Sterling had 23 AYP goals and a 4 to 1 computer to student ratio. Located in south Charlotte, Sterling utilized the MAZE reading program and offered afterschool tutorials year round. Its paired school was Highland Renaissance elementary.

Highland Renaissance is a K-5 elementary with a theme to create a learning environment that addresses acceleration and energizes classrooms. Located in the historic Highland Mill neighborhood, it had a 5 to 1 computer to student ratio and 21 AYP goals. Their partnerships include Wachovia, Johnson and Wales and parents who must volunteer and attend parent workshops. The enrollment was 606.

Westerly Hills elementary (WHES) is a 345 size school in southwest Charlotte in the Westerly Hills neighborhood. WHES had a 3 to 1 ratio of computers to students and had a strong emphasis on using technology in the classroom daily. It had 13 AYP goals and strong partnerships including First Presbyterian church and Goodrich Inc. WHES implemented Truancy court to improve student attendance. Utilizing across grade level scheduling and planning was instrumental in the development of common assessments. Its paired school was Sedgefield elementary school.

Sedgefield has a population of 442 and had 17 AYP goals. The computer to student ratio was 4 to 1. Sedgefield implemented Accelerated Math, Character Education and PBIS. Sedgefield boasts of the Drive-Time program. A new principal was appointed to lead Sedgefield in 2010.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data from the CMS Accountability and Research Department website. The data collected were from the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests for students in grades three, four, and five during the school years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. The researcher utilized school level composite data and summaries as student and teacher achievement were not available at the time of this study. The researcher obtained staff satisfaction data from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Schools annual staff survey administered in March of 2009, 2010, and 2011. The data on student achievement results came from student performance reports from the North Carolina End-of-Grade tests in Reading and Math. The researcher assessed students' performance and growth using individual scale scores compiled into an average school composite school which yielded results in the form of an overall school proficiency percentage. The district administers these assessments during the spring of the academic year to students in grades three through five. Students have opportunities to make up the test if they are absent or retest if they perform poorly on the exam. Before a student can retest, they must participate in remediation provided by the local school.

School attendance and suspension data were retrieved from the NC Report Cards, 2010. Every fall each local education agency must certify and confirm specific data from the previous academic school year including enrollment, attendance, and suspension before submitting to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

The researcher collected all data confidentially without adverse effects to participants, and all responses to the surveys were anonymous. All fifth grade students completed the student survey anonymously at their respective schools. The researcher will retain all accessed data in a locked file cabinet for one year after the completion of the research project.

Instrumentation

The researcher drew quantitative data from the results of end-of-grade tests in reading and math, and results of student attendance and suspension from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) Report Cards. Quantitative data also came from student, staff and parent surveys. Qualitative data were derived from the

researcher's auto-ethnography. The CMS Accountability and Research Department distributed surveys to students, parents, and teachers. Each school hand delivered parents surveys to students, collected the surveys in sealed envelopes at the school, and later sent the sealed envelopes to the district office. Staff surveys were administered via email. The Accountability and Research Department collected all data, which ensured that neither the local school nor the researcher could manipulate the results. The surveys included a Likert Scale for recording responses. The Likert scale rubric utilized for student surveys was Always, Sometimes and Never. The Likert scale rubric utilized for parent surveys was Satisfied, Neutral and Unsatisfied. The Likert scale utilized for staff surveys was Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Data Analysis

This analysis compared the achievement data over a three-year span in SSI and non-SSI schools. The achievement data used End-of-Grade proficiency percentage, AYP status and growth comparison of each of the paired schools. Analysis of student attendance and suspension data were also derived and analyzed among the SSI and non-SSI schools. The analysis included a comparison of data on student, staff, and parent satisfaction of the SSI and non-SSI schools to determine stakeholder satisfaction. Qualitative analysis involved the researcher's auto-ethnography to identify behavior before becoming a SSI principal and after becoming a SSI principal.

Summary

This mixed methods research examined the results of the Strategic Staffing Initiative used in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and

2010-2011 school years. The study examined student achievement, attendance, suspension, and stakeholder satisfaction.

In Chapter 4, quantitative and qualitative data analysis examines the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of SSI on student achievement within the target schools?
2. Did the SSI lead to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability Standards within three years?
3. How did the attitudes of each school's staff, parents, and students change over three years of the SSI's implementation?
4. How did student achievement in the SSI schools compare to student achievement in the non-SSI schools during the same time period?

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The study provided an examination of the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) implemented in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools from 2008-2011, and the initiative's impact on student achievement, attendance and suspension rates. This mixed methodology inquiry also examined stakeholder satisfaction using survey data and included an auto-ethnography. The researcher paired each of six SSI schools with a non-SSI school with similar socioeconomic status (free and reduced lunch status). SES with a three percent range was used to determine the comparison schools. The researcher also included an auto-ethnography of her experience as a SSI principal as part the qualitative research component. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What has been the impact of SSI on student achievement within the target schools?
2. Did the SSI lead to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability Standards within three years?
3. How did the attitudes of each school's staff, parents, and students change over three years of the SSI's implementation?
4. How did student achievement in the SSI schools compare to student achievement in the non-SSI schools during the same time period?

Description of Schools

This study provides a comparison between six SSI elementary schools and six schools without this designation. The six schools that participated in the Strategic Staffing Initiative include Briarwood Elementary School, Bruns Avenue Elementary School, Devonshire Elementary School, Reid Park Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, and Westerly Hills Elementary School. The six schools that did not participate in the initiative, but served as comparison schools, include Winterfield Elementary School, Walter G. Byers Elementary School, Hidden Valley Elementary School, Billingsville Elementary School, Highland Renaissance Elementary School, and Sedgefield Elementary School. The schools' demographics, attendance lines, or school program did not significantly change throughout the duration of this study (See Table 2).

Table 2: SSI and Non-SSI Schools

SSI School	FRL (%)	Enrolled	Non-SSI school	FRL (%)	Enrolled
Briarwood	86.0	622	Winterfield	88.0	600
Bruns Avenue	95.7	536	Walter G. Byers	95.8	404
Devonshire	93.0	574	Hidden Valley	90.5	528
Reid Park	92.9	577	Billingsville	93.4	396
Sterling	87.6	582	Highland Renaissance	88.8	606
Westerly Hills	89.9	345	Sedgefield	88.5	442

This section provides a brief description of each SSI school and its comparison Non-SSI school. The descriptions include information about each school's size, student demographics, and staffing.

Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools

In this first pairing, Briarwood Elementary School served as the SSI school, and Winterfield served as the Non-SSI school. Briarwood Elementary School was a K-5

school with 622 students. The population includes 58.7% African American, 1.6% White, 34.4% Hispanic, and 5.3% other students, and 86% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school employs two Assistant Principals, 45 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 37 Support Staff.

Winterfield was a K-5 school with 600 students. The population includes 42.3% African American, 2.3% White, 47.4% Hispanic, and 7.7% Other students; and 88% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. There are two Assistant Principals, 50 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 41 Support Staff.

Bruns and Walter G. Byers Elementary Schools

In this pairing, Bruns Elementary School participated in the Strategic Staffing Initiative, and Walter G. Byers served as the Non-SSI school. Bruns Elementary School was a K-5 school with 536 students. The population includes 84.5% African American, 1.3% White, 6.2% Hispanic, and 8% Other students; and 95.7% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school's staff includes one Assistant Principal, 41 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 31 Support Staff.

Walter G. Byers Elementary School was a K-5 school with 433 students. The population includes 95.1% African American, 0.2% White, 4.4% Hispanic, 3.9% Other students; and 95.8% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school staff includes one Assistant Principal, 36 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 31 Support Staff.

Devonshire and Hidden Valley Elementary Schools

In this pairing, Devonshire served as the SSI school, and Hidden Valley served as the Non-SSI comparison school. Devonshire Elementary School was a K-5 school with

574 students. The population includes 57.3% African American, 1.4% White, 35% Hispanic, 6.3% Other students; and 93% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school staff includes one Assistant Principal, 39 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 44 Support Staff.

Hidden Valley Elementary School was a K-5 school with 528 students. The population includes 59.3% African American, .2% White, 36.7% Hispanic, and 3.8% Other students; and 90.5% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school staff includes one Assistant Principal, 45 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 38 Support Staff.

Reid Park and Billingsville Elementary Schools

In this pairing, Reid Park participated in the Strategic Staffing Initiative, and Billingsville served as the Non-SSI comparison school. Reid Park Elementary School was a K-5 school with 577 students. The population includes 90.08% African American, 1.4% White, 4.2% Hispanic, and 3.6% Other students; and 92.9% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school staff includes one Assistant Principal, 43 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 39 Support Staff.

Billingsville Elementary School was a K-5 school with 396 students. The population includes 64.9% African American, 3.8% White, 21.7% Hispanic, and 9.6% Other students; and 93.4% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school staff includes one Assistant Principal, 38 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 33 Support Staff.

Sterling and Highland Renaissance Elementary Schools

In this pairing, Sterling Elementary School participated in the Strategic Staffing Initiative, and Highland Renaissance served as the Non-SSI comparison school. Sterling was a K-5 school with 582 students. The population includes 60.8% African American, 3.4% White, 30.6% Hispanic, and 5.2% Other students; and 87.6% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The staff includes one Assistant Principal, 44 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 41 Support Staff.

Highland Renaissance Elementary School was a K-5 school with 606 students. The population includes 60.9% African American, 5.9% White, 27.7% Hispanic, and 5.4% Other students; and 88.8% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The staff includes one Assistant Principal, 47 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 41 Support Staff.

Westerly Hills and Sedgefield Elementary Schools

In this pairing, Westerly Hills Elementary School served as the SSI school, and Sedgefield Elementary School served as the Non-SSI comparison school. Westerly Hills was a K-5 school with 345 students. The population includes 76.2% African American, 3.5% White, 5.8% Hispanic, and 14.5% Other students; and 89.9% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The staff includes one Assistant Principal, 29 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 26 Support Staff.

Sedgefield Elementary School was a K-5 school with 442 students. The population consists of 57.9% African American, 5.7% White, 29% Hispanic, and 7.5% Other students; and 88.5% of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. The

staff includes one Assistant Principal, 46 teachers, one Student Support Specialist, and 34 Support Staff.

Description of Students

The students in the study ranged in age from eight to ten years old, and were in grades three, four, and five at the time of the study. The research utilized test scores from the North Carolina End-of-Grade (NCEOG) Tests in Reading and Math. All fifth grade students had the opportunity to participate in the survey. Average daily attendance and suspension data were also collected from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction School Report Card. Average daily attendance is calculated by the total number of days of attendance for all students divided by the total number school days. Attendance is defined as when a student is present at school, at a school sponsored function or being supervised by a school official on a school day according to the NCDPI Report Card. Suspension data were collected per 100 students on an annual basis for all enrolled kindergarten through fifth grade students.

Description of Staff

The study also included data from certified and non-certified staff members at the SSI schools. The age of staff members ranged from 25 through 55. A number of the school staff members participated throughout the duration of data collection process, while others left due to resignations, transfers, or retirement. In many cases, new staff persons took over the roles of the vacating staff members.

Description of Parents

A sample of parents of students in grade five was also surveyed. The respondents were randomly chosen by the CMS Accountability Department. There was no way of

knowing the age or ethnicity of the participants as respondents were not asked to reveal that data.

Quantitative Results

Bruns Avenue and Walter G. Byers Elementary Schools

Over the course of the study, the students at Bruns Avenue Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores during the study duration (2007-2008 school years to the 2010-2011 school year). During the 2007-2008 year, 18.8% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011, 43% of students were at or above grade level in reading, a gain of 24.2. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 22.7% the students at Walter G. Byers Elementary School non-SSI comparison school were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage increased to 33.7%.

Students at Bruns Avenue Elementary School demonstrated an increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 43.8% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 67.2 % of students were at or above grade level. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 29.8% of the students at Walter G. Byers were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage had increased to 48.5%. Overall, Bruns Avenue Elementary School students made a total gain of 24.2% in reading and 23.4% in math. Walter G. Byers Elementary School, however, made a gain of 11% in reading and 18.7% in math over the three years of the study (See Figure 2 and Table 3).

Table 3: Reading and math Scores for Bruns Avenue Elementary School and Walter G. Byers Elementary School

Note: *SSI school ** Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Bruns*	18.8	43.8
2007-2008 Byers**	22.7	29.8
2008-20 09 Bruns*	36.4	56.8
2008-2009 Byers**	39.0	52.7
2009-2010 Bruns*	42.3	62.4
2009-2010 Byers**	39.9	53.8
2010-2011 Bruns*	43.0	67.2
2010-2011 Byers**	33.7	48.5

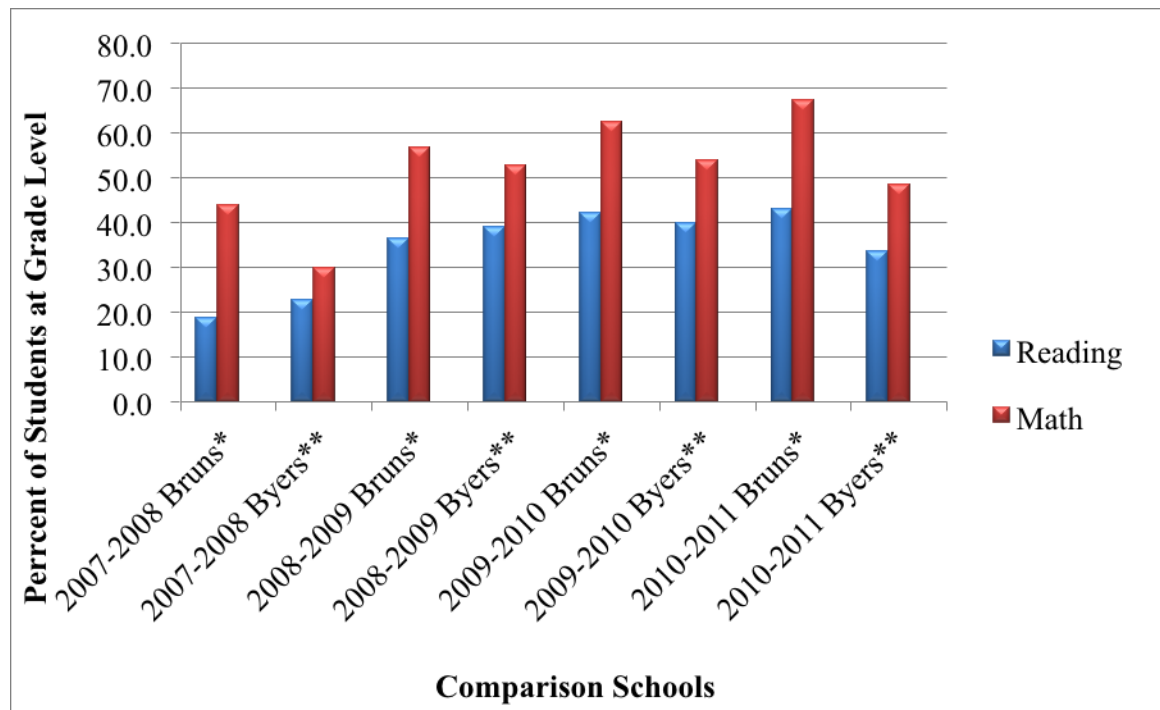


Figure 2: Reading and math Scores for Bruns Avenue Elementary School and Walter G. Byers Elementary School

Devonshire and Hidden Valley Elementary Schools

Students at Devonshire Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 33.9% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011, 55.3 % of students were at or above grade level in reading. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 38.2% of Hidden Valley Elementary School, non-SSI school students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage had increased to 56.2%.

Students at Devonshire demonstrated a significant increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 54.2% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 93.5 % of students were at or above grade level. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 65.3% of the students at Hidden Valley were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, this percentage had increased to 74.4% (See Figure 3 and Table 4). Overall, students at Devonshire made a gain of 21.4% in reading and 39.3% in math. Students at Hidden Valley made a total gain of 18% in reading and 9.1% in math.

Table 4: Reading and math Scores for Devonshire Elementary School and Hidden Valley Elementary School

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Devonshire*	33.9	54.2
2007-2008 Hidden Valley**	38.2	65.3
2008-2009 Devonshire*	54.9	77.3
2008-2009 Hidden Valley**	53.5	70.8
2009-2010 Devonshire*	54.7	81.8
2009-2010 Hidden Valley**	62.6	78.1
2010-2011 Devonshire*	55.3	93.5
2010-2011 Hidden Valley**	56.2	74.4

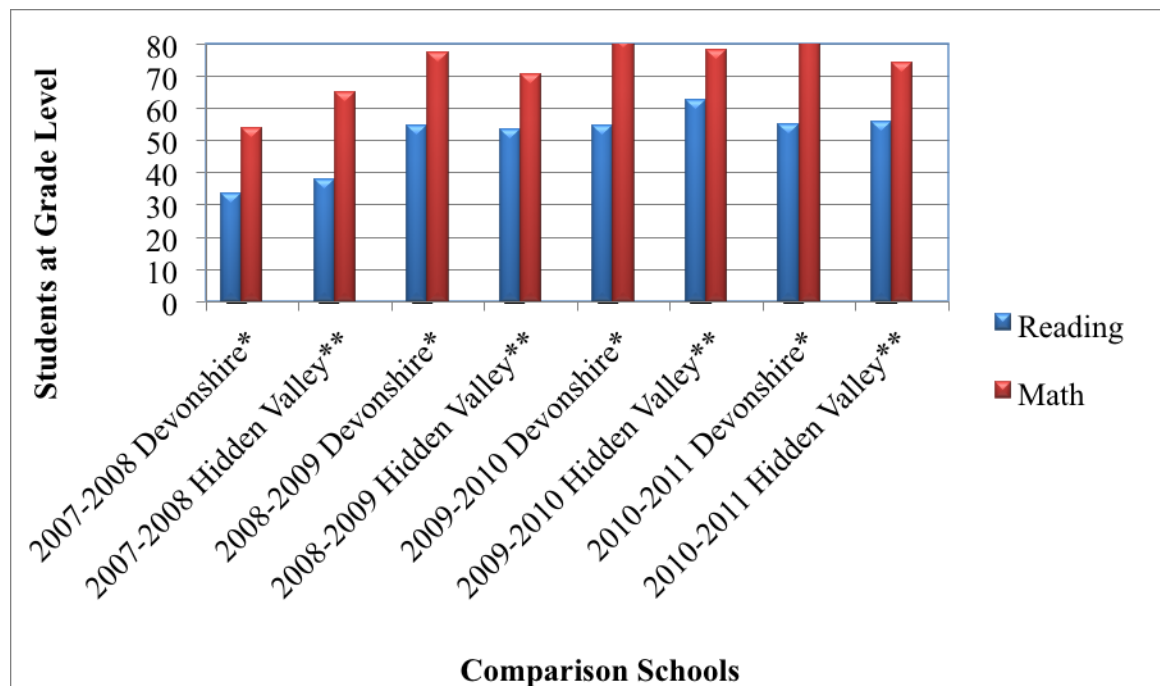


Figure 3: Reading and math Scores for Devonshire Elementary School and Hidden Valley Elementary School

Reid Park and Billingsville Elementary Schools

Students at Reid Park Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores between the 2007-2008 school year and the 2010-2011 school years.

During the 2007-2008 school year, 22.8% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 37.6% of Billingsville Elementary School non-SSI comparison school students were at or above grade level in reading. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 26.9% of the students at Billingsville were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage had increased to 56.2%.

Reid Park students demonstrated an increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 30.8% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 61.9 % of students were at or above grade level. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 43.9% of the students at Billingsville were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage had increased to 63% (See Figure 4 and Table 5). Overall, Reid Park students made a total gain of 14.8% in reading and 31.1% in math, while Billingsville students made a total gain of 7.6 % in reading and 19.1% in math.

Table 5: Reading and math Scores for Reid Park Elementary School and Billingsville Elementary School

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Reid Park*	22.8	30.8
2007-2008 Billingsville**	26.9	43.9
2008-2009 Reid Park*	35.0	46.6
2008-2009 Billingsville**	37.7	56.4
2009-2010 Reid Park*	33.9	61.8
2009-2010 Billingsville**	24.5	51.1
2010-2011 Reid Park*	37.6	61.9
2010-2011 Billingsville**	34.5	63.0

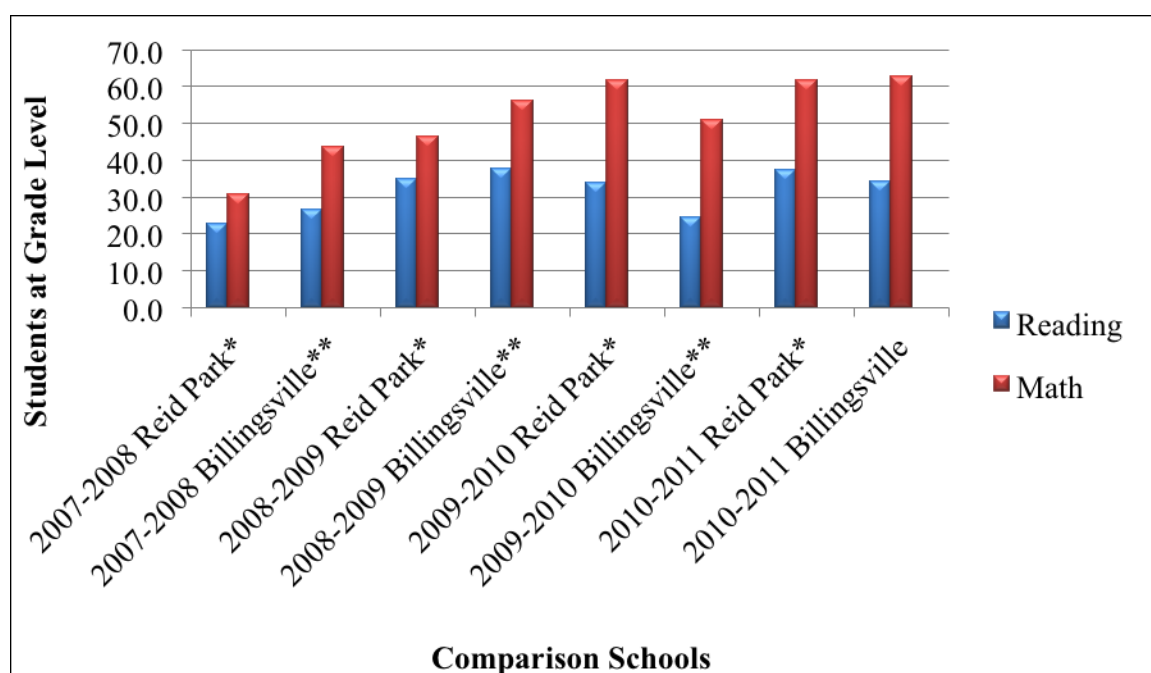


Figure 4: Reading and math Scores for Reid Park Elementary School and Billingsville Elementary School

Sterling and Highland Elementary Schools

Students at Sterling Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores between the 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-

2008 school year, 34.6% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 73.8% of students were at or above grade level in reading. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, students at Highland Elementary School, non-SSI comparison school were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage had increased to 50.6%.

Students at Sterling demonstrated an increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 52.4% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 86.4 % of students were at or above grade level. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 59.3% of the students at Highland were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage had increased to 68.2% (See Figure 5 and Table 6). Overall, Sterling students made a total of 39.2% in reading and 34% in math. Highland students made a total gain of 11.3% in reading and 8.9% in math.

Table 6: Reading and math Scores for Sterling Elementary School and Highland Elementary School

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Sterling*	34.6	52.4
2007-2008 Highland R**	39.3	59.3
2008-2009 Sterling*	59.0	83.8
2008-2009 Highland R**	47.8	66.2
2009-2010 Sterling*	65.8	81.6
2009-2010 Highland R**	57.0	70.7
2010-2011 Sterling*	73.8	86.4
2010-2011 Highland R**	50.6	68.2

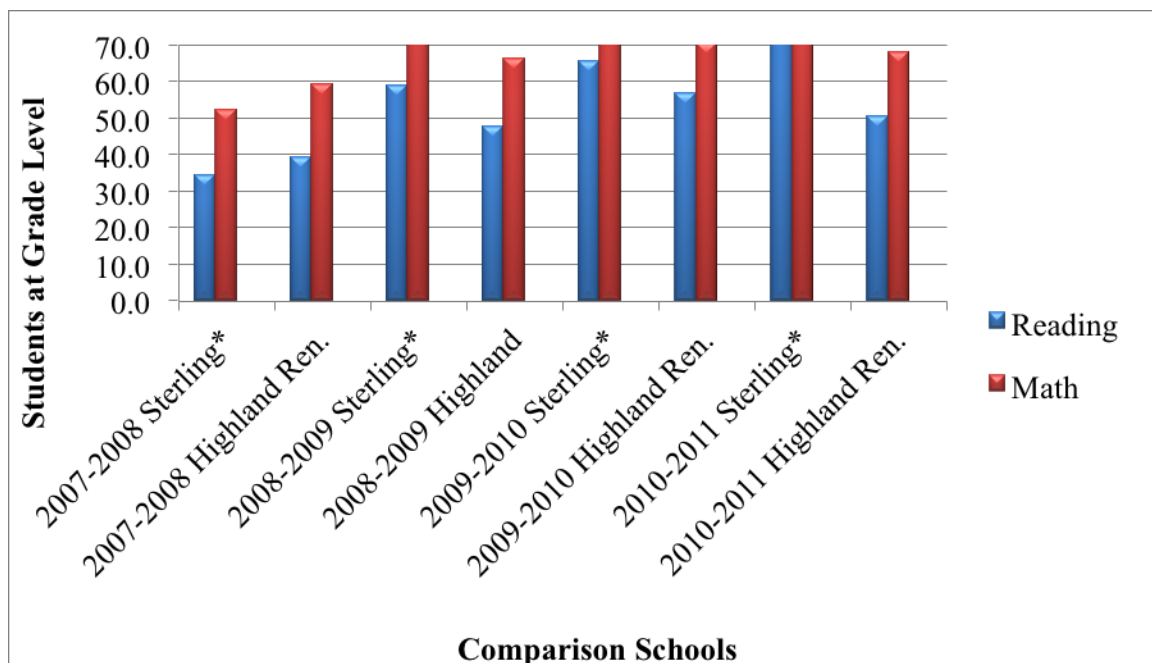


Figure 5: Reading and math Scores for Sterling Elementary School and Highland Elementary School

Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools

Students at Briarwood Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores between the 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 31.8% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 56.3% of students were at or above grade level in reading. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 35.5% of the students at Winterfield Elementary School non-SSI comparison school were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage had increased to 46.8%.

Briarwood Elementary School students demonstrated an increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 school years. In the 2007-2008 school year, 45.7% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 67.3% of students were at or above grade level. At the end of the 2007-2008

school year, 52.9% of the students at Winterfield were at or above grade level in math.

By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage had increased to 68.5% (See Figure 6 and Table 7). Overall, Briarwood students made a total gain of 24.5% in reading and 21.6% in math. Winterfield students made a total gain of 11.3% in reading and 15.6% in math.

Table 7: Reading and math Scores for Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools

Note: * SSI school **Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Briarwood*	31.8	45.7
2007-2008 Winterfield**	35.5	52.9
2008-2009 Briarwood*	41.6	57.1
2008-2009 Winterfield**	49.2	66.3
2009-2010 Briarwood*	50.0	66.0
2009-2010 Winterfield**	50.9	76.1
2010-2011 Briarwood*	56.3	67.3
2010-2011 Winterfield**	46.8	68.5

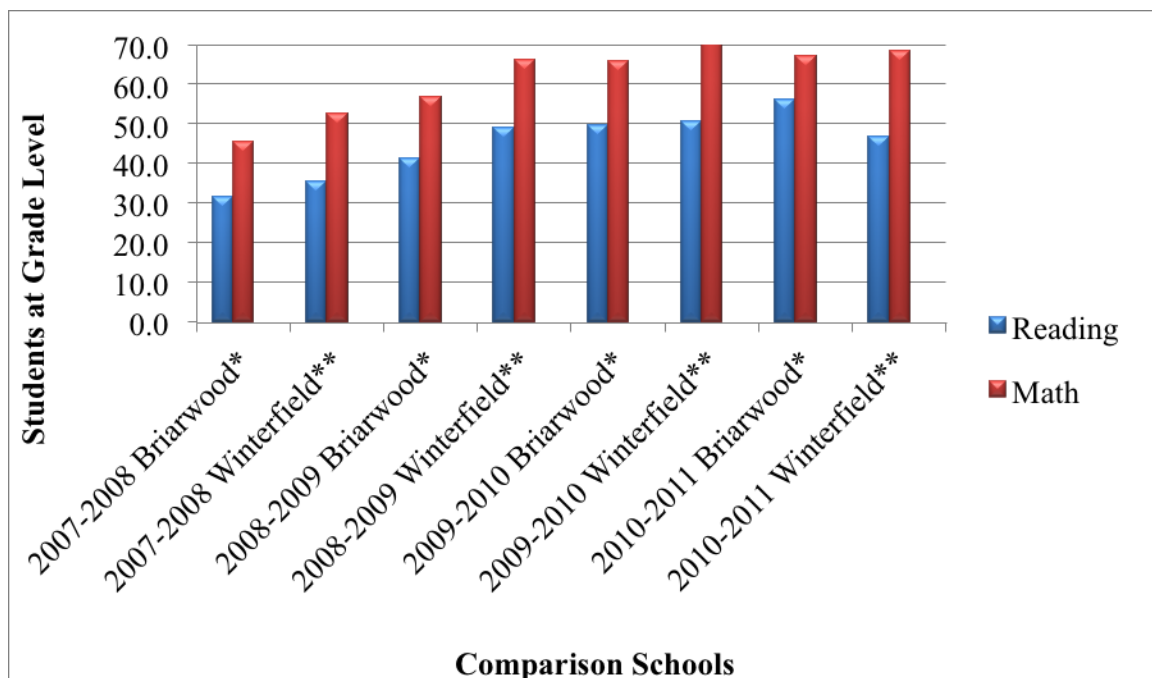


Figure 6: Reading and math Scores for Briarwood and Winterfield Elementary Schools

Westerly Hills and Sedgefield Elementary Schools

Students at Westerly Hills Elementary School, SSI school demonstrated an increase in reading scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, 32.9% of students were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, 48.5% of students were at or above grade level in reading. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 36.9% of the students at Sedgefield Elementary School non-SSI comparison school were at or above grade level in reading. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, that percentage had increased to 44.3%.

Westerly Hills students demonstrated an increase in math scores between the 2007-2008 and the 2010-2011 school years. In the 2007-2008 school year, 41.7% of students were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year,

72% of students were at or above grade level. Sedgefield students did not make gains in math. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, 63.6% of the students Sedgefield Elementary School were at or above grade level in math. By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage had decreased to 56.6% (See Figure 7 and Table 8). Overall, Westerly Hills students achieved a total gain of 15.6% in reading and 30.3% in math. Sedgefield students achieved a total gain of 7.4% in reading, but their math scores decreased 7%.

Table 8: Reading and math Scores for Westerly Hills Elementary School and Sedgefield Elementary School

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

School Year/School	Reading	Math
2007-2008 Westerly Hills*	32.9	41.7
2007-2008 Sedgefield**	36.9	63.6
2008-2009 Westerly Hills*	43.9	54.9
2008-2009 Sedgefield**	40.9	74.6
2009-2010 Westerly Hills*	48.3	66.2
2009-2010 Sedgefield**	41.1	69.3
2010-2011 Westerly Hills*	48.5	72.0
2010-2011 Sedgefield**	44.3	56.6

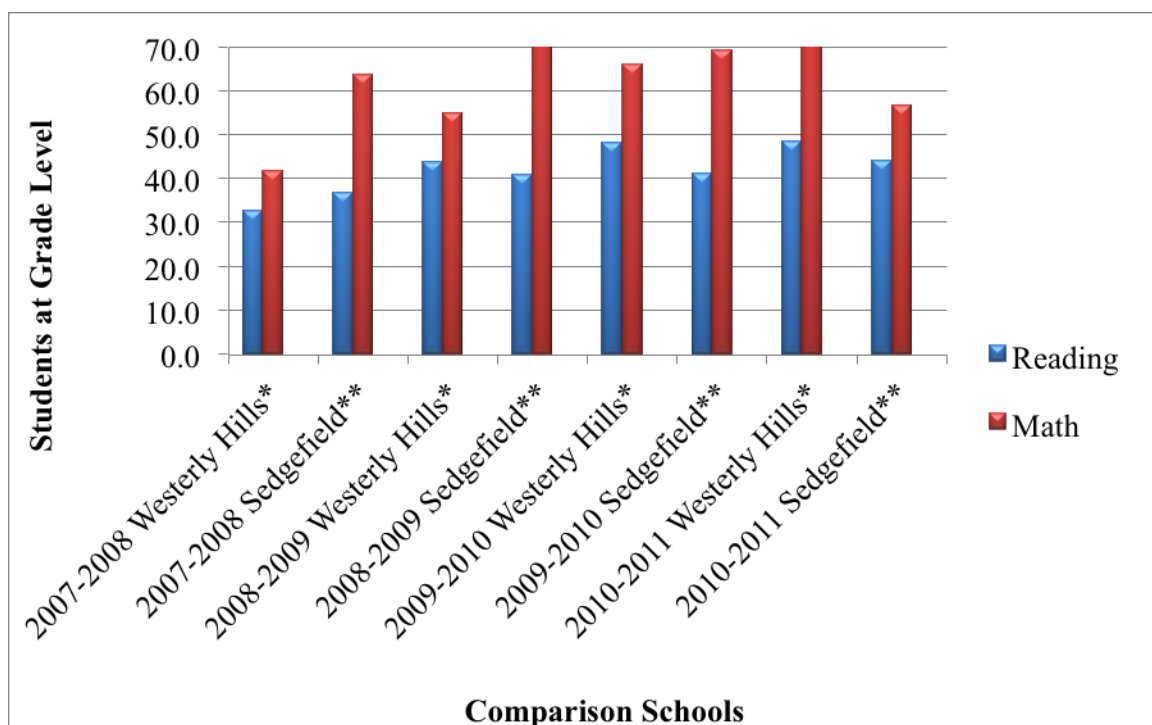


Figure 7: Reading and math Scores for Westerly Hills Elementary School and Sedgefield Elementary School

Achievement Gains and Losses

Students at Reid Park and Briarwood, SSI schools demonstrated inconsistent gains in reading. Their data were similar to that of the paired non SSI schools. Students at all six SSI schools demonstrated increases in math achievement during the three years of the study. They also scored higher each year than the paired non-SSI schools. Each of the SSI schools had more student achievement gain than their paired non-SSI school. The range of overall achievement in reading was 14.8-39.2 points in the SSI schools and 7.4-29.3 points in the non-SSI schools. The range of overall achievement in math was 21.6 -39.3 points in the SSI schools and 7-19.1 points in the non-SSI schools. See Tables 9-12.

Based on the comparison of student achievement data, the researcher concluded that four of the SSI schools demonstrated measurably improved achievement in Reading

and outperformed the paired school. All of the schools participating in SSI improved in Math and outperformed the paired school. Four of six of the SSI schools in the study achieved growth each year with the exception of Briarwood and Reid Park.

Table 9: Achievement gains and losses

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

School	Reading	Math
Bruns*	24.2%	23.4%
Byers**	11%	18.7%
Devonshire*	21.4%	39.3%
Hidden Valley**	18%	9.1%
Reid Park*	14.8%	31.1%
Billingsville**	7.6%	19.1%
Sterling*	39.2%	34%
Highland**	11.3%	8.9%
Briarwood*	24.5%	21.6%
Winterfield**	11.3%	15.6%
Westerly Hills*	15.6%	30.3%
Sedgefield**	7.4%	-7%

Table 10: Achievement gains and losses

Schools	Overall Reading	Overall Math
SSI Schools	14.8%-39.2%	21.6%-39.3%
Non-SSI Schools	7.4%-29.3%	-7%-19.1%

School Performance Data

Briarwood students, SSI school, achieved expected growth during the first year of the study, no growth during the second year, and high growth in the final year.

Winterfield students, non-SSI school achieved expected growth during the first two years and high growth the final year. Bruns students, SSI school, achieved expected growth during the first year and high growth the following two years. Walter G. Byers students, non-SSI school, achieved expected growth during the first year and no growth for the final two years. Devonshire students, SSI school, achieved high growth all three years. Hidden Valley students, non-SSI school, achieved expected growth the first year, high growth the second year, and no growth in the final year of the study.

Reid Park students, SSI school, achieved no growth during the first year of the study, high growth the second year, and no growth the following year. Billingsville students, non-SSI school, achieved expected growth the first two years of the study and high growth in the final year. Sterling students, SSI school, achieved high growth the first year, expected growth the second year, and high growth the following years. Highland Renaissance students non-SSI school, achieved no growth the first year, high growth the second year, and expected growth the final year.

Westerly Hills students, SSI school, achieved expected growth the first year of the study, expected growth the second year, and high growth the final year. Sedgfield

students, non-SSI school, achieved high growth the first two years and no growth in the final year of the study (See Table 9).

Table 11: School performance data

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

Schools	08-09 Growth	09-10 Growth	10-11 Growth
Briarwood*	Expected Growth	No Growth	High Growth
Winterfield**	Expected Growth	Expected Growth	High Growth
Bruns Avenue*	Expected Growth	High Growth	High Growth
Byers**	Expected Growth	No Growth	No Growth
Devonshire*	High Growth	High Growth	High Growth
Hidden Valley**	Expected Growth	High Growth	No Growth
Reid Park*	No Growth	High Growth	Expected Growth
Billingsville**	Expected Growth	Expected Growth	High Growth
Sterling*	High Growth	Expected Growth	High Growth
Highland**	No Growth	High Growth	Expected Growth
Westerly Hills*	Expected Growth	Expected Growth	High Growth
Sedgefield**	High Growth	High Growth	No Growth

Overall Growth Summary

Five of the SSI six schools demonstrated growth in year one of the study; however, Reid Park Elementary School, SSI school, did not experience any growth at the end of the first school year in comparison to its paired school, Billingsville, non-SSI school, which achieved expected growth. SSI schools, Briarwood Elementary School, Bruns Elementary School, and Westerly Hills Elementary School demonstrated expected growth while their paired schools, Winterfield, Byers, and Sedgefield respectively achieved high growth. Devonshire Elementary School and Sterling Elementary School,

SSI schools, experienced high growth while their paired schools, Hidden Valley made expected growth and Highland Renaissance did not realize growth.

At the end of the second year of the study, five of the six SSI schools demonstrated growth. Sterling Elementary School and Westerly Hills Elementary School achieved expected growth as their paired schools Highland Renaissance and Sedgefield reached high growth. Bruns Elementary School reached high growth while its paired school, Byers did not attain growth. Devonshire Elementary School and Reid Park Elementary School also achieved high growth while their paired schools, Hidden Valley realized high growth and Billingsville achieved expected growth respectively.

Five of the six SSI schools, Briarwood Elementary School, Bruns Elementary School, Devonshire Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, and Westerly Hills Elementary School achieved high growth at the end of the third year of the study while Their paired schools, Byers, Hidden Valley and Sedgefield achieved no growth and Highland Renaissance attained expected growth during the third year. Reid Park Elementary School achieved expected growth in the third year as its paired school, Billingsville demonstrated high growth. One SSI school, Devonshire Elementary achieved high growth all three years of the study.

Adequate Yearly Progress

As discussed in Chapter 2, three days after his inauguration, President George W. Bush signed legislation that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB was a 1,100-page document that required schools to meet adequate yearly progress each year or face sanctions. Under the Act, district and state agencies mandated that schools that consistently failed to meet

AYP goals had to identify and execute plans to address the areas of failure. Each year that a school did not meet AYP expectations, the sanctions became more severe. If a school did not make AYP for five years in a row, it became eligible for restructuring, which gave the school district the autonomy to replace or dismiss the staff or redesign and restructure the governance of the school.

When developing NCLB, the federal government expected the Act would provide a comprehensive education measurement strategy focused on standards with assessment to determine whether or not students were meeting the standards. The Act also provided an accountability arm to hold schools accountable for helping students reach those standards. District and state representatives measured each school's adequate yearly progress toward meeting established educational goals using statewide standardized tests. Failure to make adequate progress resulted in the aforementioned sanctions.

Briarwood Elementary School did not meet AYP goals the first or second year of the study, but did make AYP by the final year. Winterfield did not meet AYP expectations the first or final years of the study, but made AYP the second year. Bruns Avenue met AYP goals the first year, but not the second or third year. Walter G. Byers Elementary School did not meet AYP goals for the three years of the study. Devonshire did not meet AYP expectations the first or final year of the study, but did make AYP the second year. Hidden Valley did not meet AYP goals the first or final years, but the school did make AYP during the second year of the study.

Reid Park and Billingsville Elementary Schools both met AYP goals the first year of the study, but not the following two years. Sterling met AYP expectations all three years. Highland Renaissance met AYP goals the first year, but did not make AYP the

following two years. Westerly Hills met AYP expectations the first two years, but not the final year of the study. Sedgfield met AYP goals the first year but did not meet AYP the following two years (See Table 12).

Table 12: Adequate Yearly Progress

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

Schools	08-09 AYP	09-10 AYP	10-11 AYP
Briarwood*	Not Met	Not Met	Met
Winterfield**	Not Met	Met	Not Met
Bruns*	Met	Not Met	Not Met
Byers**	Not Met	Not Met	Not Met
Devonshire*	Not Met	Met	Not Met
Hidden Valley**	Not Met	Met	Not Met
Reid Park*	Met	Not Met	Not Met
Billingsville**	Met	Not Met	Not Met
Sterling*	Met	Met	Met
Highland**	Met	Not Met	Not Met
Westerly Hills*	Met	Met	Not Met
Sedgfield**	Met	Not Met	Not Met

Summary of AYP

At the end of the first year, four of the six SSI schools, Bruns Elementary School, Reid Park Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School met AYP, their paired schools, Byers, Billingsville and Highland Renaissance did not meet AYP. Westerly Hills, SSI school also met AYP, its paired school, Sedgfield also met AYP. Two SSI schools, Briarwood Elementary School and Devonshire Elementary School, did not meet AYP during the first year and neither did their paired schools, Winterfield and Hidden Valley.

At the end of the second year in the study, three SSI schools, Devonshire Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School and Westerly Hills Elementary School, met AYP during the same year, non SSI schools, Hidden Valley met AYP but Highland and Sedgfield did not meet AYP. Briarwood Elementary School, SSI school did not meet AYP but its paired school Winterfield met AYP. Neither Bruns Elementary School nor Reid Park Elementary, SSI schools, or Byers nor Billingsville their paired schools met AYP during the second year of the study.

At the end of the final year of the study, two SSI schools, Briarwood Elementary School and Sterling Elementary School met AYP while Winerfield and Highland Renaissance the paired schools did not meet AYP. Four SSI schools, Bruns Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, Reid Park Elementary School and Westerly Hills Elementary School nor their paired schools met AYP during the third year of the study.

Student Attendance and Suspension

Attendance is defined as when a student is present at school, at a school-sponsored function or being supervised by a school official on a school day (NCDPI Report Card, 2010). Average daily attendance is calculated by the total number of days of attendance for all students divided by the total number school days. Out of school suspension data were collected per 100 students on an annual basis for all enrolled kindergarten through fifth grade students (See table 13).

Table 13: School suspensions

Note: *SSI school **Non-SSI school

Schools	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11
Briarwood*	13	12	11	6
Winterfield**	6	4	1	4
Bruns*	22	20	24	13
Byers**	32	37	52	46
Devonshire*	13	8	3	14
Hidden Valley**	21	12	13	24
Reid Park*	39	36	27	10
Billingsville**	19	16	15	3
Sterling*	33	6	8	4
Highland**	13	18	13	15
Westerly Hills*	10	12	16	13
Sedgefield	12	15	28	12

Student Attendance

This study examined average daily attendance and out of school suspension rates for each SSI and non SSI school. The average daily attendance of each school was examined but did not reveal substantial data for analysis All SSI and non-SSI schools had and average attendance between 95-96%.

Suspension Summary

Four of six SSI schools, Bruns, Devonshire, Sterling and Westerly Hills had better suspension rates (fewer suspensions per 100 students) than their paired non-SSI schools over the course of the study. Wintefield and Billingsville, non-SSI schools had better suspension rates (fewer suspensions per 100 students) than their paired SSI schools.

Byers, non-SSI school, had the highest number of suspensions while Winterfield, another non-SSI school had the fewest number of suspensions. All SSI schools had a decrease over time although their paired schools did not follow that same pattern.

Parent Satisfaction Survey

This study examined parent satisfaction survey data of the SSI schools at the end of the school year in 2009, 2010 and 2011. At Briarwood in 2009, 98.6% of the parents reported that they were satisfied, compared to 74.3% in 2010 and 100% in 2011.

Winterfield, the paired school had 33.3% satisfaction in 2009 and increased to 51.5% and 60% in 2010 and 2011. In 2009, for example, 61.6% of the parents at Bruns Avenue Elementary School reported that they were satisfied. Parental satisfaction increased to 90.6% in 2010. In 2009 the paired school Byers had a 50% satisfaction rate a decrease to 18.8% in 2010 and an increase to 66.7% in 2011. In 2009, 66.9% of the parents at Devonshire Elementary School reported that they were satisfied. This figure increased to 73.1% in 2010 and 100% in 2011.

In 2009, Hidden Valley the paired school had a 42.9% satisfaction and 47.2% in 2010 and increased to 50% in 2011. In 2009, 55.5% of the parents at Reid Park Elementary School reported that they were satisfied, compared to 61.2% in 2010 and 80.7% in 2011. Billingsville, Reid Park's paired school had a 52.2% parent satisfaction rate in 2009, 40.6% in 2010 and 100% in 2011. In 2009, 81.5% of the parents at Sterling Elementary School reported satisfaction. This percentage increased slightly in 2010 to 84.2% and declined to 79.6% in 2011. The paired school, Highland Renaissance had the following parent satisfaction rates, 72.7% in 2009, 61.3% in 2010 and 66.7% in 2011

Table 14: Parent satisfaction survey

Parents Survey Results

Note: RR Response Rate S Satisfied N Neutral U Unsatisfied

* SSI school ** Non-SSI School

Schools	2008-09				2009-10				2010-11			
	% RR	% S	% N	% U	% RR	% S	% N	% U	% RR	% S	% N	% U
Bruns*	24.1	61.6	38.5	0	31.7	90.6	6.3	3.1	1.3	0	100	0
Byers**	37	50	40	10	41.2	18.8	25.0	37.5	5.9	66.7	33	0
Devonshire*	38.2	66.9	4.8	23.8	55.3	73.1	19.2	7.7	1.9	100	0	0
Hidden Valley**	38.9	42.9	33.3	4.8	66.3	47.2	35.8	1.9	4.9	50.0	25	25
Reid Park*	16.4	55.5	22.2	22.2	47.2	61.2	20.4	18.4	3.1	80.7	19.2	0
Billingsville**	27.4	52.2	17.4	8.7	35.6	40.6	50.0	0	1.9	100	0	0
Sterling*	50	81.5	10.9	0	51.9	84.2	10.5	5.3	0	79.6	10.2	10.2
Highland**	40	72.7	22.7	4.5	55.6	61.3	25.8	3.2	3.9	66.7	0	33.3

Table 14 (continued)

Schools	2008-09				2009-10				2010-11			
	% RR	% S	% N	% U	% RR	% S	% N	% U	% RR	% S	% N	% U
Briarwood*	10.7	98.6	0	1.4	43.2	74.3	17.1	5.7	1.3	100	0	0
Winterfield**	4	33.3	25.4	0	43	51.5	33.3	12.1	6.3	60	20	20
Westerly Hills*	22	81.9	0	9.1	67	75	15.9	9	5	50	25	25
Sedgefield**	35	61	31.7	2.4	33.3	38.5	46.2	3.8	5.1	50	50	0

Summary of Parent Satisfaction

While Westerly Hills Elementary School earned an 81.9% parent satisfaction rate in 2009, the percentage dropped throughout the study to 75% in 2010 and 50% in 2011. In 2009, Sedgfield the paired school had 61% satisfaction, 38.5 in 2010 and 50% in 2011 (See Table 13). Summary of Parent Satisfaction

Parent survey response rates ranged in each school and varied across the three year study. The researcher analyzed *satisfied* response rates compared to *neutral* combined to *unsatisfied*. During year one response rates varied from 10.7% - 50% in the SSI schools and 4% - 37% response in non-SSI schools. In year two SSI schools had a response rate range 31.7%-67% and the paired schools had 33.3% - 66.3%. In year three the SSI response rate range was 1.3% - 5.9% and non-SSI schools 1.35 - 6.3%.

Student Satisfaction Survey

Student survey data of the SSI schools at the end of the school year in 2009 and 2011 were examined. In 2009, 40.5% of the students at Briarwood Elementary School stated that they were *always satisfied* compared to 54.4% who were *sometimes satisfied*. The percentages remained close in 2011 with 41.3% of the students indicating that they were *always satisfied* and 58.7%. The comparison school, Winterfield, 41.4% were *always satisfied* in 2009 compared to 56.95 *sometimes satisfied*. In 2009 at Bruns, 50.8% of the students stated that they were *always satisfied* compared to 42.9% who were *sometimes satisfied*. In 2011, the number of students who were *always satisfied* decreased to 34.2% with 61.6% indicating that they were *sometimes satisfied*. The comparison school Byers, had a 36.8 always satisfied rate in 2009 and 42.4% in 2011.

The students responded 54.45 *sometimes satisfied* in 2009 and a slight decrease to 51.5 in 2011.

At Devonshire Elementary School, 51.4% of students responded that they were *always satisfied* and 43.1% indicated that they were *sometimes satisfied*. In 2011, 53% of the students responded that they were *always satisfied*, and 45.5% indicated that they were *satisfied sometimes*. Hidden Valley the comparison school had a 45.7 *always satisfied rate* in 2009 and 44.1% in 2011. The *sometimes* rating was 48.6 in 2009 and 25.9 in 2011. In 2009, 39.3% of the students at Reid Park Elementary School indicated that they were *always satisfied*, and 53.6% indicated that they were *sometimes satisfied*. The percentage of *satisfied* students decreased in 2011, the percentage of *satisfied* students decreased to 37.7% of the students *always satisfied* and 52.8% of the students *sometimes satisfied*. The comparison school, Billingsville, had the following ratings, in 2009 65.3 *always satisfied* and a slight decrease to 64.7 in 2011. *Sometimes satisfied* was revealed 28.6% in 2009 and 33.3 in 2011.

In 2009, 29.7% of Sterling Elementary School students responded that they were *always satisfied*, and 59.4% indicated that they were *sometimes satisfied*. In 2011, 41.4% of the students reported that they were *always satisfied*, and 56.9% of the students responded that they were *sometimes satisfied*. The comparison school, Highland Renaissance had a 45.9% *always satisfied* rating and *sometimes satisfied* 47.3% in 2009 and in 2011 the rating was 45.7% *always satisfied* and 50% stated they were *sometimes satisfied*. In 2009, 51.7% of the students at Westerly Hills Elementary School indicated that they were *always satisfied*, and 36.4% responded that they were *sometimes satisfied*. In 2011, 41.3% of the students indicated that they were *always satisfied*, and 58.7%

stated that they were *sometimes satisfied*. At Sedgefield elementary the students of the comparison school responded 51.5% *always satisfied* and 45.5% *sometimes satisfied* in 2009 and 47.1% *always satisfied* and 50% *sometimes satisfied* in 2011(See Table 15).

Table 15: Student satisfaction survey

Student Survey Results (No Data Available for 2009-2010)

Note: A Always S Sometimes N Never; * SSI school ** Non-SSI school

Schools	2008-09				2010-11			
	Response Rate	A	S	N	Response Rate	A	S	N
Bruns*	87.8	50.8	42.9	6.3	100	34.2	61.6	4.1
Byers**	100.	36.8	54.4	8.8	93.1	42.4	51.5	6.1
Devonshire*	92.3	51.4	43.1	5.6	100	53.0	45.5	1.5
Hidden Valley**	90.1	45.7	48.6	5.7	87.0	44.1	25.9	2.9
Reid Park*	98.8	39.3	53.6	7.1	85.5	37.7	52.8	9.4
Billingsville**	82.0	65.3	28.6	6.1	84.6	64.7	33.3	2.0
Sterling*	94.3	29.7	59.4	3.7	96.7	41.4	56.9	1.7
Highland**	74.3	45.9	47.3	6.8	95.9	45.7	50.0	4.7
Briarwood*	92.1	40.5	54.4	5.1	94	41.3	58.7	
Winterfield**	73.4	41.4	56.9	1.7	100.	37.7	59.0	3.3
Westerly Hills*	95	51.7	36.4	9.1	100	41.3	58.7	
Sedgefield**	85.2	51.5	45.5	3.0	100	47.1	50.0	2.9

Summary of Student Survey

Three SSI schools, Bruns, Devonshire and Westerly Hills and three non-SSI schools, Billingsville, Highland Renaissance and Winterfield had higher percentages of *always satisfied* than *sometimes satisfied* in 2008-2009. Four of six non-SSI schools, Byers, Billingsville, Highland Renaissance and Sedgefield had higher percentages of *always satisfied* than *sometimes satisfied* in 2010-2011. Three SSI schools, Bruns, Devonshire and Westerly Hills and one non-SSI school, Billingsville had higher percentages of *always satisfied* than *sometimes satisfied* in 2008-2009. Devonshire, SSI school and two non-SSI schools, Hidden Valley and Billingsville had higher percentages of *always satisfied* than *sometimes satisfied* in 2010-2011.

Staff Satisfaction Survey

Staff members (teachers and instructional assistants) at the SSI and non SSI schools completed satisfaction surveys at the end of each school year in the study (2009, 2010, 2011). The survey asked staff members to indicate agreement on several statements regarding school leadership. The survey employed a Likert scale with “1” representing “strongly disagree” and “4” representing “strongly agree.”

2008-2009 Staff Survey Results

In 2008-2009, when responding to the statement, “My principal uses the school’s mission, values, and beliefs to guide his/her decision making,” the responses ranged from 2.96 to 3.88 for all schools. When addressing the statement, “My principal sets high professional standards for me,” the responses ranged from 3.08 to 3.88. When addressing the statement, “My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging staff,” the responses ranged from 2.24 to 3.62. The responses to the statement, “My school has

a strong culture of collaboration among the staff,” ranged from 2.92 to 3.62. When addressing the statement, “Failures at my school are seen as opportunities for improvement,” the responses ranged from 2.64 to 3.21. Responses to the statement, “I feel empowered by my principal to do what is necessary to impact student achievement,” ranged from 2.03 to 3.50. Lastly, the responses to the statement, “There are effective opportunities for professional growth at this school,” ranged from 2.53 to 3.66. See Tables 16 for survey questions and Table 17 for survey response rates and participant responses to each survey question.

Table 16: Staff survey questions 2008-2009; 2009-2010; 2010-2011

Question Number	Survey Question
Question 1	My principal uses the schools mission, values, and beliefs to guide his/her decision-making.
Question 2	My principal sets high professional standards for me.
Question 3	My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging staff.
Question 4	My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.
Question 5	Failures at my school are seen as opportunities for improvements.
Question 6	I feel empowered by my principal to do what is necessary to impact student achievement.
Question 7	There are effective opportunities for professional growth at this school (examples: in-house professional learning communities, professional development, mentors/coaches, etc.).

Table 17: Staff survey results 2008-2009 (Results represent the mean score for Teachers and Instructional Assistants)

Schools	Response Rate (%)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Bruns	71.9	3.02	3.27	2.66	3.24	2.85	2.93	3.12
Byers	21.3	3.51	3.69	3.21	3.15	3.00	3.10	3.28
Devonshire	58.6	3.61	3.55	2.95	3.17	2.93	2.03	3.10
Hidden Valley	61.9	3.69	3.67	3.62	3.49	3.21	3.21	3.38
Reid Park	77.8	3.48	3.48	3.43	3.32	3.14	3.29	3.14
Billingsville	53.3	3.22	3.47	2.97	2.97	3.03	3.25	3.31
Sterling	94.4	3.22	3.40	2.78	3.02	2.79	3.00	3.27
Highland	75	2.96	3.08	2.24	3.06	2.80	2.94	2.53
Briarwood	58.8	3.62	3.68	3.30	3.62	3.09	3.13	3.62
Winterfield	70.4	3.00	3.22	2.39	3.08	2.64	2.78	3.25
Westerly Hills	88.0	3.88	3.88	3.25	3.34	3.19	3.50	3.66
Sedgefield	78.7	3.29	3.34	2.90	2.92	2.79	3.12	3.39

2009-2010 Staff Survey Results

On the 2009-2010 survey, when asked to address the statement “My principal uses the school’s mission, values, and beliefs to guide his/her decision making,” the responses ranged from 2.54 and 3.75 for all schools. When addressing the statement, “My principal sets high professional standards for me,” the responses ranged from 2.64 to 3.79. When addressing the statement, “My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging staff,” the responses ranged from 1.59 to 3.43. The responses to the statement “My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff.” ranged from 2.45 to 3.54. When addressing the statement, “Failures at my school are seen as opportunities for improvement,” the responses ranged from 1.95 to 3.29. Responses to the statement, “I feel empowered by my principal to do what is necessary to impact student achievement,” ranged from 1.85 to 3.61. Lastly, the responses to the statement, “There are effective opportunities for professional growth at this school,” ranged from 2.59 to 3.71. See Table 16 for response rates and participant responses to each survey question.

2010-2011 Staff Survey Results

For the 2010-2011 survey, when asked to address the statement, “My principal uses the school’s mission, values, and beliefs to guide his/her decision making,” the responses ranged from 2.84 to 3.52 for all schools. When addressing the statement, “My principal sets high professional standards for me,” the responses ranged from 3.22 to 3.52. When addressing the statement, “My principal is an effective leader when it comes to encouraging staff,” the responses ranged from 2.42 to 3.50. Responses to the statement, “My school has a strong culture of collaboration among the staff” ranged from

2.57 to 3.37. When addressing the statement, “Failures at my school are seen as opportunities for improvement,” the responses ranged from 2.57 to 3.25. Responses to the statement, “I feel empowered by my principal to do what is necessary to impact student achievement,” ranged from 2.34 to 3.44. Lastly, the responses to the statement, “There are effective opportunities for professional growth at this school,” ranged from 3.03 to 3.56. See Table 17 for response rates and participant responses to each survey question.

Table 18: Staff survey results 2010-2011 (Results are the mean score for Teacher Assistants & Teachers)

Schools	Response Rate (%)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Bruns	77.6	29.1	3.22	2.42	2.89	2.58	2.58	3.07
Walter G Byers	85.4	2.89	3.29	2.51	2.57	2.57	2.34	2.69
Devonshire	50	2.84	3.44	2.92	3.00	2.72	2.96	3.20
Hidden Valley	83.9	3.38	3.48	3.04	3.12	3.04	3.21	3.38
Reid Park	80.4	3.46	3.29	3.49	3.02	3.20	3.39	3.29
Billingsville	81.6	3.63	3.68	3.50	3.20	3.25	3.40	3.45
Sterling	91.0	3.24	3.34	2.78	2.76	2.63	3.12	3.20
Highland	92.3	3.46	3.54	2.94	3.13	3.13	3.02	3.25
Briarwood	65.2	3.17	3.43	2.77	2.90	2.90	3.3	3.03

Table 18 (continued)

Schools	Response Rate (%)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Winterfield	84.0	3.38	3.60	3.02	2.93	2.95	3.07	3.26
Westerly Hills	100	35.2	3.52	3.30	3.37	3.22	3.44	3.56
Sedgefield	83.3	3.08	3.23	2.55	2.75	2.75	2.73	3.15

Summary of Staff Satisfaction Surveys

Response rates for staff surveys varied over the period of the study. The researcher did observe an increase in the response rates at four SSI schools, Byers, Reid Park, Briarwood and Westerly Hills and five non-SSI schools, Hidden Valley, Billingsville, Highland Renaissance, Winterfield and Sedgefield. Westerly Hills had the highest mean average each year of the study of all SSI schools, Hidden Valley, non-SSI school had the highest mean average during year one and two of the study and Billingsville and the highest mean average during year three of the study of the non-SSI schools.

During the 2008-2009 school year, four SSI schools, Reid Park, Sterling, Briarwood and Westerly Hills had a higher mean average than their non-SSI schools. During the 2009-2010 five SSI schools, Bruns, Briarwood, Reid Park, Sterling and Westerly Hills had a higher mean than their non-SSI schools. Only two SSI schools, Bruns and Westerly Hills had a higher mean score than their non-SSI school.

Autoethnography of a Strategic Staffing Principal

As stated in Chapter 1, I served as a principal in the Strategic Staffing Initiative. In this capacity, I gained valuable professional experience. I also developed questions about school reform initiatives and research related to SSI. I quickly learned that there is

a lack of research exploring the SSI model, and that a study of SSI in large urban school districts like CMS could add to the body of literature on effective reform models.

Background

In May 2008, I received a phone call from the CMS District office while employed in another school district in North Carolina. Based on my proven leadership record and experience improving student achievement at my school, I received an offer to return to CMS to turn around a low-performing school. The caller shared an overview of the Strategic Staffing Initiative with which I would begin work in the fall of 2008. I was immediately intrigued about what I heard, and I told the caller that I was definitely interested.

The following week, a meeting occurred with the district Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and Chief Academic Officer. During the meeting, the Superintendent shared his vision of the SSI and his expectations of implementation. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Superintendent was asked when he planned to make his decision about the leadership of the seven target schools. He responded, “I have made my decision; I am waiting on you to make yours!” The challenge to be a part of the SSI was accepted.

The next week, the Superintendent took his list of recommended principals’ names to the Board of Education for approval. The next day he held a press conference to introduce the new principals and reveal the new SSI to the public.

The Work Begins

Later that week, the Area Superintendent introduced me to the staff at my new school. It is always somewhat stressful when the staff meets the new principal, and I recognized that stress and tension on the faces of some of the teachers. A few of the staff

had questions, the first and most obvious of which (and the elephant in the room) was who would be displaced? I assured them that regardless of who any displacements that may occur, they would have a job the next year, though that job might be in another location. I encouraged the staff not to worry about employment right now but rather to focus on having a smooth closing.

On June 5, 2008, I participated in a teacher interest rally. During the rally, I met and began to recruit high-performing teachers for available positions at Westerly Hills Elementary School (WHES). I immediately began reviewing the resumes' of individuals who expressed interest in coming to WHES. Over the next three weeks, I conducted in-person and phone interviews and checked references of possible additions to the team. I had until June 30, 2008 to determine which teachers I would displace and which ones I would hire.

Once I had completed these tasks, I began to develop my transition plan. Part of the transition involved my reflection on my professional philosophy regarding the SSI. Although I had been a principal in elementary, middle, and high schools, I had not been a part of a turn-around initiative. I was both excited and nervous about the opportunity. I questioned whether I would meet the goal of high student growth (by North Carolina's accountability standards) and improved stakeholder satisfaction. After the initial nervousness wore off, however, I was ready to plan my work and work my plan.

My leadership style includes beginning with the end in mind. I outlined a plan that included benchmarks over the next three years (See Table 19).

Table 19: Three year plan

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Build relationships to improve morale	Continue building relationships	Execute, Execute, Execute!
Increase accountability	Review teacher planning time	Monitor benchmarks implemented in year one and two
Develop operational procedures	Design common assessments	Staff-presented professional development
Celebrate success	Align professional development to meet staff needs	
Evaluate partnerships	Build capacity among staff	
Design data utilization	Adjust master schedule to maximize time for instruction	
Maximize time, resources and people	Communicate the vision and expectations	

In my experience, the SSI proved an effective mechanism for turning around a low-performing school. Its focus, unlike many initiatives in which I had taken part in the past, was on leadership and not a prescribed program. Based on my experiences, strong leaders should lead struggling schools.

The district and state leaders recognized me as an exemplar leader based upon my proven record of improving student achievement. This recognition encouraged me to want to work even harder. The preferential treatment SSI schools received regarding central office support demonstrated their commitment to the schools' success. We were the first to collaborate with Human Resources to staff our schools, and were the first to receive any support from the other departments, such as Curriculum and Instruction, Auxiliary Services, Child Nutrition, and Transportation. SSI principals also received autonomy and freedom with flexibility. This freedom allowed me the opportunity to

implement researched-based programs, differentiate staffing, and develop a creative master schedule.

I chose this research topic because I knew my school, as a SSI school, had produced high growth in student achievement, improved stakeholder satisfaction, and met AYP goals in two of the three years. I wanted to know if the other school leaders that implemented the SSI realized the same or similar results. I reviewed the formative research on the SSI and thought the summative research would be a useful addition to the existing body of literature on educational reform.

Reflective Assessment of 5 Tenets of SSI

Transformational Leadership

When implementing the Strategic Staffing Initiative in CMS, the superintendent searched for principals with a proven demonstration of transformational leadership. It was clear that the principals chosen to participate in this initiative needed tangible evidence of the ability to transform and turn around a low performing school. As a principal, I experienced improved student achievement and positive annual evaluations. I also realized success as an Instructional Improvement Officer in Guilford County, NC as evidenced by five of seven high schools under my supervision obtained expected or high growth.

While serving as an SSI principal at Westerly Hills Elementary School, the school matriculated from expected growth in year one and two of the study to high growth in the final year of the study. The school also obtained achievement gains of 15.6% in reading and 30.3% in math during the study. Westerly Hills Elementary School also achieved AYP two of three years during the implementation of the SSI. Based on my success at Westerly Hills Elementary School, I was one of 49 principals who received Freedom and

Flexibility with Accountability. This designation allowed for autonomy in decision making. I was also asked to become a mentor for beginning principals.

Building and Hiring a Leadership Team

In my career as a principal, prior to the SSI I had only been able to hire teachers and administrators when there was a clear vacancy resulting from retirements, resignations or transfers. Participation in the Strategic Staffing Initiative provided the first opportunity in my career to select and hire a leadership team who understood, supported and actively pursued collaboratively developed goals and initiatives. The process included reviewing viable applicant files including resumes' and applications. Interviews were held and after references were checked, I would recommend an applicant for the vacancy. The Human Resources department would then be responsible for making the offer to the applicant. Each applicant had to make a two-year commitment to the school before requesting a transfer to another school.

As a SSI principal, I was able hire an assistant principal, a literacy facilitator, a Behavior Management Technician (BMT) and five teachers. All eligible candidates had demonstrated student achievement growth of greater than .04% and successful summative evaluations for the last three years. Interviews were held and upon approval of the Area Superintendent the applicant was offered the new position. Applicants in these positions had to make a three year commitment. The selection timeline was short and concise.

The ability to build a leadership team with individuals who had demonstrated the capacity to improve student achievement was vital to the success at Westerly Hills

Elementary School. This leadership team built capacity in the school and increased efforts to improve student achievement.

Flexibility to Remove Staff

Prior to SSI, I followed all Human Resources guidelines to remove underperforming staff from my school. Unless staff resigned, retired or transferred they remained on my staff. The only exception was poor performance which could lead to non-renewal or termination. There was no option to remove staff for underperformance, failure to support cultural changes or other behaviors detrimental to staff cohesiveness.

The strategic staffing initiative provided autonomy to remove staff. Shortly after entering my role as principal of Westerly Hills Elementary School, I met with the Area Superintendent and the interim principal to discuss potential staff removals. These decisions were based on past evaluations, student referrals, and classroom observations. While principal at Westerly Hills Elementary School, I removed five teachers. I retained the assistant principal and literacy facilitator and hired a Behavior Management Technician.

Time and Authority to Reform the School

Prior to the SSI, I adhered to the district curriculum initiatives and 'non-negotiables'. Non-negotiables specified scheduling, instructional programs, and student support programs to be implemented in the school. If the district selected textbooks and supplemental materials schools were expected to utilize materials according to expectations and guidelines. Principal evaluations were conducted annually and began the year you entered the role.

As a SSI principal, I had the opportunity to opt out of district initiatives. It was expected that if I opted out I would select a researched-based program or process with a record of student success. I also had flexibility to utilize a creative master schedule and for students and staff. I also was held harmless on my annual evaluation for three years.

Differentiated Compensation

Prior to the SSI, school level employees were paid on the state pay scale and the county provided a supplement as is the norm for school districts across the state. Pay was based on degree level or specific certification and years of experience.

As a SSI principal, I, along with the assistant principal and BMT, received a 10% monthly supplement to my salary. Strategic Staffing Initiative teachers received a \$10,000 stipend year one and a \$5,000 stipend year two and three. It should be noted that if a SSI staff member did not fulfill the three obligations for a reason stipulated in the contract, they would be required to repay the incentive.

The five tenets combined provided school leaders with professional autonomy to make decisions based on the needs of their students. The tenets encourage principals to think creatively and use student achievement to drive every decision. The focused district support, and priority given to SSI schools was evident and a strong component of the success of the initiative.

Analysis of Years One Through Three

Year One

Year one was a positive experience. I spent the majority of my time visiting classrooms, participating in grade level planning meetings, and collaborating with internal and external partners. Now was the time to rebrand and communicate the good news about WHES to the public. I enjoyed the work and was relentless. I did not accept mediocrity, and shared my sense of urgency with all who would listen. At times, my colleagues claimed that I was moving too, fast but I did not slow down. My professional experience taught me that children only had one year to prepare for the next grade level. It was incumbent upon us to make the most of that year.

I used what I learned from my previous experiences to ensure this time around would be better for students, staff, and the school community. While I observed many things that needed to change, I remembered that change was often difficult for adults. I was strategic when planning and executing the needed change. During year one, we achieved expected growth, met AYP, and received an 80% return rate from staff surveys.

Year Two

In year two, we evaluated and revised the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports and amended the master schedule to ensure appropriate planning time. Teachers began to facilitate grade-level planning as part of the plan to build capacity among staff. Because teachers owned the process, the dialogue among the teachers improved. Student progress and performance became the center of the conversation. Special area teachers also had common planning time.

During year two, we also implemented professional development for all staff. The staff agreed to read four books as part of the book studies professional learning. The staff then completed a survey and collectively decided on the four books that we would read. All classified and certified staff participated in professional learning, and staff indicated that the experience was beneficial in their evaluations.

We also worked to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships during year two as we realized an increase in volunteer hours. Per their request, the volunteers received training from the facilitators on specific strategies they could use when tutoring students in a small group or one-on-one.

I continued to focus on being transparent about the budget, available resources, growth opportunities, and parent engagement activities. This transparency improved overall trust and communication internally and externally as evidenced by the fact we achieved expected growth, met AYP, and had a 100% return rate for staff surveys.

Year Three

I entered year three planning to refrain from implementing any new initiatives or processes. I wanted year three to center around perfecting our execution. Efficient utilization of time, resources, and people was critical. Teacher leaders created the master schedule with input from colleagues, and common planning continued with teachers having complete autonomy. I added a third planning to encourage teachers to discuss students who needed social wrap around services. I facilitated those conversations every third week of the month, and we assigned a school-based mentor to any student we felt needed extra support. The mentorship program was so important to me that I assigned

myself a mentee. At the end of year three, we had achieved high growth and had a 100% return rate of staff surveys.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the findings of the study and presented a comparison of SSI schools and non-SSI schools using student achievement data obtained from end-of-grade test scores. The chapter also included measurements of performance data, AYP and student attendance and suspension data at both the SSI and non-SSI schools. The chapter also presented parent satisfaction survey data, student satisfaction survey data, and staff satisfaction data for all schools and an auto-ethnography.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation and discussion of the findings detailed in Chapter 4. The chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the findings that are relevant to public school reform and provides recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL THOUGHTS

This study presents an exploration of the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI) implemented in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools using a mixed methodology approach. The researcher paired each of six SSI elementary schools with a non-SSI school with similar characteristics. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What has been the impact of SSI on student achievement within the target schools?
2. Did the SSI lead to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability Standards within three years?
3. How did the attitudes of each school's staff, parents, and students change over three years of the SSI's implementation?
4. How did student achievement in the SSI schools compare to student achievement in the non-SSI schools during the same time period?

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings related to the research questions.

Discussion

Examination of the Strategic Staffing Initiative

This study explored four research questions. All questions examined the impact of SSI on student achievement and the attitudes of staff, parents, and students. Each SSI school was paired with a non-SSI school. This provided an opportunity to compare student achievement data of a school participating in SSI

to a school with similar SES but did not participate in the initiative. Student achievement data includes student achievement based on end of grade testing scores, progress towards AYP and measures of growth.

The first research question in the study was ‘What has been the impact of SSI on student achievement within the target schools?’ The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of SSI on student achievement, student attendance and suspension within the SSI and non SSI schools. The fourth research question was ‘How did student achievement in the SSI schools compare to student achievement in the non-SSI schools during the same time period?’ Based on the data from chapter four, the researcher concluded that SSI does lead to student achievement and growth. Below is a comparison analysis of student achievement of the SSI school and the Non-SSI school using school performance data, growth data and AYP data.

Student Achievement

This study included a comparison and analysis of student achievement data collected from North Carolina End-of-Grade test results in reading and math for the six schools that participated in the study. Student achievement at Bruns Elementary School, Devonshire Elementary School, Sterling Elementary School, and Westerly Hills Elementary School increased over the course of the study. Achievement at these schools was higher than the achievement of the paired non-participating schools.

Adequate Yearly Progress

Adequate yearly progress is a measurement strategy used to determine if students are meeting state and federally-mandated standards. This measurement helps state and federal education agencies hold schools accountable for reaching

established benchmarks. Data revealed that all the six SSI schools outperformed their paired school in the overall student achievement gain in reading and math. Four of the six SSI schools made greater progress towards AYP than their paired school. Four of the six SSI schools achieved either expected or high more often than their paired school. Three of the six SSI schools made high growth more often than the paired school. All SSI schools and paired schools made AYP at least once with the exception of Walter G. Byers Elementary School. While this information paints a picture of the descriptive data, the question remains as to why in some cases the SSI schools outperformed the non-SSI schools. The elements of SSI directly impacting student achievement, it appears that transformational leadership, quality teachers and the development of leadership teams had the greatest impact which is supported by research on transformational leadership and student achievement.

The second research question posed in this study was “Did the SSI lead to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability standards within three years?” The purpose of the study was to examine if SSI led to high growth in student achievement according to the North Carolina Accountability Standards within the three years of the study. Below is discussion of growth within the participating schools.

Growth

One measurement used to track growth in student achievement is the growth model, which measures students’ gains in achievement over the course of one school year. Schools achieve “expected growth” if the student achievement data indicates the presence of an upward trend in achievement that indicates that the goal will be attainable

in a short time frame. “No growth” indicates that a school did not make any advancement in achievement over the course of the school year. “High growth” indicates that schools achieved higher than the “expected growth” in one school year.

Devonshire Elementary School achieved high growth all three years. Bruns Elementary School and Sterling Elementary School achieved high growth two of three years. Briarwood Elementary School, Reid Park Elementary School and Westerly Hills Elementary School achieved high growth one of three years. Five of six SSI schools achieved high growth by the end of the third year.

Four of the SSI schools realized expected or high growth each year of the study. Briarwood and Reid Park did not realize expected growth one of the three years of the study. Of the paired non-SSI schools, Byers only made expected growth one year and no growth the other two years. The data suggests that transformational leaders given autonomy to hire quality teachers as the study describes directly affects student achievement. They also utilize flexible authority in hiring practices and selecting resources that will ensure achievement, growth and academic gains. While this information paints a picture of the descriptive data, the question remains as to why in some cases the SSI schools outperformed the non-SSI schools. The elements of SSI directly impacting student achievement, it appears that transformational leadership, quality teachers and the development of leadership teams had the greatest impact which is supported by research on transformational leadership and student achievement.

Attendance and Suspension

The average daily attendance was consistent across all SSI and non-SSI schools between 95% -97% . There were no noteworthy increases or decreases.

Four of the six SSI schools, Briarwood, Bruns, Reid Park and Sterling had a decrease in suspension from 2008 through 2011. Four of six SSI schools, Bruns, Devonshire, Sterling and Westerly Hills had lower overall suspension averages than their paired schools. From this study, there is no identifiable effect of leadership on student suspension. It would be worth further study to identify leadership perceptions of student suspension and to define creative practices school leaders utilize to alleviate, avoid or in lieu of students being suspended.

Impact of Collaborative Culture

According to Hallinger (2003), the movement from instructional leadership to transformational leadership creates a change in power relationships. This is a very delicate shift that requires a knowledgeable transformation leader. The leader is responsible for building a leadership team that increases teacher participation in decision making and providing increased opportunities for teacher leadership. Hallinger (2003) asserts that leaders need the power to control the selection of teachers and the allocation of resources. By increasing participation in decision making, the principal leads in a way that is consensual and facilitative in nature. The leader uses power through people and not over people. Transformational leadership provides a balance of power, an increase in productivity and a collaborative school culture.

This collaborative school culture impacts attitudes and satisfaction for students, parents and teachers. All stakeholders are positively impacted when decision making is shared and there is a balance of power (Hallinger, 2003). This is supported by SSI data.

The five tenets of the Strategic Staffing Initiative supported transformational leadership by providing an opportunity for principals to have input in hiring decisions. Principals are encouraged to identify teacher leaders and hire appropriately based on instructional goals and to create their own leadership teams. Principals are also encouraged to remove staff members who lack vision, leadership or commitment to instructional goals. Developing collaborative structures that facilitate staff professional development and opportunities to work are essential (Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. 2000). Principals are given autonomy and work within a culture that recognizes that school reform takes time. The SSI also recognizes that courageous, effective leaders, both principals, teachers and support staff, should be financially compensated for their reform efforts.

It is clear that SSI schools experienced increased student achievement on all measures including end of grade test scores, AYP indicators and growth measures. It is also clear that satisfaction increased or remained steady during the study. These gains can be attributed to transformational leadership and a balance of power in decision making at the school level.

Based on this analysis, the researcher determined that the SSI encouraged and supported improved student achievement, high growth, adequate yearly progress, and while satisfaction among students, and staff remained constant.

The third research question in the study was “How did the attitudes of each school’s staff, parents and students change over three years?” Return rates for parent surveys were inconsistent throughout the study. Staff surveys were similar with Westerly Hills having the highest return rate and highest mean score on a Likert scale of 1-4; Student surveys indicated fifth grade students were generally always satisfied and somewhat satisfied over the three year period.

Parent Satisfaction

During the study, parents of students at the SSI and non-SSI schools completed a satisfaction survey at the end of each school year. At four of the SSI schools, Briarwood, Bruns, Devonshire, and Reid Park and their paired schools parent satisfaction increased over the three year period of the study. According to survey data, parent satisfaction decreased over the three year period at Sterling Elementary School and Westerly Hills Elementary School. The return rate of the parent survey data from all schools was inconsistent and fluctuated between 1.3% and 67% in varying years. It should be noted that while comparisons of SSI schools to their paired schools were completed, the return rates significantly declined the final year of the study which questions the reliability of these data. Three exceptions were identified in 2009-2010. That year more parents responded neutral and or unsatisfied combined than satisfied at three non-SSI schools, Byers, Billingsville and Sedgefield.

Student Satisfaction

This study included student survey data for the 2008-2009 school year and the 2010-2011 school year. Data was not available for the 2009-2010 school year. Devonshire and Briarwood, SSI schools had a slight increase of students responding

always satisfied from 2008-2011 while their paired schools, Hidden Valley and Winterfield respectively had a slight decrease. Sterling had a 11.7% increase and its paired school, Highland Renaissance had a slight decrease. Bruns, Reid Park and Westerly Hills had a decrease from *always* to *sometimes satisfied* while their paired schools Byers had an increase and Billingsville and Sedgefield had decreases respectively. Student satisfaction does not reveal an identifiable impact on achievement. One realization was that leadership does not have a meaningful impact on student satisfaction.

Staff Satisfaction

Over the course of the three-year study, teachers and instructional assistants in the SSI and non-SSI schools completed a survey at the end of each year. The survey included questions that asked staff persons to describe their principals' decision making related to the mission, values, and beliefs. The questionnaire also included questions about professional standards set by the principal, encouragement from the principal, the culture of collaboration, the principal's handling of failures, the principal's sense of empowerment, and opportunities for professional growth. Responses varied from school to school, but remained consistent and close to the median of 2.5 on a 4 point Likert scale. Over the duration of the study three non SSI schools Billingsville, Winterfield and Highland Renaissance had improved satisfaction with a mean score from 2008-2011 of 3.17 to 3.44, 2.90 to 3.17 and 2.80 to 3.20 respectively. Four SSI schools, Devonshire, Reid Park, Sterling and Westerly Hills staff satisfaction remained constant with the rate difference of .10 or less over the three years. The remaining schools, Bruns, Byers, Briarwood and Sedgefield all SSI schools and Hidden Valley, non-SSI school realized a

decrease of .20 or more in the mean staff satisfaction. It is important to recognize that staff members at the SSI schools did not remain consistent over the three year period, and the staff turnover rates must be a consideration when examining the data. Griffith (2004) states that job satisfaction is indirectly related to transformational principal leadership and must be furthered studied therefore it should be noted that according to this study, in spite of staff turnover, staff satisfaction remained above average and did not significantly change.

Autoethnography of a SSI Principal

I originally intended to analyze principal interview data to determine principals' perception of the Strategic Staffing Initiative; however, due to a moratorium in the IRB process approval in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, this was not possible. Four of the six SSI principals were currently employed with CMS and could not be interviewed again due to the moratorium of the IRB process. The fifth principal has relocated to another state and could not be reached and I was the sixth SSI principal. Since I served as a SSI principal I provided data on my personal experience with SSI implementation.

Other principals in the study were chosen for their demonstrated skills at transformational leadership. While the six principals in the study had different leadership styles and experiences, it was their ability to recognize and build on the leadership of others in their building to reach instructional goals that was a common thread.

All principals in the SSI schools received the same autonomy to build their leadership team. Each principal built a team to meet the individual needs of their student population. Lucas (2002) affirms principals with vision and direction must have a supportive team with high expectations and influence on the culture to make a difference.

This empowered school leaders to assess needs and place staff to meet those needs. School leaders were able to be intentional and strategic when hiring staff. This autonomy was vital to improving student achievement. A careful review of each staff member and their contribution to improving student achievement was instrumental in making informed decisions to help support my instructional goals. When school leaders are empowered to make decisions that impact student achievement, capacity in the building increases and there is greater impact.

Principals in the Strategic Staffing Initiative were allowed to make decisions based on the unique needs of their students. Principals had autonomy to make professional decisions that would directly impact student achievement. The ability to tailor materials, schedule, and implement student support programs to the school population and needs of the students greatly impacted student achievement gains.

Financial compensation demonstrated the district's commitment to school improvement. It also demonstrated the importance of quality staff to school reform.

Implications for Practice

The Strategic Staffing Initiative has produced an increase in student achievement in CMS. Strategic Staffing uses human capital to improve schools and reform school cultures therefore some implications for practice are as follows:

1. Principals with proven track records of improving student achievement should be assigned to low performing schools.
2. Quality teachers should be encouraged or assigned to the schools with the most need (Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003).

3. School districts must have specific focus and support for low performing schools.
4. Compensation in varied forms should be considered for those who accept the challenge of teaching in a school with great need.
5. Principals need autonomy and time (transformational leadership) to make creative decisions to meet the needs of their specific population of students.
6. Follow up research should be conducted to identify specific school improvement strategies used by effective principals.
7. Professionals from any other fields and professions can use the practices from the Strategic Staffing Initiative. The model supports innovative strategies for the placement of personnel, the use of time, and the use of resources to promote productivity.

Recommendations for Future Research

The existing body of literature offers limited research on the Strategic Staffing Initiative effectiveness as a strategy for turning around low-performing schools. What can be found is research on specific instructional programs showing its effects on student achievement. Human capital was the impetus of this study, identifying the effects of leadership on student achievement. This dearth in information provides a number of opportunities for further research and practice:

1. Research should be conducted on the effects in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. This vertical articulation continuation plan would provide increased information about the long-term impact of the initiative on student achievement.

2. Research on the feasibility of a hybrid model in tested areas only would provide districts a possible less costly alternative to full implementation.
3. At the time of this study, compensation for performance is a hotly debated topic. Might Strategic Staffing offer a more sensible approach that personnel evaluation?
4. While this study focused on SSI in low-performing urban elementary schools in a very large county-wide district, its implications for other areas such smaller districts, rural schools, alternative schools, and schools with large ESL populations are rich opportunities for future research.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study contribute largely positive findings to the body of research on reform strategies used to turn around low-performing schools. An in-depth study of the Strategic Staffing Initiative in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools should be conducted to analyze the sustainability of improved student achievement at the SSI identified schools. The researcher provided implications for practice in the field of education as well as other professions. These implications have importance to school districts across the country faced with improving student achievement in low performing schools. This descriptive study also reveals significant opportunities for further research to contribute to the body of school reform research.

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