

12-21-2009

High Stakes, High Scores and Student Achievement: A Middle School Case Study

Eugene McGorry

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

McGorry, Eugene, "High Stakes, High Scores and Student Achievement: A Middle School Case Study" (2009). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 802.

<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/802>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact cclouser@iup.edu, sara.parme@iup.edu.

HIGH STAKES, HIGH SCORES AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
A MIDDLE SCHOOL CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Eugene McGorry

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December, 2009

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Professional Studies in Education

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Eugene Coleman McGorry

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

Faith Waters, Ed.D., Co-Chair
Professor of Professional & Secondary Education
East Stroudsburg University

Sue Rieg, D. Ed., Co-Chair
Associate Professor
Professional Studies in Education
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Kathleen Foster, Ed.D.
Professor of Professional & Secondary Education
East Stroudsburg University

ACCEPTED

Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: High Stakes, High Scores and Student Achievement: A Middle School Case Study

Author: Eugene C. McGorry

Dissertation Co-Chairs: Dr. Faith Waters, Dr. Sue Rieg

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Kathleen Foster

This research focuses on educational programming and student achievement in a middle school in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The school was selected primarily because its students score higher than average on state standardized tests while its population consists of a percentage of low income students higher than the state average. Interviews, document reviews, focus groups, and surveys provided a comprehensive picture of the organization, educational programming, and student achievement.

Based on the results of this study, there are several recommendations for fostering student achievement in a middle school environment with low socioeconomic status. First, a close relationship between students and teachers seemed to be very important to this district in this study.

Second, directly related to maintaining a close relationship with students are programs such as advisories and exploratories. These programs are unique in that students work very closely with teachers and they have the opportunity to focus on non-academic subjects such as wrestling and drama.

Third, closely related to these strong teacher/student relationships is varied instruction. Due to the fact that students may vary significantly in ability, teachers must be able to reach students via differentiated and individualized instruction.

Finally, faculty and administrators both agreed that their special focus on developing programming to address standardized tests was extremely important to student achievement on these academic measures.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	THE PROBLEM.....	1
	Problem Statement and Context.....	2
	Significance of the Study	6
	Research Questions	9
	Definition of Terms.....	10
	Limitations	12
	Delimitations.....	12
	Summary	13
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	15
	Historical Development	15
	The Adolescent	19
	The Essential Elements of the Middle School	22
	Exemplary Middle School Model.....	28
	Research and Measurement of Student Achievement at the Middle Level	32
	Student Achievement and Stakeholders' Perceptions	38
	Middle School Practices and Research.....	40
	No Child Left Behind.....	42
	Achievement and Socioeconomic Status	52
	Qualitative and Quantitative Research.....	56
	Summary	59
3	PROCEDURES.....	61
	Setting, Sampling and Participants	61
	Methods and Procedures	65
	Management of Data Analysis.....	72
	Data Analysis.....	73
	Summary	74
4	FINDINGS	75
	Quantitative Data	76
	Summary	91
	Qualitative Data	91
	Comparison and Synthesis of Focus Group, Survey and Interview Data.....	117

Chapter	Page
Relevance to Prior Research and Findings	126
Program Concepts Which Affect Student Achievement: Teaming and Block Scheduling, Advisories and Guidance, Varied Instruction, Exploratories, Transitions.....	128
Summary.....	137
5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS	145
Discussion of Research Questions	146
Summary	164
Discussion of Broader Implications	165
Recommendations for Low SES Districts	167
Limitations	170
Recommendations for Future Research	171
Chapter Summary	172
REFERENCES	174
APPENDICES	188
Appendix A – Focus Group Scripts and Letters	188
Appendix B – Interview Scripts and Letters	197
Appendix C – Survey Letters.....	209

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 Middle School Research	34
2 School Improvement	45
3 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Goals for Core Subject Results.....	48
4 Proficiency Levels	49
5 Assessment Results 2002	63
6 MMS Programs.....	64
7 Student Survey Data	78
8 Pearson Correlations	83
9 Regression Analyses of Satisfaction Levels and Grade, Gender and Race	84
10 Faculty Survey Data.....	85
11 PSSA Historical Average Proficiency Levels in Math and Reading at MMS....	133

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

During the last two decades middle schools have flourished in the United States. Today there are 15,000 middle schools in the United States, up from 2,080 in 1970 and 7,452 in 1987 (Vasallo, 1990). Advocates claim that middle schools meet the unique developmental requirements of ten to fourteen year olds. Middle school educators call for the identification of the principles and practices which justify the middle school as an educational organization different from others and which enable it to facilitate the growth and development of young adolescents (Arnold, 1990; Toepfer, 1980). This inquiry requires measurement and evaluation of past and current educational programming which claims to meet the developmental needs of adolescents.

The federal law, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, has created additional pressure for the development of standards and accountability. There is and will be a more critical focus on student achievement and meeting specific academic standards; therefore, performance measures are swiftly becoming the focus of educators' attention. Traditionally, the methods used to measure student performance have been limited to academic test results (Fountain, 2001). In order to better address student needs, a more comprehensive approach to research and measurement is necessary.

Measuring educational programming to better meet the needs of young adolescents may actually also serve the needs of districts attempting to satisfy the requirements of *NCLB*. However, the unique educational environment of the middle school poses several challenges in measuring performance and success. First, there is no consensus on what constitutes academic success: strong standardized test scores, student satisfaction with school curricula and programs,

parent satisfaction with academic and social programs for students, or perhaps a combination of these items? Second, academic success may be measured differently in urban and rural settings. Third, other factors, such as socioeconomic status, may also contribute to academic success and failure.

This research will focus on educational programming and student achievement in a middle school in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The school has been given a pseudonym for the purposes of this study. The school was selected primarily because its students score higher than average on state standardized tests while its population consists of a percentage of low income students higher than the state average. Other selection criteria considered will be addressed later in the study. The methods employed to study the school are largely exploratory. Interviews, document reviews, focus groups, and surveys will provide a comprehensive picture of the organization, educational programming, and student achievement.

Problem Statement and Context

Although middle schools seem to be flourishing, and the movement has been one of the most exciting in the history of the American education system, the impact of this educational model on student achievement is not clearly understood and has not been adequately addressed (Anfara & Roney, 2004; George & Alexander, 2003; Browne, 2002; George & Oldaker, 1985). The learner-centered perspective has led middle school educators to employ educational concepts, such as exploratory programs, advisory time, and a focus on a positive school climate in an effort to address student achievement as well as students' physical, psychosocial and cognitive development (Manning & Bucher, 2000). While these programs appear to be successful in many school environments, measurement of their effectiveness and possible

contribution to student achievement is lacking. Only through research and measurement can educators continue to develop successful programs to improve student learning and achievement.

Educators have attempted to identify learning-related needs in middle level schooling in an effort to develop an educational experience specifically suited to young adolescents. If students can feel comfortable in their learning environments, the rationale is that they will be empowered to reach higher levels of achievement and maintain an overall healthier life perspective. A number of educational theorists have demonstrated that not only are schools responsible for facilitating students' individual and social development, but that students who have higher self-esteem, better self-understanding, and are self-motivated will achieve at greater levels (George and Alexander, 2003; Schunk, 1989; Lipsitz, 1977). However, the relationship of middle level education elements to student achievement is not clear (Weiss, 2006; George, 2005; Smith, 2005; Freshcorn, 2000).

A challenge for educators, parents and administrators is to develop schools that facilitate the individual and social development necessary to enable students to achieve at greater levels. A number of researchers associated with studies on successful middle schools have concluded that teachers are pivotal in determining school effectiveness and influencing student achievement (Lipsitz, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983). Researchers and practitioners also increasingly agree that students' perceptions of school influence instruction (Weinstein, 1989). In order to comprehensively address the issue of student achievement and middle school programming, it will be necessary to consider the following in order to better understand how these factors may contribute to a "successful middle school environment"

- The young adolescents' characteristics, needs, and environments.
- The role of teachers and their responsibilities.

- The type of programming at the middle level: for example advisories and exploratories: what should be included, how should they be structured, what type of programming to date has been employed and has it been successful, understanding what works and what does not.
- How the building should be planned and organized to accommodate this programming.

More recently research has focused not necessarily on middle level theory, strategies, and outcomes but instead on student achievement relative to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Lewis, 2006; Poynton, Carlson, Hopper & Carey, 2006; Yeeke, 2006). The recent *NCLB* legislation mandating accountability has created an urgency to measure student achievement. This has been the primary impetus for exploring factors that might contribute to student achievement (Brown, 2002, Mizell, 2002). The enactment of the *NCLB* legislation indicates that the academic success of students, schools, and states will be assessed largely through annual student achievement tests (*NCLB*, 2002). Academic success as related to achievement scores in the middle grades, however, can be attributed to various individual, psychological, cultural and social factors that may either promote or inhibit academic success. Research has indicated, for example, that students with high levels of support and expectations regarding academics have a greater likelihood for academic success compared to those who do not (Ferner et al., 1997).

Further research is necessary to identify characteristics of the middle school that outperform or exceed standards and their impact on student achievement. Special consideration must be given at this point in time, however, to new environmental conditions, such as *NCLB* and its relationship to student achievement at the middle school level.

This study will attempt to answer the question, “What factors may contribute to and foster student achievement at the middle level?” The goal of this study will be to explore through a variety of both quantitative and qualitative methods possible factors that may be contributing to student achievement in low socioeconomic rural public middle school. The researcher will employ document review, interviews, focus groups, survey research and statistical analysis to explore programs, curricula, and student, teacher, and administrator perceptions of the school and its programs.

The document review may enable the researcher to corroborate evidence from other methods of data collection, such as interviews and focus groups. The primary researcher will use field notes and will attempt to utilize other documentation, such as archived school newspapers and other community papers, in order to best describe the research setting, the subjects, and the middle school concepts employed in the school. Interviews will be conducted with randomly selected teachers, administrators, students, and parents. The interviews will enable the researcher to understand the development of model middle school components at the target school and how faculty, students, parents and administrators participate in their implementation as well as how they perceive the effectiveness of these components. Focus groups will be conducted to complement the interview and survey data. This qualitative research will enable the primary researcher to explore the middle school issues in more detail and address any additional issues to better understand this particular population. Finally, data will be collected via surveys from three groups: students, parents, and faculty.

The school selected for the study is a low income, rural middle school which has demonstrated above average academic achievement. Achievement is defined by above average performance on the standardized state assessment, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment,

or PSSA. The researcher will explore the perceptions of students, faculty, administrators, and parents regarding the school's programs and curricula and their possible effects on student achievement. Issues to be addressed include:

- Teacher-student relationships
- Administration
- Student academic orientation
- Guidance
- Student-peer relationships
- Parent and community school relationships
- Instructional management
- Student activities
- Parent, teacher and student satisfaction

These items are derived from George and Alexander's (2003) research on exemplary middle schools and achievement, which will be more fully explored in the literature review of Chapter two.

Significance of the Study

In 1987, The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD) established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. This group of leading educators, academicians, researchers and government officials identified early adolescence as a period of opportunity for significant emotional and intellectual growth. Recommendations were made in its 1989 report, *Turning Points*, which provided a comprehensive approach to educating young adolescents (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Although preliminary results from the research evaluating the implementation of *Turning Points* recommendations suggested that many of the practices have

been effective at the middle level, the research did not indicate this in all situations, particularly in rural and lower income urban educational settings (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000). Further empirical research on middle school effectiveness is necessary to determine successful practices and their effects on student achievement in different contexts.

In 2001, President George Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (*NCLB*), which seeks to improve achievement through expanded testing, more stringent quality requirements for teachers, yearly monitoring of student progress and sanctions for schools that fail to improve achievement. This will require schools to measure and track student achievement for evaluation purposes. Thus, in the next decade more schools will need to determine factors affecting student achievement and develop methods to accurately measure factors affecting student achievement.

The goal of *NCLB* is to have all students fully proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. All American schools must address mandated state and/or local standards. The legislation requires that states have challenging academic content and achievement standards for all students in reading, mathematics, and science. While standards for other subjects are not required, state plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education must describe strategies for teaching children in Title I schools the same content in the other subjects such as social studies as other students in the state receive (Learning First Alliance, 2002). Not only must states set benchmarks and measure student achievement of these benchmarks grade by grade, but students also are expected to achieve 100% proficiency.

In addition to testing, benchmarks, and mastery, accountability means that districts must conduct research in order to demonstrate that their programs are effective and to be eligible for any federal funding. *NCLB* has developed specific sanctions that will be levied if a school fails to

achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Finally, *NCLB* also contains specific provisions for staff qualifications and development, training, recruitment opportunities, attendance, safety and collective bargaining (Education Commission of the States, 2002). *NCLB* may play a significant role in potentially changing the focus of the middle school from total development of the child to student achievement and accountability. Standards and student achievement may dominate many school reform efforts. Perhaps the standards and deadlines imposed by *NCLB* have contributed to the decline in the number of studies focusing on the exemplary middle school and student achievement research efforts in the last five years.

A review of the literature indicates that the number of studies regarding student achievement and middle level programming has decreased since the early 1990s (Hough, 2003). It is unclear whether this is due to less focus on the “middle level” in general or perhaps more focus on *NCLB* and measuring student achievement to meet standards. Thus, there appears to be a need for research addressing middle school programming and its effects on student achievement.

Socioeconomic status must also be considered in research of student achievement. Research on student performance frequently indicates that socioeconomic status may be one of the most important factors influencing student achievement (Hassan & Opheim, 2005; Brown, Anfara & Roney, 2004; Neill, 2003; Sutton & Soderstrom, 1999). Students of lower socioeconomic status traditionally have demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement (Tajalli & Opheim, 2005). Other research indicates that teacher affiliation, resource support, and academic emphasis have been found to positively influence student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status (Brown, Anfara & Roney, 2004; Brown, 2002; Smith 2002, Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Valente, 1999). What role does socioeconomic status play in student achievement

and will this issue create challenges for schools attempting to improve achievement? This study will explore the socioeconomic status of students in a higher achieving district.

The findings of this study may provide additional data for the process of establishing comprehensive measures that promote student achievement in a middle school environment. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be applied to explore stakeholders' perceptions, programs, curricula and other factors that may contribute to above average student achievement in a low-income school district. The purpose of this study is to provide information useful to the improvement of educational practices for early adolescents. This study is significant for several reasons.

First, the impact of middle level education remains ambiguous. The relationship of middle level programming to student achievement is particularly unclear. This study will attempt to explore these issues. Second, this study will contribute to educational theory and practice by providing theorists and practitioners with information necessary for decision making. This study is designed to provide more direction and research regarding effective educational programming that may contribute to student achievement at the middle level. This study will be informative for practitioners and will contribute to the body of research for educational theorists who guide educational reform.

Research Questions

This research project will explore a variety of factors that may have a relationship with middle school student achievement. Namely:

- 1) What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?

- 2) Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”
- 3) Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school’s programming, climate, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

In summary, the issues addressed and measures to be applied in the study include:

Question	Data Source
Identify Exemplary Middle School Characteristics and Programs at the MMS	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups, Document Review
Student Achievement	PSSA Scores
Student Satisfaction	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups
Faculty Satisfaction	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups
Parent Satisfaction	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups
Other Factors Possibly Related to Student Achievement	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups, Document Review
Programs and Initiatives	Satisfaction Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups, Document Review

Definition of Terms

The following terms provide an important foundation for this study:

Advisory Time - A regularly-scheduled period each day/week in which students interact with peers/teachers about both personal and school-related concerns (George & Alexander, 2003).

Advisor – an adult who serves as a student’s advocate (George & Alexander, 2003).

Block/Flexible Schedule - The organization of the school day into large units of time that may be utilized in varied and productive ways by the school staff (Russell, 1994).

Common Planning Time - A regularly-scheduled time during the school day during which a given team of teachers that is responsible for the same group of students is available for joint planning, parent conferencing and/or lesson preparation (George & Alexander, 2003).

Core Curriculum - The four basic subject areas of math, science, social studies and reading/language arts (George & Alexander, 2003).

Early Adolescence - The stage of development between ages ten and fourteen when the student begins to reach puberty (George & Alexander, 2003)

. Exemplary Middle School - A school clearly focused on the needs of middle school learners, which attempts to identify students' needs and the best means for their satisfaction (George & Alexander, 2003).

Exploration - A regularly-scheduled curriculum experience designed to help students discover and/or examine learning related to their changing needs, aptitudes and interests (George & Alexander, 2003).

Interdisciplinary Team Organization - The organization of faculty so that teachers share: 1) the same group of students 2) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area 3) the same schedule and 4) the same area of the building. This construct is endorsed by the National Middle School Association (George & Alexander, 2003).

Team Leaders - Teachers selected by the administration that serve as role models, provide mentoring, and diagnose learning problems for other team teachers (George & Alexander, 2003).

Whole Child - The student in terms of physical, cognitive, moral, psychological and social-emotional development (George & Alexander, 2003).

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted in this study. First, focus groups may not be representative of the target populations to be studied. Small groups of parents, teachers, students and administrators will be questioned regarding the teacher advisory program in the district. These small groups are intended to provide exploratory insight in to the research issue and to complement other research methods. Second, as the researcher will employ interviews to capture data from a number of parties, the possibility of interviewer bias will exist as the interviewer may express his or her views about a particular topic, or may, through facial expressions or body movements, express agreement or dissent with an issue. Surveys will be yet another tool for measuring perceptions in this study, introducing the possibility of acquiescence in survey responses and response rate issues. Participants may respond to questions as they believe researchers would like them to, or they may be influenced by those around them and respond accordingly. Additionally, some respondents may simply skip questions or not respond to the survey at all. Finally, statistical methods employed will, generally, assume normality of data. Analysis could become an issue if this criteria is not satisfied (Janesick, 1994; Brannen, 1992).

Delimitations

This study is limited to students from one middle school in northeast Pennsylvania, which will affect the generalizability of the results. Additionally, this data will be captured at one point in time in a case study which will also limit the study's generalizability. The researcher hopes to capture rich data through both qualitative and quantitative methods that will provide a more comprehensive picture of the research scenario. Replication of this study will enable researchers

to draw more significant conclusions regarding the effectiveness of middle schools in fostering student achievement.

Summary

In summary, this study will address factors that may be related to above average student achievement in a low income, rural middle school environment. The following questions will be addressed:

- 1) What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?
- 2) Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”
- 3) Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school’s programming, climate, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be employed to explore programs, curricula, stakeholders’ perceptions, and other issues that may be related to student achievement.

Although this study is critical for schools to continuously meet the needs of students and improve educational programs, it will also be important because schools will now be held accountable for meeting specific standards according to *NCLB* legislation, creating a need to identify factors that are related to student achievement and attempt to measure how those factors contribute to student achievement.

Chapter two will address the literature on the history of the development of the middle school, its effectiveness in regard to student achievement, the effect on poverty and achievement, *NCLB* legislation, and the use of standardized test scores. The literature will be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses, and gaps will be identified. Chapter three will focus on the

methodology for this study. Quantitative and qualitative methods employed will be thoroughly reviewed, as will sample selection and data collection and analysis. Chapter four will include a summary of findings, while chapter five will focus on a discussion of conclusions and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two will address a review of the literature on effective middle schools and student achievement: the development of the middle school, the young adolescent, effective practices of the exemplary middle school, measurement of practices at the middle school, *No Child Left Behind* legislation, socioeconomic status, research methodology, and standardized testing in Pennsylvania. Strengths and weaknesses of current research will be evaluated, and gaps in the literature identified.

Historical Development

The origin of the junior high school is usually attributed to dissatisfaction with the organization of schools in elementary grades one through eight and high school grades nine through twelve. The junior high school was designed to address high attrition rates and poor transition for students moving from elementary to high school. The first junior high schools opened their doors in the early 1900s offering a more rigorous, challenging curriculum at an earlier age, teachers who were content specialists, provisions for individual differences and programming to meet the needs of early adolescents (Lounsbury, 1992; Lounsbury & Vars, 1978; Koos, 1927; Briggs, 1920).

Armed with theories on adolescent development and individual differences and the alarming national attrition and pupil retention statistics, reformers were intent on designing schools that better addressed the needs of developing adolescents in the early part of the 20th century. The 1913 report of the Committee on Economy of Time in Education was the first report calling for the formation of the junior high school (Baker, 1913). Universities developed

curricula to prepare junior high school teachers, and state legislatures passed legislation to regulate junior high schools (Koos, 1927).

A few years later the report of The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association (1918) became the “Cardinals of Secondary Education.” For the first time recommendations regarding education in the United States encompassed issues, such as citizenship, family life, and vocations, which reinforced the mission of the junior high school as schools that addressed student needs beyond the classroom and focused on student home life, the student role in the community, and student lifelong learning.

The junior high school movement grew rapidly after 1920. The increased birth rate after World War I and other factors expanding the U.S. population created mounting school enrollments and overcrowded schools. By 1925, the number of junior high schools in the United States was greater than 2000 and grew to more than 10,000 by 1947 (Hansen & Hern, 1971).

Lounsbury (1992) credited the junior high school with five major contributions to education. First, the junior high school initiated the development of the middle level institution, with a focus on integration, socialization and exploration. Second, the enriched curriculum, which included industrial arts, home economics, foreign languages and laboratory sciences, expanded the core curriculum and reinforced the concepts of exploration and integration. Third, the junior high concept included guidance-oriented homerooms and professional counselors, addressing both the social and academic needs of the adolescent. Finally, extra-curricular activities were expanded, and students were provided with the opportunities to develop leadership, social, and other nonacademic skills through service-oriented activities (Lounsbury, 2000).

The junior high school seemed to be the most appropriate form of education for young adolescents, and no other alternative truly captured public attention until the early 1960s. Many believed that junior high schools simply mimicked high schools, labeling them “mini high schools.” New research regarding adolescent development and the early evolution of the information age prompted many educators to become advocates of new programming that would better address the needs of early adolescents. The term, “middle school,” long used in European and some American private schools was revived. Samuel Popper (1968) argued that the junior high school was America’s middle school due to its emphasis on the individual adolescent and his role in society at large. The middle school movement continued to gain impetus due to concern for academic excellence and specialization, earlier maturation of adolescents, and dissatisfaction with the typical junior high school, which seemed to be inflexible and dominated by the senior high school (Lounsbury & Vars, 1978).

William Alexander (1964) first expressed a need for and the characteristics of a new school “in the middle,” highlighting contributions of the junior high school and enumerating other characteristics desired in the new middle school concept. He suggested that although a middle unit, grades five to eight might be ideal, the grades six to eight unit was growing in popularity, and a curriculum which stressed preparation for adolescence, exploration of individual interests and an emphasis on values would be desirable (Alexander, 1964). Donald Eichorn, Emmett Williams (1965) and William Alexander among others, became early advocates of the middle school. Donald H. Eichorn played an important role in establishing the nation's first nongraded middle school in the early 1960s. He founded middle school practices and programs on learner characteristics, developmentally appropriate tasks, and advisory groups at a time when little information about young adolescents existed (Brough, 1995). Both Williams and

Alexander led research and developed programs for teachers in the 1960s dedicated to supporting the middle school model (George & Alexander, 2003).

School desegregation and population shifts provided momentum for the middle school concept during the 1960s and 1970s. In the South, but elsewhere as well, one of the important factors in establishing a middle school was the pressure to accommodate school district racial desegregation (Popper, 1968). This was accomplished by closing the junior high school(s) and moving the ninth grade to a newly desegregated high school. The fifth and sixth grades from the segregated elementary schools were combined with the seventh and eighth grades to create a new desegregated middle school. This resulted in a plan for a more desegregated school district, which would be likely to receive court approval (Alexander, 1964).

During this period of time, the changing demographic patterns in the Northeast and Midwest also brought new challenges to managing school enrollments for planners in those school districts (Compton, 1976). Buildings in some districts were far below capacity in the upper grades while new growth had created a surge of enrollment in the early grades of the elementary school, creating the need for some type of practical solution “in the middle.”

Fueling the fire to develop “middle level alternatives” was the *A Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence In Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education declared the United States “a nation at risk” with the nation’s educational foundations giving way to a rising tide of mediocrity threatening the future of the nation. Virtually every state in the nation implemented laws intended to infuse high school programs with new vigor. Educators began to question the presence of the ninth grade in a junior high school organization, even though it was counted as a high school year (George & Alexander, 2003).

Lounsbury (1992) attributed the emergence of the middle school concept to the general dissatisfaction with the junior high school, and the fact that increasingly research indicated that children were reaching adolescence earlier (Alexander, 1970; Brough, 1995). In 1975, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development reasserted the need to develop schools centered on the intellectual and emotional needs and characteristics of young adolescents. During this time the middle school concept was proving to be very popular in districts that had adopted it over the preceding two decades (George & Oldaker, 1985). A middle school program that was effectively implemented produced outcomes which pleased parents, policy-makers and practitioners alike: student behavior and attitudes improved, home-school relationships became closer, interethnic interaction became more positive, students enjoyed school more, teachers grew increasingly more appreciative of the opportunity to work together, and academic achievement held steady or improved slightly (George & Alexander, 2003). This evidence minimized the active resistance of traditional junior high school educators. Consequently, in the 1980s, the middle school concept gained popularity.

The Adolescent

Adolescence is a period during which a young person learns who s/he is, what s/he really feels, and establishes a sense of personal identity (Erikson, 1968). Adolescence marks the end of an individual's childhood years and the beginning of youth or young adulthood; it is a time of great transition (Caissy, 1994). The adolescent, as a developmental group, is characterized by differences; the program called the middle school is distinguished by its attempt to accommodate those differences.

Eichhorn (1987) defined the middle school as an integration of an educational program resulting from cultural, mental, emotional, and physical growth factors together with

administrative variables, guidance activities, and teaching requirements. The middle school is an organic whole with a focus on the growth of the child. Research has indicated several issues as crucial to adolescent development and necessary as foundations to the organization and programming of the middle school.

Students' Sense of Self

Early adolescence is difficult for most youngsters, a time for challenging one's self and the ideas learned in childhood. It is the beginning of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth, which can create both excitement and misunderstanding (George and Alexander, 2003; Carnegie Council, 1995). In early adolescence the youngster transitions from acceptance of adult direction to challenging authority and moving toward self-direction. Advisors must provide a blend of challenge and support that will promote identity development in early adolescence. Middle school students need the guidance and direction of effective counselors to begin the major developmental task of adolescence, which is to achieve a clear sense of self (Marcia, 1980).

Less Dependence on Home

As young people seek to create their own identities, they face the challenge of decreasing their dependence on family. Parents and family members need to continue to provide structure and support during the difficult moments adolescents face in growing away from complete dependence on home. In a climate of changing demographics, middle school advisors need to be prepared to help youngsters and their parents understand one another and to work collaboratively in making the difficult choices that occur during adolescence. Middle school advisors need to be especially aware of dysfunctional aspects of students' families in order to develop counseling

strategies and guidance programs that help young adolescents find themselves (Wegscheider, 1981).

Stress and Peer Pressure

Developmental psychologists have long recognized the importance of the peer group during adolescence in shaping and supporting the behavior of its members. Peer interactions become more frequent and less supervised, and peer groups form based on sex, race, proximity, and behavioral similarities including smoking, aggression, and academic achievement (Espelage, 2003). Early adolescence is a time of experimentation with new behaviors and of reliance on peers for guidance and direction. Students need to feel accepted by their peers and may engage in behaviors that adults view negatively (Corder, 1999).

Students in middle schools frequently complain about the stress this creates in their everyday lives (Elkind, 1990). Typical adolescent complaints include "Everyone is watching for me to make mistakes" and "I never have any time for myself." Although students' teachers may play an important role in supporting student motivation, parents and peers are also salient components of adolescents' relational contexts and shape their motivational identities (Murdock, Anerman, & Hodge, 2000; Wentzel, 1998b).

Adults sometimes have a tendency to discount what adolescents say believing that most of the stress youngsters experience will dissipate as maturation occurs. This lack of empathy on the part of adults and peers may leave adolescents feeling misunderstood and alienated. Middle school advisors must focus on implementing programs that help young adolescents deal with many stressful circumstances.

During adolescence peer pressure can have a substantial influence on the academic behavior of students. Typically academic achievement is not viewed favorably by students and

their peers. Research has indicated, however, that when peers advocate academic achievement, student motivation can improve (Corder, 1999).

Academics

Americans are becoming increasingly aware of the need for schools to deliver academic excellence. Increasing student attrition rates in America's schools and the generally dismal record of student achievement in public schools bode poorly for promoting academic excellence in this country. Educators in the United States must account for the failure of schools to motivate young people to stay in school and to strive for high levels of academic achievement. Middle school advisors can contribute to schools' efforts at improving academic achievement among young teenagers (Gerler, Drew, & Mohr, 1990). Teachers may have an even greater influence on students' motivation and behavior displayed in their classrooms than parents. Students are motivated both socially and academically by expectations to perform to their full potential. Research indicates that students' perceived relationships with their teachers affect the development of their motivation; higher quality teacher student relationships predict stronger motivation (Murdoch, 2003). Developmentally appropriate levels of challenge can be highly motivating (Wentzel, 2002).

The Essential Elements of the Middle School

The challenge of the middle school movement is to develop responsive practices and focused programs that meet the aforementioned developmental needs of young adolescents. Educators have begun to recognize students' overall needs in formulating educational goals (Popham, 2003; Parrish, 2002; NMSA, 1995). Proponents of this school of thought recognize the close relationship between students' academic development and their personal growth.

Exemplary middle level schools address the distinctiveness of early adolescence with various instructional and organizational features. Five key components are generally recognized by educators, associations, foundations, state boards of education, and researchers. Empirical research and evaluation conducted over the last two decades support these components (George & Alexander, 2003; National Middle School Association, 1996).

1. Teaming and Block Scheduling

Interdisciplinary teaming and block scheduling: The daily schedule features blocks of instructional time during which interdisciplinary teams of teachers provide appropriate learning experiences for their students. Other characteristics of teaming and block scheduling are:

- The creation of heterogeneous teams, typically between 100 and 150 students.
- The creation of interdisciplinary teams of teachers in areas, such as math, science, social studies, and language arts.
- A schedule of common planning times for the interdisciplinary teacher team.
- The development of a schedule within the block of time that can be altered to provide for the regrouping of students.

2. Advisories and Guidance

The guidance program provides access to an adult who has the time and responsibility for each student, assuring familiarity and continuity in providing advice on academic, personal, and social matters. The components of a middle-level guidance program are:

- Adults, typically teachers and administrators, who work with a small group of students during the middle school years to establish a stable, long-term relationship with each student.
- A well-planned sequence of activities to develop and nurture the adult-student relationship.
- A school schedule that enables a small group to meet each school day throughout the school year.

3. Varied Instruction

Appropriate core curriculum and learning skills: Learning experiences appropriate to the middle-level phase of schooling are required of all students, and students should master learning skills needed for future study. Characteristics of a core curriculum are:

- A focus on culture, science, and the humanities.
- An established set of expectations for proficiency in reading, speaking, and listening.
- Emphasis on the rights of self and others as well as responsibilities as citizens.
- Appropriate teaching strategies: A variety of teaching strategies that have been shown to be particularly effective with students of this age group should be used.

Other characteristics of appropriate teaching strategies are:

- The adaptation of instructional strategies to the characteristics of the learner and sensitivity to the individual's levels of intellectual development noting the relationship between the content and actual life situations.

- Built-in flexibility to meet the varying developmental needs of students with a focus on critical thinking skills, cooperative learning, computers and related technology information, and hands-on materials.

4. Exploratories

Exploratory programs expose students to a range of academic, vocational, and recreational subjects for career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment. Exploratory topics include foreign languages, intramural sports, health, clubs, student government, home economics, technological arts, independent study projects, music, art, speech, drama, careers, consumer education, creative writing, and several other special areas. Schools offer a wide range of exploratory or elective courses for students to develop their interests.

5. Transitions

Eighty-eight percent of public school students begin the middle grades in a new school which may prove overwhelming (MacIver, 1990). Schools ensure a smooth transition between elementary and high school by orienting students and providing close articulation and coordination of learning experiences. Many middle schools facilitate this transition with visits to the middle school while students are still enrolled in the elementary school.

Research indicates that changes in middle school organization and curriculum have resulted in significant adoption of middle school practices. A 1989 study compared results from a 1968 survey that sampled ten percent of middle schools with at least three and not more than five grades, including grades 6 and 7, with those of a similar 1988 survey. Results indicated that interdisciplinary team organization, for example, has increased tremendously in the last twenty

years. In 1968, fewer than ten percent of schools reported interdisciplinary team organization; in 1988 approximately one-third did so. Additionally, advisor-advisee programs numbered nearly 400 by 1988 (Alexander & McEwin, 1989).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) conducted a national survey of over 200 schools finding that the most common middle school grade configuration was six to eight. In addition, the majority of these schools were providing transitional activities, employing advisor-advisee programs, interdisciplinary teaching, and utilizing block schedules. These schools also provided extensive staff development activities that were focused on strategies appropriate to the needs of their students (Cawelti, 1988).

In the 1989 report, *Turning Points*, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development task force made a number of recommendations that reinforced the aforementioned studies and developed recommendations that could significantly improve the educational experiences of young adolescents:

1. Create small communities for learning where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and growth. The commission urged schools to create small schools within larger schools to foster these relationships.
2. Develop a core academic program that results in students who are literate and who know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society.
3. Create success experiences for all students. The commission urged the creation of heterogeneous grouping, the promotion of cooperative learning, and other

experiences likely to broaden the range of students experiencing success in the average middle school.

4. Empower teachers and administrators in making decisions about the experiences of middle grades students. The organization of schools into academic teams and shared decision making, such as team leaders, teachers and administrators understanding and concurring about policies and strategies, are central components of the middle school curriculum.
5. Staff schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents. The attempt to develop programs to prepare and certify such teachers has been prominent in the middle school agenda.
6. Improve academic performance by fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents. This recommendation is aligned with the goal of overall health and well-being of the young adolescent.
7. Reengage families in the education of young adolescents. The commission recommended giving families meaningful roles in school governance and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school.
8. Connect schools with their communities. The task force recommended service projects, partnerships, and other collaborative efforts that would enrich the instructional program and opportunities for extra-curricular activities.

These recommendations, in addition to a continuing commitment to meeting the needs of students, have provided the middle level school with a strong sense of vision and purpose (Carnegie Council, 1989).

Exemplary Middle School Model

Exemplary middle-level schools are identified as those that have adopted programs, practices, and policies believed to be effective in meeting diverse adolescents' needs. As noted earlier, adolescence is a crucial and transitional time in human growth and development. The program components of the exemplary middle school should be different from what students receive in either the elementary school or the high school, but not so significantly different that such experiences make the transition from elementary to high school more difficult than it would be without the presence of a middle level of education (George & Alexander, 2003).

Each aspect of the middle school concept is specially tailored to the needs of the students at the middle level. The middle school should not be an unplanned downward extension of the high school program or an outgrowth of the elementary school. Each component of the middle school should link the elementary and high schools together so that the process of education from kindergarten to high school is seamless. The middle school concept should unify the student's educational experience while providing a special learning opportunity for early adolescents that is uniquely tailored to their developmental characteristics and needs (George & Alexander, 2003).

During the past two decades, middle school advocates have been working toward a definitive set of criteria to describe exemplary middle school characteristics and goals. George and Alexander in *The Exemplary Middle School* (2003) identify essential characteristics that may make a middle school "exemplary:"

1. The primary focus of the middle school should be on the students in these schools.

These learners demonstrate the many unique needs and interests of early adolescents.

The middle school plays an essential role in assisting the physical, intellectual, moral,

- social, emotional, psychological, and perhaps even spiritual (in the sense of developing meaning and purpose in their lives) development of early adolescents.
2. The middle school must be uniquely planned, staffed, and operated to provide a program that is truly focused on the rapidly changing learners in transition from childhood to adolescence. These middle school learners need a school focused exclusively on their needs—the exemplary middle school.
 3. As a measure of school curriculum, the ultimate criterion of school quality is the progress its students attain. Any adequate program of school evaluation provides for consideration of such measures of student progress as available. The first source of data for school planning committees is data about student achievement, behavior, and attitudes. Therefore, carefully maintained records of the evaluation of each student's progress are a prerequisite to any other phases of school-wide, formative and summative evaluation.
 4. Continuous staff development is critical. Until recently middle school teacher pre-service preparation at the college and university level was virtually nonexistent. The challenges of effective implementation of almost all aspects of the complete middle school program (advisories, the interdisciplinary team organization, an integrated curriculum, as well as new and more appropriate instructional strategies) ultimately depend on authentic middle school teacher education.
 5. The middle school should provide an adequate guidance program with a focus on teacher-based guidance. Early adolescents need to feel known and recognized by a familiar, caring adult. Teacher-based guidance has the potential for addressing this need.

6. An interdisciplinary team organization is characteristic of an effective middle school. Decisions need to be made regarding the size of teams, teaching assignments of each member, and the location of each team in the school.
7. Student grouping should be employed in an exemplary middle school. Special education students and gifted students are the focus of the grouping process in middle schools. Individual education plans (IEPs) must be developed for the unique educational needs of each identified child.
8. Flexible scheduling and various types of space utilization should be planned for each middle school in order to maximize effectiveness. The effective use of time and space in the middle school is absolutely critical to the successful implementation of the other portions of the middle school program. Properly designed, these two factors represent an opportunity for the expansion and enrichment of complex yet community-building school programs.
9. School planners interested in assisting the staff of a middle school program to maximize the potential for the schedule and the building they use must foster the development of several important skills. For administrators a clear understanding of the program priorities and the knowledge of the steps involved in the construction of a master schedule to accommodate team organization are crucial. The ability and commitment to place teams together within the building is also critical. Staff development programs must be provided to help teachers learn how to use the schedule to plan effectively and to most efficiently schedule students and special activities. The goal is to enhance the life of the interdisciplinary team.

10. Exemplary middle schools depend upon effective planning and implementation of the school's building. The success of advisory programs, interdisciplinary teaming and effective curricula depend on how well activities are scheduled and the building is used. Currently there is no comprehensive research justifying the efficacy of any one pattern of school unit organization.
11. Teachers and administrators must possess a shared vision and the skills to make the continuous adjustments and improvements required to make progress toward the goals of the school.

Alexander and George (2003) recognize that no one school will exhibit to perfection all of the above characteristics. However, they do conclude that an exemplary middle school is one planned, organized and operated to be a model for everyone interested in middle school education.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Education Alliance at Brown University in collaboration with a commission of middle level practitioners and experts released a report entitled *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level School Reform* (NASSP, 2002). The ultimate goal of *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* is to move from model high-performing independent schools to an entire system of excellent schools benefiting all students. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* proposes strategies that are applicable to all types of schools: large, small, urban, suburban, or rural. The report details nine cornerstone strategies and 30 specific recommendations for improving student achievement at the middle level. It includes information from schools that actually applied the report's recommendations. The nine strategies focus on three key areas: (1) collaborative leadership with professional learning communities and the strategic use of data; (2) personalization of the school

environment; and (3) the creation of rigorous student- centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

First, goals will be established to guide the strategic planning efforts. Administrators and teachers will develop collaborative relationships with professionals in the community in order to strengthen academic programs and facilitate the continual development and revision of academic programs to improve academic achievement. Second, a supportive environment must be created within the school so that students feel connected to the institution. The goal is to provide opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to the school, a sense of ownership over the direction of one's learning, the ability to recognize options and to make choices based on one's own experience and understanding of the options. Finally, schools must align curriculum, instruction, and assessment so that students know what standards they need to meet and then are given the support to become engaged in achieving those standards.

Table 1 summarizes the research that provides the foundation for the middle school model today:

“For nearly a century the evolving middle level concept has been based on the developmentally unique characteristics and needs of middle school age students.

Establishing and maintaining high quality middle schools is dependent upon the recognition of the special qualities of these learners and the willingness to tailor programs to students' needs”

(George & Anderson, 1989).

Research and Measurement of Student Achievement at the Middle Level

Prior to the 1970s, most research on the middle school focused on the organizational, methodological and instructional changes necessary to address developmentally responsive educational programs. A significant portion of this research explored possible grade levels, the

structuring of these levels within the organization, and comparisons of the junior high and middle level school (George & Shewey, 1993).

Studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s identified exemplary schools with records of outstanding success. It is from these studies that George and Shewey (1993) identified essential components for addressing the needs of early adolescents: interdisciplinary team organization, advisories, flexible scheduling, enriched curriculum experiences, opportunities for student success, active instruction and learning, vertically integrated schools, shared decision making and parent and community involvement.

Additionally, George and Oldaker conducted a study in 1983, inviting central office staff and school administrators in 34 states to supply data regarding the effects of middle school practices in their districts. The authors identified the exemplary schools based on the 1982 study of well-disciplined schools sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, the 1983 DOE National Secondary School Recognition Program, a panel of experts in middle level education and several lists from books on middle level education. One hundred and thirty, or 81% of the schools, responded. The data indicated that these schools were characterized by the central components of middle school

Table 1

Middle School Research

Research	Author	Findings
Recommendations to improve adolescent education	Carnegie Council (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create small communities • Core curriculum • Success experiences • Empower teachers and administrators • Expert teachers • Foster health and fitness • Engage families in education • Connect schools with communities
Breaking Ranks: Middle Level Reform	National Association of Secondary School Principals (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and the strategic use of data • Personalizing the school environment • Creating rigorous student-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
Essential program concepts of the middle school	George and Alexander (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and advisory programs • Transition and articulation • Teaming and block scheduling • Appropriate teaching strategies and curriculum • Exploratory
Exemplary middle school characteristics	George and Alexander (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on students • Planning based on needs of students • Focus curriculum on personal development, continuing learning skills and basic knowledge areas • Utilize current research on instructional methods • Guidance • Interdisciplinary teaming • Student grouping • Flexible scheduling • Scheduling for team organization • Effective planning and implementation • Effective leadership

philosophy, such as teacher advisories, exploratories and staff development and leadership. Additionally, all of these schools had received significant local, regional or state recognition for applying similar school philosophies. There was no attempt to identify or distinguish schools by socioeconomic status, school size, geographic location or leadership.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents reported consistent academic improvement, while an additional 28% supplied data from standardized test scores that demonstrated test score improvement. Reorganization of the schools to be consistent with middle school philosophy also markedly improved discipline problems. Tardiness, truancy and school vandalism decreased moderately or greatly. Eighty percent noted a decrease in office referrals and suspensions while close to 60% expelled fewer students. Ninety percent noted that teacher confidence in managing student disruptions improved. Over 80% noted that student health, creativity, and confidence were positively affected by reorganization. Ninety-five percent reported that students' attitudes about school and feelings towards teachers became moderately or strongly positive. Eighty-six percent witnessed greater student participation in activities, and 75% noted better school attendance. Ninety-four percent reported better staff morale and rapport as a result of reorganization. Administrators noted greater staff development in designing and executing curriculum when conducting staff development to facilitate reorganization. Positive parental support was also noted (George & Oldaker, 1985).

Between 1990 and 2002, over 3500 studies related to middle schools were published. Dissertations accounted for approximately 50% of this research, while documents and journal articles indexed in ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) accounted for two-thirds of all the published studies. Almost twelve percent of all the studies were published in 1998; the volume of research waned to roughly only six percent by 2002 (Hough, 2003).

About two-thirds of all studies on middle level education are qualitative in nature; while quantitative studies once represented almost 30% of the total, they now represent only about 15%. The data collection techniques of choice among researchers conducting middle level education research include unobtrusive methods, case studies, and mixed approaches. Less common are observation, surveys, and interviews (Hough, 2003).

Studies regarding middle schools in the last decade have focused primarily on the efficacy of the middle level restructuring effort (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995). Students in middle level schools with less departmentalization, more heterogeneous grouping and more team teaching had higher achievement scores and were more engaged in their schooling than were students in schools without these characteristics (Williamson, 1993). While these factors independently did not impact student learning, collectively, they had a positive influence on student learning (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995). Several of these studies are described in more detail below.

Seghers (1997) conducted a study of 154 administrators in Louisiana public schools. The author found that implementing many of George and Alexander's middle level practices is related positively to academic achievement and negatively related to the proportion of suspensions, expulsions, and teacher turnover.

Russell (1994) conducted research relating to the implementation of specific components of the middle school concept and student achievement. The middle level concept had been applied to varying degrees in the district. Ten schools from a large (40,000 student) urban Midwestern district participated. Three hundred and eighty-one certified professional staff members were surveyed to collect data regarding the middle level programming, and 2323 eighth grade students' achievement scores were analyzed. Forty-seven percent of the student sample

was registered for free or reduced lunch and sixty-six percent was Caucasian. Females and students in the low income group seemed to benefit more from middle level programming than other students. In general, however, middle level programming has contributed to enhanced student achievement. Results demonstrated a relationship between improved student achievement and practices, such as interdisciplinary teaming, exploratory curriculum, developmentally appropriate teaching strategies and transition activities.

Felner, Kasak, Mulhall & Flowers (1997) attempted to evaluate the implementation of the *Turning Points* recommendations and their impact on students' achievement, socio/emotional development and behavioral adjustment. The research team investigated standardized test scores, attendance data, disciplinary data and descriptive data in a longitudinal study of 1500 students and 900 teachers in schools rated on levels of implementation of recommendations of the Carnegie Council's report, *Turning Points*: The results indicated better student outcomes regarding achievement, behavior, and socio-emotional factors in schools with higher levels of implementation of exemplary middle school philosophies versus the more traditional approaches of junior high schools.

Many middle level experts advocate moving beyond the use of norm-referenced tests as the sole measure of effectiveness and encourage increased accountability and program evaluation on a regular basis (Poynton et al, 2006). A variety of successful middle schools identify standardized test scores, average daily attendance, number of teacher absences due to illness, grade distribution, discipline referrals, courses selected by students in high school, parent participation in conferences, staff development participation by teachers, and student participation in co-curricular activities as their measures of success (George, 1993).

Incorporating several of these factors as measures simultaneously in a study may provide a more comprehensive picture of the high performing middle school.

Student Achievement and Stakeholders' Perceptions

Schools have begun to address issues related to meeting standards of NCLB. One of the greatest challenges is demonstrating annual measurable progress. Many schools have attempted to address this task by developing on-going processes of data collection, tracking and evaluation. Although NCLB was the impetus for data tracking, comprehensive research and the establishment of benchmarks, educational institutions have begun to track and measure a variety of programs, activities and test scores in order to more clearly measure, understand, and continuously monitor the longitudinal goal of student achievement. An institution will be considered an “achieving” institution in terms of NCLB if the school is meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks. There is, however, no consensus as to what exactly constitutes accurate, comprehensive measurement of student achievement in an educational setting.

Halderson, Kelly, Keefe, and Berge conducted research in the late 1980s to develop input measures for the achievement tracking process. They identified goals and objectives, demographics, organizational characteristics, and characteristics of stakeholders such as parents, teachers and students as crucial data to be included in the school's decision support system (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe, & Berge, 1989). Keefe & Kelley (1990) also found that parent, teacher, and student perceptions of the learning environment, and their satisfaction with the learning environment, correlate with student achievement. These have been identified as “inputs” to the student achievement process in schools. Thus, an attempt to measure student achievement in a middle school environment should include not only traditional data, such as

standardized test scores and student and family demographics, but also data regarding perceptions and satisfaction gathered from parents, faculty, administrators, and students. This data should include parameters, such as student programming, curriculum, and relationships amongst various stakeholders and facilities, as well as validated, reliable instruments to measure student achievement.

In the late 1980s, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) developed a Task Force on Effective School Climate. This group conducted a study to determine (Keefe & Kelley, 1990) variables that influence the conditions and outcomes of schooling. Student, teacher, and parent satisfaction were identified as indicators of student achievement and surveys were developed and validated to explore stakeholder issues such as the following:

Teachers: opportunities for advancement, student responsibility and discipline, curriculum and job tasks, parents and community, school buildings and supplies, and communication.

Parents: parental involvement, student activities, teachers, support services, student discipline, school buildings, administrators and information services.

Students: student activities, teachers, fellow students, schoolwork, discipline, decision making opportunities, and communication.

The outcomes of their research were validated instruments developed to measure stakeholders' perceptions and satisfaction (earlier identified as contributors to the educational environment). As there are not many validated instruments to explore student achievement in an educational environment, these surveys were some of the first nationally employed, validated instruments that may be applied in tandem with other tools to comprehensively explore student achievement in a school setting.

Middle School Practices and Research

Current research addressing middle school practices and student achievement has been sparse, has focused on select middle school practices such as teaming and organizational structure, or has had a significant focus on standardized test scores, specifically, reading, mathematics, and writing. Further, multiple measures of student performance have been subjective and lack evidence of external validity (Nichols, 2008; Cavanagh, 2005; Tonn, 2005; Brown, 2004; George & Alexander, 2003; Lynley, 2003).

Brown et al, (2004) attempted to measure student achievement, comparing high performing suburban middle schools to lower performing urban middle schools. While they identified significant disparities between test scores and funding, they also identified stark differences between the schools, administration, structure, organizational health and student expectations. Initially, they found insufficient studies on achievement and had difficulties comparing studies due to faulty research designs.

Others have found conflicts between indicators or measures of student achievement. Tonn (2005) describes standardized data and expectations as more accurate measures of achievement, while Cavanagh (2005) identified teacher training and curriculum as predictors of student achievement.

Another noted limitation to the extant literature on student achievement is the research related to stakeholders. In many studies more than one body (such as students or parents for example) may be excluded from the research, which results in a uni-dimensional versus a comprehensive perspective of student achievement at the middle level (Nichols, 2008).

Further, not only have a number of studies identified different variables that may contribute to student achievement, many studies have not considered longitudinal data, which may lead to inaccuracies in terms of directional relationships of variables. For example, does students' sense of belongingness contribute to student achievement or does achievement level influence how connected a student feels to a school (Lynley, 2003).

Finally, George and Alexander (2003) found a paucity of studies that were empirically insufficient and inaccurate in terms of research designs. This inconsistency in research design results in inaccurate conclusions and decreased comparison opportunities for middle school philosophy programming.

Existing research fails to demonstrate a comprehensive approach to measuring student achievement and school effectiveness at the middle level (Good, 2002). Support for multiple measures of student performance has been expressed by the American Psychological Association, the National Council on Measurement in Education and the American Educational Research Association (1999) in an effort to enhance overall validity of decision making. Thus, although most advocates of middle school education have come to consensus on the components necessary for effective learning at the middle level, and some research has indicated that these components must be employed concurrently to positively affect student achievement and learning, further comprehensive research is necessary to explore all elements of an effective middle school and how these elements may indeed affect student learning and achievement in a climate where success of a school has been redefined as high-stakes assessments (George & Alexander, 2003).

“No Child Left Behind”

In the last decade federal educational policy has undergone its most significant change since 1965. Federal law now requires all states, all school districts, and all schools to ensure that every child is proficient in math, science, reading and writing. In 2001, President George Bush signed the “No Child Left Behind” Act (*NCLB*). This act reauthorized and expanded the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal of *NCLB* is to have all students fully proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. Every state, district, and school must demonstrate progress each year toward meeting that objective (Accountability for Schools, 2006). The funding provided to districts from this legislation may offer a variety of opportunities to improve the achievement of young adolescents (Accountability for Schools, 2006). It most certainly will increase districts’ attempts to monitor student achievement. It is currently unclear which methods may be most effective in determining comprehensively student achievement levels. To date, this legislation has fueled a focus on standardized test scores. Although standardized test scores most likely will play an important role in measuring achievement levels, other measures, which may include qualitative indices, must be considered to develop a longitudinal, holistic image of the educational setting.

The new legislation requires that states have challenging academic content and achievement standards for all students in reading, mathematics and science. While standards for other subjects are not required, state plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education must describe strategies for teaching children in Title I schools the same content in the other subjects as other students in the state receive (Learning First Alliance, 2002).

Educators have expressed great concern regarding accountability (Hess, 2005; Olson, 2005). The accountability provisions in the law focus on new testing requirements, calling for

annual reading and mathematics exams for students in grades three through eight and at least once in grades 10-12. Science assessments are required at least once in the grade spans 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12 by 2007-08. *NCLB* mandates that students' performance on these exams show "Adequate Yearly Progress," (AYP) or evidence that they are mastering the material and consistently improving their scores on these tests year by year.

Each state must establish separate baselines for both math and reading from which all progress will be measured. Using assessment scores from the 2001-02 school year, the starting point at a minimum is the percentage of students performing at the proficient level who are either: in the state's lowest-achieving demographic subgroup or in the school at the 20th percentile of the state's schools, as ranked by student proficiency--whichever is higher. The subgroups are defined as a major racial or ethnic group, those with limited English proficiency, disabled students with I. E. P.'s or migrant students. For a school to meet AYP in any given year, each demographic cluster of students must perform at or above the bar, wherever it is set. It also must test at least 94.5% of students in each academic subgroup. From that point states must raise the bar toward the ultimate goal of 100% proficiency. The first increase must occur within two years, and each following increase must occur within three years. States decide how aggressively to pursue the proficiency increases; many states have opted to defer the greatest challenges until later years.

In making AYP determinations, *NCLB* further requires schools and school systems to test at least 95% of the students and each sub-group of students and include one other academic indicator for all students. The U.S. Department of Education permits (with approval) each state to determine the minimum number of students that will be tested in a subgroup before that subgroup counts separately in determining a school or district's AYP status. This eliminates the

issue of a small number of students skewing a school's status and should enable states to identify schools requiring intervention. Schools that do not achieve AYP for the first time are placed on the state's warning list of schools. Schools on this list that do not achieve AYP the following year are moved to school improvement status. All schools are subject to *NCLB* goals and reporting requirements; however, only schools receiving Title I funds are subject to specific requirements for corrective action (Accountability for Schools, 2006).

Schools that don't demonstrate adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years are identified as needing improvement and subject to immediate interventions. Schools that receive federal aid under Title I must allow students to transfer to schools that are achieving AYP and use public money to provide tutors. Non-Title I schools must implement school improvement plans. Schools that do not achieve AYP after being in school improvement for two years are moved into corrective action, which may lead ultimately to restructuring of the school if the students do not demonstrate progress. Schools must achieve AYP for two consecutive years to be removed from the state's list. This process is summarized in the following table:

Table 2
School Improvement

Year (of not meeting targets)	Action or Status
1	Warning
2	School Improvement I: School choice, school assistance teams, and a specific plan for improvement.
3	School Improvement II: Same, plus supplemental services such as tutoring.
4	Corrective Action I: Same as School Improvement plus significant changes in leadership, curriculum, professional development or other strategies.
5	Corrective Action II: Same, plus significant changes in governance such as reconstitution, chartering, or privatization.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us>)

There are two key aspects to the accountability issue of *NCLB*: states must set benchmarks at a high level and measure student achievement of these benchmarks at each grade level. Second, all students are expected to be proficient by 2014, which means that all students will reach full proficiency of the benchmarks within a specific time frame. Meeting accountability requirements specified by *NCLB* may be daunting for many districts (Accountability for Schools, 2006).

To date, most states have made progress in raising achievement in the elementary grades, but secondary schools still struggle to close gaps between poor and minority students and their white and more affluent peers. State assessment results in reading and math from 2003 to 2005 indicate progress in raising achievement and closing gaps in the elementary grades. Achievement in middle and high schools also has improved somewhat. In middle school math, 29 states improved overall achievement while one lost ground and one saw no change. Overall reading achievement increased in only 20 of 31 states examined, while achievement declined in six states and did not change in five others (Education Trust, 2006).

There are wide-reaching ramifications for many districts in terms of *NCLB*. In addition to testing, benchmarks, and mastery, accountability implies that districts will also conduct accurate research in order to demonstrate that their programs are effective. States must do this in order to be eligible for any federal funding. Additionally, *NCLB* has developed specific sanctions that will be levied if a school fails to achieve adequate yearly progress. Finally, *NCLB* also contains specific provisions for staff qualifications and development, training, recruitment opportunities, attendance, safety and collective bargaining (Education Commission of the States, 2002).

NCLB may play a significant role in potentially changing the focus of the middle school from total development of the child to student achievement and accountability. Standards and student achievement may dominate many school reform efforts. As each school is a unique learning community, however, mandated standards may not truly provide insight as to the effectiveness of the educational programs in developing the total child. There is a need for educators to explore a variety of measures that include all major stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the community in addressing educational programs (Fountain, 2001).

Pennsylvania

In this study, a number of measures will be explored to indicate student achievement. In Pennsylvania school's students achievement levels are measured by the PSSA, participation in those tests, and on attendance at the elementary/middle school level and graduation rates at the high school level. The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) provides information about individual student achievement and that of schools and districts. The purposes of the statewide assessment component of the PSSA are to:

- Provide students, parents, educators and citizens with an understanding of student and school performance.

- Determine the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of academic standards.
- Provide results to school districts (including charter schools) and Area Vocational Technical Schools (AVTs) for consideration in the development of strategic plans.
- Provide information to state policymakers including the General Assembly and Board on how effective schools are in promoting and demonstrating student proficiencies of academic standards.
- Provide information to the general public on school performance.
- Provide results to school districts (including charter schools) and AVTSs based upon the aggregate performance of all students, for all students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and for those without IEP, (Mathematics Assessment Handbook, 2001).

The PSSAs, participation in those tests, and attendance at the elementary/middle school level and graduation rate at the high school level will be used to determine Pennsylvania schools' AYP status. Using 2001-2002 data as the starting point, Pennsylvania established the following AYP targets for 2005-2007:

- 54% of students proficient or above in reading.
- 45% of students proficient or above in math.
- 95% student participation in the PSSA.
- 90% or improvement in attendance/80% or improvement in graduation.

These expectations apply not only to the school or district as a whole but also to the performance of subgroups, including racial/ethnic categories, low-income students, students with disabilities,

and English Language Learners. The following chart summarizes long range goals for Pennsylvania students in meeting AYP:

Table 3

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Goals for Core Subject Results

Year	2002-04	2005-07	2008-10	2011	2012	2013	2014
Percent <i>Proficient in Reading</i>	45	54	63	72	81	91	100
Percent <i>Proficient in Math</i>	35	45	56	67	78	89	100

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us>)

In 2004-05, 2428 or 81% of Pennsylvania schools achieved AYP status. In addition to higher standards, 45% in math and 54% in reading in 2004-05, schools had to show 90% attendance for schools without a graduating class, or an 80% graduation rate and a 95% participation rate for students who were eligible to take the exam (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

According to data from 2003-2005 analyzed by the Education Trust, Pennsylvania middle school students in general performed at or above the proficient or “meets standards” level. As indicated in the following table, however, subgroup data reveals a bleaker perspective. Although students overall in the state of Pennsylvania demonstrated gains in math and reading, African American and Latino students demonstrated deficiencies in both areas:

Table 4

Proficiency Levels

Group	Reading	Math
African American	-4*	-3
Latino	-7	-8
Native American	+3	No change
All students	+1	+12

Source: <http://www2.edtrust.org> *Score variance from proficient level

Achievement Gaps in Pennsylvania

A primary goal of *NCLB* was to close persistent gaps in achievement. Many states are not achieving that goal in secondary schools. In 2005, after two full school years of implementation of *NCLB*, states have made progress in reading and math at the elementary grades, but results are lagging in the middle grades and high schools, particularly when it comes to narrowing achievement gaps (Education Trust, 2006).

In reading at the middle grades, more states saw achievement gaps narrow than grow wider, but in some cases, those gaps narrowed because the achievement of white students declined. This contrasts with states like New York, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, each of which raised achievement for all groups of students, while accelerating gains for the lowest-performing groups.

The black-white achievement gap was narrowed by an average of seven percentage points in ten school districts in Pennsylvania. Black students in these districts have increased their reading and math proficiency rates by ten percentage points, while white students have

improved by three points. While the average black-white achievement gap is 23.3 percentage points in these districts, this compares favorably to the average gap of 25.6 points for all K-12 districts statewide. The average Hispanic-white achievement gap in Pennsylvania is 24.5 points for all K-12 districts (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

In Pennsylvania, 51 districts were recognized for narrowing achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students and all students by an average of 9.1 percentage points. Economically disadvantaged students in these districts have raised their reading and math proficiency rates by 14.2 percentage points, while all students have improved by 5.2 points. The average gap between economically disadvantaged students and all students remains at 11.4 percentage points for the districts being recognized. This still compares favorably to the average gap of 15.3 points among all K-12 districts (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

The achievement gap begins at an early age. At the fifth grade testing level, 67% of white students are reading at proficient or advanced levels, and 65% are proficient or advanced in mathematics. However, only 28% of black students tested at proficient or above in reading at the fifth grade, and 25% of black students tested at proficient or above in mathematics at the same level. Among Latino students, 30% are proficient in reading, and 32% are proficient in mathematics. Low-income students tested at 36% proficiency in reading and 35% proficiency in mathematics. Students with IEPs are also at the low end of the achievement gap. At the fifth grade level, only 19% are proficient in reading and 22% in math (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

Although one of the primary goals of *NCLB* was to close gaps in achievement, the United States has not made significant gains nationally at the middle level. Pennsylvania, however, has been achieving solid results in narrowing the achievement gap. This study will attempt to explore

the strategies that have been successful in supporting achievement in middle schools in the state of Pennsylvania. Additionally, the phenomenon of lower income districts achieving above state achievement averages will be investigated.

Rural Schools in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is the third most rural state in the nation. In 2005, 352,040 students were enrolled in Pennsylvania's rural schools, 20% of students in the state. The US median for rural school enrollment is 148,579. Fifty-two percent of students were in elementary grades (K-6) and 48% were in secondary grades (7-12). Twenty-five percent of public schools in Pennsylvania are rural; state education funding to these schools is 24% (Rural School and Community Trust, 2005). Data on rural school enrollment show the majority of rural schools have had either stagnant or declining enrollments over the past ten years. Enrollment projections from the Pennsylvania Department of Education suggest that this trend will continue for at least another ten years. The recession of the 1980s led to a "Brain Drain" of many of the rural areas in the state creating issues for districts attempting to provide resources for education. Although there are administrator and teacher shortages, especially special education teachers, attrition rates for students are lower in rural districts (Hillman, 2003).

In Pennsylvania in 2004, 160 city public schools made AYP, up from 58 schools the previous year (Dean, 2005). Results for rural schools in Pennsylvania are not clear; researchers have questioned the validity of AYP measures in rural districts (Lee, 2005). Traditionally in Pennsylvania, rural students face comparatively fewer challenges (enrollment, class size, teachers' salaries) than rural students in other states but nonetheless demonstrate weak student performance (Hillman, 2003). In the report entitled "A Rising Tide: The Current State of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," the Education Policy and Leadership Center

and The Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania found that while Pennsylvanians as a whole are enjoying increasing access to higher education, young adults in rural communities remain at a significant disadvantage (Education and Policy Leadership Center, 2006).

Achievement and Socioeconomic Status

NCLB demands from the American public school system that all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, must be held to the same academic expectations and that their academic progress must be measured using the criteria of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Success in complying with the law will be based on how well students are doing in making progress toward meeting these standards.

Does AYP provide an accurate measure of student achievement? Although this may be questionable, it has provided impetus for educators to explore possibilities for measuring student achievement. Among educators there is currently no consensus on predictors of student achievement. Faculty behaviors and school organization, school size, parental involvement and monitoring are often cited as predictors of student achievement (DiPaolola, Hoy, 2005; Spera, 2005; Alspaugh & Gau, 2003). Research on student performance, however, also frequently indicates that socioeconomic status is one of the most important factors influencing student achievement (Hassan & Opheim, 2005; Brown, Anfara & Roney, 2004; Neill, 2003; Sutton & Soderstrom, 1999).

Students of lower socioeconomic status traditionally have demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement (Tajalli & Opheim, 2005). Research provides several hypotheses as to the nature of the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement. Low-income students may enter school substantially less prepared to do academic work than their middle-income peers

(Lee & Burkam, 2002). In addition, lower income students may attend schools that are far less prepared, in terms of teachers and physical resources, to assist them in achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. This may create significant challenges for economically disadvantaged schools attempting to improve achievement.

Other research, however, has indicated that lower socioeconomic status may not necessarily translate to lower academic achievement. For example, teacher affiliation, resource support, and academic emphasis have been found to positively influence student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status (Brown, Anfara & Roney, 2004; Brown, 2002; Smith 2002, Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Valente, 1999). Sirin (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement in journal articles published between 1990 and 2000. The sample included over 100,000 students in 6871 schools and 128 districts. The results indicated a relationship between SES and achievement; however, Sirin found the relationship is moderated by the unit, the source, the range of SES variable, and the type of SES-achievement measure. The relationship is also contingent upon school level, minority status, and school location (Sirin, 2005).

Of all the factors examined in the meta-analytic literature, family SES at the student level is one of the strongest correlates of academic performance. Student characteristics, such as student's grade, minority status, and school location, moderated the magnitude of the relationship between SES and academic achievement. Results suggest that parents' location in the socioeconomic structure has a strong impact on students' academic achievement. When students provided the data about their family's SES, the magnitude of the relationship between SES and academic achievement was the smallest. When the SES data were collected from parents; however, the results were likely to be much higher. Studies reviewed in this analysis assessed

students' academic achievement using different types of academic achievement measures. Single subject achievement measures, such as verbal achievement, math achievement, and science achievement, yielded significantly larger correlations than general achievement measures such as GPA or a composite achievement test (Sirin, 2005).

Other studies confirm this finding. For example, the Illinois Education Research Council, in conjunction with the Illinois State Board of Education and Chicago Public Schools, found that low income students perform better in classrooms with higher quality teachers. The researchers evaluated teachers in Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, ranking schools according to a teacher quality score. In Illinois, that score was determined by five factors: the average college entrance exam score of all teachers in the school; results on the teacher licensing test of basic skills; a national ranking of college attended; years of experience; and number of teachers with provisional credentials. All of the state's 3,800 public schools were evaluated. In schools where more than half the pupils were low-income, an average of 44 percent of students passed math, reading, writing, science and social science exams when the school was filled with low-quality teachers. In poor schools with better teachers, the pass rate increased to 56 % (Banchero, 2006).

Alsbaugh and Rui (2003) studied student achievement using data from a large urban Missouri school district. The district's 39 elementary schools applied similar resources in all schools but varied considerably in K-5 enrollment, socioeconomic status (SES), and student achievement. Smaller schools were located in the older, inner-city section of the district, while larger schools were found in the newer, suburban parts of the district. There was a general decline in achievement as school enrollments increased for both the inner-city and suburban schools. Other research, however, indicates that the relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status is substantially weaker in smaller schools than larger schools, that is,

students from impoverished communities are much more likely to benefit from smaller schools (Tajalli & Opheim, 2005).

The role of poverty in school reform is of great debate in the United States as well. The United States has the highest rate of childhood poverty among rich nations; this poverty is highly correlated with race and ethnicity (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Data from a number of sources have indicated that poverty, particularly among urban minorities, is associated with lower academic performance, and among the lowest social classes, environmental factors, such as family, social and medical influences, are strongly associated with academic performance (Anyon, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). Berliner (2006) found that small reductions in family poverty led to increases in positive school behavior and better academic performance.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, known as TIMSS, presents data on mathematics and science scores for fourth and eighth grade Americans disaggregated by the degree of poverty in the schools they attend. In 2003, data indicated that schools with wealthier students consistently achieved higher scores. The average scores for the schools with greater than 50% of their students in poverty fell below the U.S. average score (Gonzales, Guzmán, Partelow, Pahlke, Jocelyn, Kastenber, & Williams, 2004).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) scores, which is a reading assessment administered to nine and ten year olds in 35 nations, reveals striking similarities. American students ranked ninth in literacy in this study. When only data from white students in the U.S. are analyzed (data from schools with higher percentages of low income students are excluded); however, U.S. students score higher than Sweden, which is the leading nation in literacy (Ogle et al, 2003).

Is student achievement a factor of socioeconomic status, or can issues, such as school organization, faculty training and school programming, positively influence student achievement? It will be important for educators to explore issues of social class and educational environment and how changes may actually mediate learning in schools. In this study a socio-economically disadvantaged student population in rural Pennsylvania that achieved above average scores on state standardized achievement tests was investigated in order to explore factors that may affect student achievement positively.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Gay (1996) defines qualitative research as the collection of extensive narrative information on many variables over a period of time, which occurs in naturalistic surroundings. This allows the researcher to acquire insights not otherwise available through other methodologies. Qualitative research allows for a more complete understanding of behavior requiring an understanding of the circumstances in which it takes place. The focus of the qualitative approach is the development of phenomenon and events in a naturalistic setting. Qualitative researchers further consider how people feel about things as they exist, what people believe, as well as what meanings are emotionally involved with the assorted activities.

In quantitative research the researcher typically approaches the research problem with distinct variables in mind. Reality can be measured in a reliable and valid manner employing pre-established operational and standardized definitions. Quantitative research is typically more structured than qualitative research. In the social sciences there has been great debate regarding the exclusive application of methods. That is, some researchers argue that one method is more complete, thorough, and appropriate than another and should be applied exclusively for exploring research hypotheses (Howe, 1988).

Research in the social sciences represents an attempt to understand human beings and the world in which they function. Qualitative and quantitative research should represent an interactive continuum (Newman & Benz, 1998) and should be applied as a holistic approach to research. In order to accurately explore issues in an educational environment, a variety of research methods should be employed.

The concept of "triangulation," is essential to a multidimensional research approach. It entails "inspection of different kinds of data, different methods, and a variety of research tools" (van Lier, 1988) in a single investigation. Denzin (1978) identified different varieties of triangulation:

- Theoretical triangulation – applying different perspectives to analyze the same set of data
- Data triangulation – applying multiple data sources and data sets (different data sets may be obtained through different methods or the same method at different times (Brannen, 1992).
- Investigator triangulation - multiple observers, researchers, or evaluators; methodological triangulation use multiple measures of a given concept (Isaac & Michael, 1981).

Triangulation has an important advantage: it facilitates corroboration, elaboration, and illumination of the issue in question (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Studies relying on a single method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method (Patton, 1990).

Triangulation of measurement is particularly crucial in educational research because "there are serious risks in making recommendations based on a single criterion which fails to consider the whole educational outcome of an educational process" (Isaac & Michael, 1981). This study will employ a variety of both qualitative and quantitative methods in an effort to comprehensively address the research question.

A focus group is a group of individuals gathered to discuss a topic that is the subject of research exploration (Powell, 1996). Focus groups rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). The key distinguishing characteristic of focus groups is the insight and data produced by the interaction among participants. The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that is unique versus other research methods, such as observation, one-on-one interviewing, or surveys. The participants' attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction of a focus group. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. Focus groups also enable the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.

An interview is a research tool in which the interviewer prepares questions to address a specific topic. The interviewer guides the questions and focuses the study, attempting to elicit responses from participants in their own terms. The researcher must determine what is important and ethical, and determine the completeness and accuracy of the results (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Interviews enable researchers to ask questions and collect data on a variety of topics. Additionally, the researcher can collect rich, detailed data from each participant. One disadvantage of the interview method of data collection is the lack of generalizability and reliability. Also, interviewers must be careful not to introduce bias to the research interview.

The survey is a non-experimental, descriptive research method. Surveys can be useful when a researcher wants to collect data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed. Data are usually collected through the use of questionnaires, although sometimes researchers directly

interview subjects. Surveys can use qualitative (e.g. ask open-ended questions) or quantitative (e.g. use forced-choice questions) measures. There are two basic types of surveys: cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal surveys. Cross-sectional surveys are used to gather data on a population at a single point in time while longitudinal surveys gather data over a period of time (Babbie, 1973).

Questions must be designed carefully. A poorly designed questionnaire captures inaccurate or inconclusive data. One advantage of survey research is the ability to collect large amounts of data in a short period of time at relatively low costs. Raw data can be analyzed in many different ways, and the data can be stored and managed for future research. One of the greatest disadvantages to survey research is the fact that researchers must apply specific questionnaire design principles in order to accurately collect data. For example, researchers must be familiar with construct development and scale measurement.

Summary

The literature on the middle school provides a comprehensive view of the history of the evolution of the middle school, as well as numerous studies addressing the transition from junior high school to middle school. Additionally, middle school advocates seem to have come to consensus on criteria to describe exemplary middle school characteristics and goals.

It is evident that the middle school concept is supported by a significant amount of research on the developmental needs of 10-14 year olds.

However, although there has been a variety of research directed at the organization of the middle school and its essential components, most middle school advocates agree that existing research fails to demonstrate a comprehensive approach to measuring student achievement and school effectiveness at the middle level. Many of the existing studies addressing student

achievement focus primarily on standardized test scores as measures of achievement, which involve purely empirical data. Additionally, there has been a significant decrease in research on the exemplary middle school in the year 2000 and beyond. Finally, the introduction of *NCLB* legislation has significantly shifted the focus of middle school studies from exemplary practices and models to the measurement of student achievement per state and federal mandates. More comprehensive research employing multiple measures of student achievement is necessary to continue meeting the needs of today's young adolescents.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to evaluate factors that may be related to above average student achievement in a rural, low income middle school environment. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be employed to explore programs, curricula, stakeholders' perceptions, and other issues that may be related to student achievement. This chapter will address the evaluation design, the context, the sample population included in the analysis, instrumentation, variables and data analysis.

A case study approach with exploratory and descriptive methods of data collection will be employed. Data will be collected from students, administrators, parents and faculty through surveys, interviews, focus groups and document review. Because the data will be collected from four groups at one point in time, this design is considered a one shot case study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The single bounded system is the "Miller Middle School," (MMS), and the groups to be studied will be investigated in one academic year only.

Setting, Sampling, and Participants

The district is located in East Central Pennsylvania and is situated on the northern edge of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. The history of the county officially dates back to 1811. Before the first European settler ventured through the area's forests, this county served as a Native American hunting ground for the many tribes inhabiting the banks of the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers in Pennsylvania. During the latter half of the 18th century, German settlers farmed the wide valleys during the era of the American Revolution. By the 1800s, the discovery of anthracite coal forged a new period of Industrial Revolution, as coal mining influenced immigration and further development of many boroughs and "patches" across the county.

Transportation expansion, by the way of canal, railroad, and trolley, followed as the county was fueled by the anthracite industry. A multi-ethnic immigration followed, making this county one of the United States' classic "melting pots" of society. The area totals 1.42 square miles with 5,548 inhabitants. The population is comprised of 48% males and 52% females. Twenty percent of the population is under the age of 15, while almost 20% is over the age of 65. The area is 97% Caucasian (www.censusbureau.org, 2008).

One thousand three hundred and twenty-eight students are enrolled in the school district, with 315 housed in the middle school, grades five through seven with 93 students in grade five, 112 students in grade six, and 110 in grade seven). The district is comprised of one high school, grades eight to twelve, one middle school, grades five to seven, and four elementary schools. One hundred and eighty-three students are enrolled in the special education program, and twenty-nine are enrolled in the gifted program. The number of instructional days totals 180, with the average school day lasting six hours. The following chart provides details regarding PSSA results for the entire district (paprofiles.org, 2008).

Table 5

Assessment Results 2002

Mathematics		Percent of Students Achieving Scores in the Following Score Groups:			
Grade	Scaled Scores	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
5	1,340	27%	37%	18%	18%
8	1,340	16%	44%	24%	16%
11	1,310	21%	26%	25%	28%
Reading		Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
5	1,400	38%	31%	18%	14%
8	1,360	29%	43%	15%	14%
11	1,320	15%	46%	24%	16%
Writing		Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic
6	1,320	15%	46%	30%	9%
9	1,380	13%	59%	13%	14%
11	1,440	31%	57%	7%	5%

The state baseline for proficient and above is 45% for Reading and 35% for Mathematics.

Source: <http://www.paprofiles.org/profiles/DistrictAssessments.asp>

The Miller Middle School was selected based on several criteria, including student scores on achievement tests, percentage of students in the district identified as low income, location relative to the primary researcher and accessibility to the primary researcher. As displayed in the table above, 60% of students were advanced or proficient in mathematics at the middle level, 69% proficient or advanced in reading, and 72% proficient or advanced in writing.

Grade retention for the 2001-02 school year was zero for both seventh and eighth grade, and average class size ranged from five to twenty five. The school has a 94.9% attendance rate and 32.2% of the students are low income. There are 6,401 library titles, with 3,736 checked out during the school year. Seventy-five computers with Internet access are available for student use: 47 in classrooms, 28 in computer labs, and six in library/media centers. In terms of standardized academic assessment, thirty-six percent of students scored in the advanced range on state math

assessment exams, while thirty-nine percent score in the advanced range in reading (School Profiles, 2008).

The following table programs/opportunities/initiatives were offered and/or actively supported at the school during the 2001-02 school year:

Table 6

MMS Programs

Academic Programs/Opportunities/Initiatives	
✓	Required art courses
✓	Required music courses
✓	Acceleration programs
✓	Enrichment programs
✓	Tutorial or extra help programs
✓	Environmental education center
✓	Required physical education courses
✓	Industrial arts/technology education
✓	Career exploration/career resource center
✓	Consumer and homemaking education
✓	School to Work program
✓	Honors programs/courses:
✓	Math
✓	Eng
Supporting Programs/Opportunities/Initiatives	
✓	Intramural sports
✓	Band/orchestra
✓	Chorus
✓	Theater/arts activities or productions
✓	Parent involvement programs/organizations
✓	Community service programs/opportunities
✓	On-site lunch service
✓	On-site breakfast service

The number of students suspended (excluded from school for 1-10 days) is eighty-five. There were no students expelled (students excluded from school for more than ten days). There

were ten law enforcement referrals in the school year 2000-01, and no students classified as habitual truants per the school code (Pennsylvania School Profiles, 2004).

The study sample will be comprised of four groups: teachers, students, administrators and parents of the Miller Middle School (MMS). This study will employ a non-probability sample, as the primary researcher will attempt to conduct a census of the MMS student and faculty population via survey and will employ convenience sampling for focus groups and interviews with all groups.

Included in the sample were all 27 faculty members of the teaching staff. Due to budget and time constraints, no more than 20 parents were surveyed and 10 interviewed for the study. All four hundred and twenty-three students of the school were surveyed for the study. Administrators were not surveyed, but were interviewed for the study.

Methods and Procedures

In order to provide a detailed, in-depth profile of the population, multiple sources of data collection were employed: surveys, one-on-one interviewing, document review and focus groups. Students, faculty, administrators and parents were the target of the varied data collection methods. Prior to fieldwork, permission to conduct the investigation will be obtained from the local district school board office and the principal of the middle school. Approval to collect data from subjects was obtained from The East Stroudsburg University Institutional Review Board, the committee for the protection of human subjects.

Case Study

Case study research enables us to explore a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods. Researcher Robert K. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984).

The literature contains numerous examples of applications of the case study methodology. The earliest and most natural examples are to be found in the fields of law and medicine, where "cases" make up the large body of the student work. However, there are some areas that have used case study techniques extensively, particularly in government and in education. The government studies were carried out to determine whether particular programs were efficient or if the goals of a particular program were being met. The evaluative applications were carried out to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives. In both types of investigations, utilizing merely quantitative techniques tended to obscure some of the important information that the researchers needed to uncover (Yin, 1994).

Case study is known as a triangulated research strategy. Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, (1991) asserted that triangulation can occur with data, investigators, theories, and even methodologies. Stake (1995) stated that the protocols that are used to ensure accuracy and alternative

explanations are called triangulation. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In case studies this could be done by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984).

The combination of qualitative and quantitative research will provide the most comprehensive image of the school district and enable the researcher possibly to develop new measures to explore student achievement.

Surveys

Data will be collected via surveys from three groups: students, parents, and faculty. Survey questions will be derived from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Task Force on Effective School Climate study (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe & Berge, 1989). Satisfaction as an outcome measure is characterized by a person's affective response to his or her environment. Student, parent, and teacher satisfaction contributes to a measure of student outcomes, which are the goals of schools (Keefe & Kelly, 1990). Via four separate surveys, School Climate, Student Satisfaction, Teacher Satisfaction and Parent Satisfaction, the Task Force attempted to explain, predict or control environmental variables that influence the conditions and outcomes of schooling. These surveys were tested and refined in a national field test in 1985.

The NASSP School Climate survey is normed for use with students, teachers and parent or citizen groups. The survey collects data about perceptions on ten subscales: teacher-student relationships, security and maintenance, administration, student academic orientation, student behavioral values, guidance, student-peer relationships, parent and community-school relationships, instructional management and student activities. There are a total of 55 items on the original survey, although items may be selected from the survey which would be most

appropriate for the current study. The student satisfaction survey of 46 items provides data about student perceptions on eight scales: teachers, fellow students, schoolwork, student activities, student discipline, decision-making opportunities, school building and supplies, and communication. The teacher satisfaction survey of 56 items addresses the following subscales: administration, compensation, opportunities for advancement, student responsibility and discipline, curriculum and job tasks, co-workers, parents and community, school buildings and supplies, and communication. The parent satisfaction survey of 58 items collects data on the following subscales: parent involvement, curriculum, student activities, teachers, support services, school buildings and supplies, student discipline, school administrators and school information services. Again, items were selected from each survey which were be most appropriate for the current study.

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it proposes to measure. Although the Climate and Satisfaction surveys developed by NASSP are relatively new, they have demonstrated content and construct validity. During the national norming studies of the instruments, school personnel at 65 schools across the country told NASSP researchers that the results of the survey had confirmed what the practitioners had known or suspected about the school, indicating face or content validity; the instruments measured what was important to stakeholders. Additionally, the school surveys were developed from an extensive bank of items based on the dimensions of climate and effective schools reported in the literature (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe & Berge, 1989). Thus, development of the surveys was grounded in a shared understanding of content, further supporting content validity. In the early development of the instrument, the Task Force produced a variety of research related to key variables of the model.

The Task Force placed great emphasis during instrument development on scale and item conceptualization to ensure construct validity, addressing the meaningfulness of the instrument.

Reliability is an indicator of consistency, the extent to which an instrument yields consistent measures of constructs. Chronbach's alpha provides an estimate of the degree to which items on a given scale are perceived as similar in meaning. The average internal consistency measure of both the NASSP School Climate Survey and the Student Satisfaction Survey scales is .81. The average reliability of the Teacher Satisfaction Survey is .88, and the Parent Satisfaction Survey reliability score is .85 (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe & Berge, 1989), indicating that the items demonstrate consistency in measuring the concepts.

All students from grades five through seven were surveyed regarding their satisfaction with school environment. Students and faculty were surveyed during school on campus, whereas parents were surveyed by mail. All participants were given a consent letter describing the goals of the study and will also be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data was then be collected and analyzed with SPSS software. The data will be housed in database management software for future analysis and study.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a simple random selection of teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Ten students were be selected from the school roster. Ten faculty members and parents were randomly selected as well. Two administrators from the middle school building were also be interviewed.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview format that enabled participants to incorporate their ideas regarding the topic and provide any spontaneous response as well. The interview will include both closed and open-ended questions. The interviews enabled the

researcher to understand the development of model middle school components at MMS, and how faculty, students, parents and administrators participated in their implementation as well as how they perceived these components.

An interview guide was developed and utilized for the study. The final guide will be reviewed by both the primary researcher and the principal of the building to ensure that it is appropriate for the student body. This also enabled the primary researcher to determine whether or not there were additional issues that needed to be addressed to better understand this particular population.

Students, faculty and administrators were interviewed privately on campus during the school day or after school. Parents were interviewed at their convenience either on or off campus. All on-campus interviews were conducted in one of the teacher/staff preparation rooms. A letter describing the study and inviting the randomly selected parents to participate was sent home with students approximately one month prior to the scheduled interview dates. For teachers, students and administrators, this letter was provided prior to the interview on campus. The interview protocol was approximately three to four pages in length in order to conduct the interviews within a thirty-minute time frame. The researcher recorded responses manually and also asked the interviewees if audio taping would be permissible. This was done to ensure accuracy of data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Data was immediately transcribed and then organized in database software.

Document Review

In a research situation documents may provide the researcher with the ability to witness events that have already taken place. Document review may enable the researcher to corroborate

evidence from other methods of data collection, such as interviews and focus groups. In this study the primary researcher took field notes throughout the entire research process and attempted to utilize other documentation, such as old school newspapers and community papers in order to fully describe the research setting, the subjects, and the middle school concepts employed in the school. Standardized test records, calendars, and newsletters were accessed for analysis. Minutes from meetings, announcements, formal policy letters and other documents were also be utilized for research purposes.

Focus Groups

A focus group script will be created to complement the interview and survey data. The final script will be reviewed by both the primary researcher and the principal of the building to ensure that it is appropriate for the student body. This also enabled the primary researcher to determine whether or not there were additional issues that needed to be addressed in order to better understand this particular population. One to two qualitative researchers (with terminal degrees in research) were employed to serve as moderators. A letter describing the study and an invitation to participate were delivered one month prior to the focus group sessions. Participants were assured that their identities will not be revealed in the study report.

Two sessions with six faculty members in each were conducted during an in-service day. The faculty was be provided with breakfast as an incentive to participate. Two sessions with six parents in each were planned to be conducted in the evening at the school campus. Parents were provided with refreshments and a gift not greater than \$10 in value from the school store for participating. Two sessions with eight students in each group were conducted during school lunch hours. Students were provided with free lunch and a gift (not greater than \$5 in value)

from the school store for participating. Data was summarized by the primary researcher in coordination with the two qualitative researchers.

Management of Data Analysis

Data must be organized and analyzed for the previously mentioned data collection processes. This involves several processes:

Data Preparation

Analysis of data was conducted by the primary researcher. All returned questionnaires were examined for errors, failure of respondents to follow directions, explanatory comments and other items noted by the respondents. The response rate was noted and any invalid surveys omitted. Data from focus groups and interviews also were reviewed for any errors.

Data Accuracy

Data will be screened for accuracy upon receipt. Data will be checked to ensure that the responses are legible and readable, that all important questions are answered, and that responses are complete.

Developing a Database Structure

The database structure is the manner in which the data will be stored for the study so that it can be accessed in subsequent data analyses. A printed codebook was generated that described the data and indicated where and how it can be accessed. This codebook included: variable names, variable descriptions, variable formats (number, data, text), instrument/method of collection, date collected, respondent or group, variable location in database, and any notes. This comprehensive documentation will also enable other researchers who might subsequently wish to analyze the data.

Data Entry

The data was logged into the computerized database program, Microsoft Access, and further data analysis was completed with SPSS. Simple descriptive analyses were conducted to determine data status. Original data records were stored in a data archive, as this information will be important to the school district. This includes returned surveys and field notes.

A procedure was established to check the data for accuracy. Records were spot checked on a random basis. After the data was entered, a combination of spreadsheets and databases were used to summarize the data and check that all the data was within acceptable limits and boundaries. Additionally, all data was checked for missing values.

Data Analysis

The data obtained on the returned questionnaires were entered into a Microsoft Access database and exported to SPSS where an item analyses was conducted. Frequency distributions and cross tabulations were conducted in SPSS to analyze questionnaire responses. Frequency distributions were also used to determine the distribution of item/responses. Univariate and multivariate statistical analyses were utilized to determine relationships between variables.

Document Review

The information found through the document review process were housed in a database. Data was in text, graphical, or photographic format. This enabled the researcher to provide extensive descriptions of data over an extended period of time determining existing patterns. The software was used to confirm any recurring themes.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Categorical aggregation was employed for the data obtained via interviews and focus groups. The researcher attempted to determine patterns and arranged the data in tabular format.

Audiotapes from the interviews and videotapes from the focus groups were reviewed by the primary researcher to confirm manually recorded responses. Additionally, recurring themes from the video, such as body language, were noted.

Summary

Case study research will be employed in this study, including a variety of exploratory and descriptive methods for data collection: surveys, interviews, focus groups and document review. The primary researcher will explore standardized test scores, as well as student, teacher, parent and administrator perceptions of school climate and satisfaction levels. Focus groups and interviews will complement the data collected via surveys and will provide triangulation of data to create a more comprehensive image of the Miller Middle School and its stakeholders. Multiple sources of evidence typically improve the accuracy of conclusions (Yin, 1994). Data will be collected and organized in order to facilitate future study of this topic and particular school district. Data analyses will be performed using SPSS software. The following chapter will discuss results of the data collection and analyses while chapter five will focus on discussion, conclusions and future research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This research focuses on educational programming and student achievement in a middle school in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The school has been given a pseudonym for the purposes of this study. This rural school was selected primarily because students score higher than average on state standardized tests while the population consists of a percentage of low income students that is higher than the state average. Typically, a lower income student population would not demonstrate this type of performance.

This study attempts to answer the question, “What factors may contribute to and foster student achievement at the middle level?” The goal of this study was to explore through both quantitative and qualitative methods possible factors that may be contributing to student achievement in a public middle school environment with a high percentage of students below the poverty level.

A case study approach with exploratory and descriptive methods of data collection was employed. Data was collected from students, parents, administrators and faculty via surveys, interviews, focus groups and a document review. The single bounded system is the “Miller Middle School,” and the groups to be studied will be investigated in one academic year only. Surveys were delivered to 279 students and fifteen teachers at the end of a school day. Twenty surveys were sent home to parents; however, only five were returned. Due to the low response rate on the parental survey, those statistics must be interpreted with caution. Survey questions were derived from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Task Force on Effective School Climate study (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe & Berge, 1989). The surveys were scored, and data was entered into SPSS 17 for analysis.

The surveys all employed a six-point Likert scale ranging from one to six (with one representing very dissatisfied, five representing very satisfied, and six representing “I don’t know”) to measure the extent to which each group is satisfied with a variety of features and programming of the MMS.

Following the collection of survey data, a random selection of respondents was interviewed and participated in focus groups to further discuss the middle school. The qualitative data was triangulated with the quantitative data to obtain a deeper and richer explanation and understanding of the middle school and to attempt to answer the research questions that frame this study.

This study explored the following questions:

1. What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?
2. Are these relational factors the same as those identified in the literature as “exemplary middle school components?”
3. Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school’s programming, climate, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from four groups: students, faculty, parents and administrators. Results from surveys, focus groups, and interviews are presented by group.

Quantitative Data

Student Data

Surveys

Two hundred and seventy-nine students from the middle school, 89% of the school population, were surveyed during school time at the end of the school day. Thirty-four percent of

the students were in fifth grade, thirty-six percent in sixth grade and thirty percent in seventh grade. Forty-nine percent of the surveyed student population was male while forty-three percent was female. The school population is 49.5% female and 50.5% male.

Several dimensions were measured in the survey: relationship with teachers and fellow students, school work, student activities, student discipline, decision making, supplies buildings and upkeep, and communication. Survey items included a scale ranging from one to six, with one representing “very unhappy,” two “unhappy,” three “neither,” four “happy,” and five representing “very happy,” and six representing “I don’t know.”

Summary scores on the dimensions indicate that students are most satisfied with school buildings and upkeep, student activities and their teachers. The least satisfaction occurs with schoolwork, decision making opportunities and student discipline. Detailed frequencies for each question are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

<i>Student Survey Data</i>	<i>Top*</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>Bot</i>	<i>DK</i>
TEACHERS				
How well teachers understand my problems	48.5	17.8	14.5	18.9
How often teachers tell me when I do good work.	58.9	18.1	16.0	7.0
How much teachers help me when I am having trouble.	61.9	16.3	10.8	11.1
How much teachers make me want to learn new things	45.2	20.7	22.6	10.7
How much teachers help me with my schoolwork	57.8	15.6	16.3	10.4
How much teachers seem to enjoy teaching	55.2	11.1	12.6	20.7
How I feel in general about my teacher	71.1	13.0	9.3	6.7
FELLOW STUDENTS				
How easy it is to make new friends at my school	54.4	15.6	18.9	11.1
How often students help each other on school projects	45.6	18.9	23.3	12.2
How students treat each other	27.1	24.4	35.5	12.6
The kinds of students who go to my school	43.7	28.1	13.7	14.4
How I feel in general about other students who go to my school	47.0	27.0	12.6	13.0
SCHOOLWORK				
The choices I have in picking classes	26.7	13.3	35.5	24.1
How much my classes challenge me	45.2	27.0	17.0	10.7
The number of tests I have	30.8	24.8	33.7	10.7
How much my schoolwork is exciting	17.4	21.5	50.0	11.1
The amount of homework I have	18.1	25.9	38.5	7.0
How I feel in general about my classes and schoolwork	46.3	25.9	17.0	10.4
STUDENT ACTIVITIES				
The number of sports teams at my school	57.4	15.9	10.4	16.3
The number of school events in which I take part	59.2	11.5	17.4	11.5
How much students can plan and take part in school events	48.2	20.0	17.4	14.1
The number of social events at school	39.3	17.0	24.1	19.3
How I feel in general about student activities in my school	58.5	18.5	10.7	11.9
STUDENT DISCIPLINE				
How safe I feel at school	57.8	16.7	12.6	12.6
How well students behave in class	25.6	31.1	33.4	9.6
How well students behave in school	25.5	25.9	36.6	11.5
How well school rules are enforced	39.6	22.2	35.1	12.6
How well students do what is expected without being told.	24.1	25.9	35.6	13.3
How I feel in general about student discipline in my school	36.0	21.9	26.7	15.2
DECISION MAKING OPPORTUNITIES				
The importance of meetings that students are invited to attend	31.9	19.6	23.7	24.4
How much opportunity students have to comment on courses that are offered	33.0	17.8	25.2	23.7
How much influence the student council has in suggesting school events	40.4	15.9	25.2	18.1
How well school administrators listen to student ideas.	34.4	17.4	29.6	17.8
How well I feel in general about making decisions at my school	34.4	14.8	30.0	19.6
SCHOOL BUILDINGS SUPPLIES AND UPKEEP				
How easy it is for me to use the school library	62.6	12.6	13.0	11.1
How good the books and other materials are in the school library	57.8	17.0	17.1	7.0
How well the school grounds are kept clean	51.1	17.0	23.0	7.8
How well the school buildings are kept clean and in good repair	55.2	13.3	23.0	7.4

How well classroom supplies and materials help me learn	54.5	16.7	13.7	13.7
How happy I am in general about buildings supplies at my school	56.6	17.0	12.2	13.0

COMMUNICATION

How easy it is for me to find out about new and important things at school	49.2	15.6	20.4	13.0
How easy it is for me to talk to teachers outside the classroom	44.5	20.0	22.3	12.2
How much I am told about what is happening at the school	45.1	20.0	24.4	9.3
How much time I spend talking with others about classes and school activities	47.4	18.5	22.9	10.0
How easy it is to talk with the principal or other school administrators	35.9	16.7	26.7	19.3
How I feel in general about relating to people and things at my school	48.9	14.8	16.3	18.1

*Top Box = summation of “Happy and “Very Happy” frequency percentages Mid = “neither happy or unhappy” frequency percentage Bottom

Box = summation of “Unhappy” and “Very Unhappy” frequency percentages DK= “Don’t know”

Students responded to questions about their teachers. Seventy-one percent are happy or very happy in general with their teachers while only 9% are unhappy or very unhappy with their teachers. Thirteen percent are neutral. Forty-nine percent are happy or very happy with how well teachers understand their problems. Nineteen percent “don’t know” how they feel about how teachers understand their problems. Fifty-nine percent are happy or very happy with how often teachers tell them they do good work. Sixty-two percent are happy or very happy with the assistance they receive from teachers when they are having trouble. Forty-five percent are happy or very happy with how teachers make them want to learn new things. Twenty percent, however, are also neutral on this question. Fifty-eight percent are happy or very happy with how much teachers help them with schoolwork, and 55% say teachers seem to enjoy teaching. Twenty-one percent say, “don’t know,” to this question.

Students were also questioned about their fellow students. Fifty-four percent are happy or very happy with how easy it is to make new friends at school, and 46% are also happy or very happy with how often students are willing to help each other on school projects. The following question may be more telling and connected to the discipline issue: only 27% are happy or very happy with how students treat each other, while 24% are neutral and 36% are unhappy or very

unhappy. Forty-four percent are happy or very happy with the types of students who go to the school, while 28% are neutral. Forty-seven percent feel happy or very happy about the students in general who attend the school.

The next dimension relates to school work. While 26% are happy or very happy with the choices they have for classes, 36% are unhappy or very unhappy about class choices, and 24% “don’t know” how they feel about their class choices. Most students seem to agree that they are satisfied with the rigor of their classes; 45% are happy or very happy with how much their classes challenge them. While 30% are happy or very happy with the number of tests they have, 34% are unhappy or very unhappy, and 25% are neutral about this question. Fifty percent of students state they are unhappy or very unhappy with how exciting their classes are. Only 17% are happy or very happy about the number of tests. Again, only 18% are happy or very happy with the amount of homework they have, while 26% are neutral and 39% are unhappy or very unhappy about homework.

Students responded to questions regarding student activities. Fifty-seven percent are happy or very happy with the number of sporting activities offered at the school, while 59% are happy or very happy with the number of activities they participate in. Forty-eight percent are happy or very happy about their participation in planning school events, while only 39% are happy or very happy with the number of social events at school. Twenty percent don’t know how they feel about the number of social events. Fifty-nine percent of students are happy or very happy in general with the way they feel about student activities in school. Twenty-four percent of students are unhappy with the number of social events at school.

Student discipline is another issue addressed in the survey. While 58% of students indicate that they are happy or very happy with how safe they feel at school, only 26% are happy

or very happy with how students behave in class and in school. In fact, 36% are unhappy or very unhappy with how students behave in school.

Students were also asked questions about decision making opportunities. Only 32% are happy or very happy with the importance of the meetings they are invited to attend; twenty-four percent “don’t know.” Only 33% are happy or very happy with the opportunities they have to comment on the courses that are offered at school twenty-four percent “don’t know.” The highest “happiness” score on this dimension is how students feel about the influence student council has on events to be offered at school. Forty percent of students are happy or very happy with student council’s influence. Thirty-four percent are happy or very happy about how administrators listen to student ideas, and thirty-four percent are happy or very happy in general with their opportunity to make decisions in their school. The highest “unhappiness” score on this question is the one regarding students’ general feelings about their opportunities to participate in decision making in school. Thirty percent are unhappy or very unhappy with their opportunities to make decisions in school.

School supplies, upkeep, and maintenance of the physical buildings were also explored. Exploring top box frequencies indicates that 63% of students are either happy or very happy with how easy it is to use the library. Fifty-eight percent of the students are pleased with the condition of the library, while 51% are pleased with the school grounds. Fifty-five percent of the students are happy or very happy with the way school buildings and grounds are maintained, and how classroom supplies help them learn, while 57% of students are happy or very happy in general with the way school grounds, buildings and supplies are maintained at the school.

In terms of communication, 49% of students indicate they are happy or very happy about how easy it is to find out about events or other news at school, while 45% are happy or very

with how easy it is to talk to teachers. Forty-five percent of students indicate that they are happy or very happy with what they are told about what is happening at school and 47% indicate they are happy or very happy to spend time talking to their friends about what is happening at school. The lowest top box score is indicated in the question regarding how easy it is for students to talk to the principal or administrators about events at school. Only 36% of students are happy or very happy about communication with this group of individuals. Twenty-seven percent indicate they are unhappy or very unhappy with this, and 19% don't know. In general, however, 49% of students feel happy or very happy about communication in their school. Eighteen percent don't know.

A correlation analysis on the general satisfaction statements for each dimension reveals significant correlations among several general satisfaction items ($p < .05$). The strongest relationships exist between student activities and communication (.456), and student discipline and decision making (.436). All significant correlations are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Pearson Correlations

Dimensions	Pearson Coefficient	Significance*
Classes and schoolwork and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.145	.000
Classes and schoolwork and Student Activities	.183	.006
Teachers and Student Discipline	.206	.002
Student Activities and Student Discipline	.210	.002
Teachers and Student Activities	.233	.000
Teachers and Decision Making	.234	.001
Fellow Students and Decision Making	.251	.000
Classes and schoolwork and Student Discipline	.264	.000
Fellow Students and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.285	.000
Teachers and Fellow Students	.296	.000
Fellow Students and Student Discipline	.322	.000
Fellow Students and Communication	.330	.000
Building and Maintenance, Supplies and Communication	.331	.000
Student Discipline and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.341	.000
Teachers and Communication	.343	.000
Teachers and Classes and schoolwork	.345	.000
Teachers and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.346	.001
Classes and schoolwork and Communication	.348	.000
Student Discipline and Communication	.355	.000
Classes and schoolwork and Decision Making	.372	.000
Decision Making and Communication	.396	.000
Fellow Students and Student Activities	.402	.000
Student Activities and Decision Making	.409	.000
Building and Maintenance, Supplies and Decision Making	.411	.000
Decision Making and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.411	.000
Student Activities and Building Maintenance, Supplies	.416	.000
Student Discipline and Decision Making	.436	.000
Student Activities and Communication	.456	.000

* significant at $p < .05$

Regression analyses were conducted to determine any gender, grade, or race effects on general student satisfaction within each dimension. Grade level influences how students feel about teachers, their fellow students, communication, their student activities and discipline, their role in decision making, and facilities ($p < .05$). Students' levels of satisfaction decrease with their

grade levels. Grade does not seem to play a role in students' satisfaction with their schoolwork.

Gender is significant ($p < .05$) in predicting student satisfaction with schoolwork and communication, while race is a predictor of satisfaction with fellow students and building facilities and maintenance ($p < .05$). Table 9 displays regression coefficients and p values.

Table 9

Regression Analyses of Satisfaction Levels and Grade, Gender and Race

Independent Variables Standardized Beta Values			
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	Grade	Gender	Race
Satisfaction with Teachers	-.247*	-.051	.058
Satisfaction with Fellow Students	-.272*	.056	.145
Satisfaction with schoolwork	-.127	-.164*	.020
Satisfaction with student activities	-.361*	-.051	.121
Satisfaction with student discipline	-.263*	-.080	-.033
Satisfaction with decision making	-.376*	-.085	.029
Satisfaction with buildings and supplies	-.375*	.017	.144*
Satisfaction with communication	-.179*	-.248*	.082

* significant at $p < .05$

Faculty Data

Fifteen faculty members, 56% of the faculty population, completed and returned surveys. Twenty percent of the respondents were male and seventy percent were female. This survey measured a number of different dimensions: administration, compensation, opportunities for advancement, student discipline, curriculum and job tasks, co-workers, parents and community, facilities, and communication. Detailed frequencies for each question are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

<i>Faculty Survey Data</i>	<i>Top</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>Bot</i>	<i>DK</i>
ADMINISTRATION				
The degree to which the school administration deals tactfully with problems	45.5	18.2	36.4	
The amount of input you have into administrative decisions that affect class	36.4	27.3	36.4	
The quality of feedback you receive from administrators about performance	81.8	9.1	9.1	
The amount of support provided to you by your administration	63.7	18.2	18.2	
The level of interest shown by administrators about concerns and problems	54.6	27.3	9.1	9.1
The amount of recognition provided by administrators for your work	36.4	45.5	18.2	
The degree to which administrators supervise or control your work assignment	63.6	27.3	9.1	
Your overall level of satisfaction with your school administrators	54.6	27.3	9.1	9.1
COMPENSATION				
The degree of financial security provided by your present teaching job	18.2	18.2	63.7	
The number of fringe benefits available to teachers at your school	27.3	18.2	54.6	
The degree to which your present salary is meeting your financial needs	9.1	9.1	81.9	
The quality of health benefits provided to you	18.2	27.3	54.6	
Your overall satisfaction with your pay, fringe benefits, and other compensation	18.2	9.1	72.8	
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT				
The number of opportunities for advancement within your school or district	18.2	36.4	27.3	18.2
The extent to which increasing skill levels increase advancement opportunities	36.4	45.5	9.1	9.1
The number of promotions which occur in your district each year	18.2	36.4	27.3	18.2
Overall satisfaction with opportunities for career advancement in district	18.2	63.6	9.1	9.1
STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE				
Satisfaction with the behavior of students in your school	36.4	9.1	54.6	
The extent to which students are motivated to learn	45.5	9.1	45.5	
The degree of responsibility students show toward their school assignments	27.3	9.1	63.6	
The extent to which students act in a self-disciplined manner.	36.4		63.6	
Your overall level of satisfaction with student responsibility and discipline	36.4		63.6	
CURRICULUM AND JOB TASKS				
The range of courses offered in your areas or teaching specialties	45.5	36.4	18.2	
The amount of administrative paperwork/grading student papers required	36.4	27.3	36.4	
The feeling of accomplishment you get from your job	63.6	18.2	9.1	9.1
The extent to which you find your job challenging	72.7	27.3		
The extent to which curriculum, course content, and course outlines are current	72.7	18.2	9.1	
Your satisfaction with the courses you are assigned to teach	81.8	9.1	9.1	
Your overall level of satisfaction with the curriculum and your job tasks	56.6	36.4	9.1	
CO-WORKERS				
The range of interests of the teachers and staff members on daily basis	54.6	27.3	9.1	9.1
The competence of teachers in your school and district	63.6	27.3		9.1
The extent to which teachers and staff members support school improvement	63.6	18.2	9.1	9.1
The degree to which teachers and staff show concern student learning/welfare	72.7	9.1	9.1	9.1
Quality of your relationship with co-workers	72.7	18.2		9.1
Extent to which your co-workers stimulate and support you in your work	63.6	9.1	18.2	9.1
Your overall level of satisfaction with your co-workers	72.7	9.1	9.1	9.1
PARENTS AND COMMUNITY				

Degree of interest shown by parents in the education of their children	18.2	27.3	54.5
The financial support the community provides for the school	18.2	36.4	45.5
The degree and quality of parent and community input into school /curriculum	27.3	45.5	27.3
Extent to which parents feel responsible for children's school performance		27.3	72.7
Extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school programs	9.1	36.4	54.5
Overall level of satisfaction with parents and community where you work	9.1	45.5	45.5

SCHOOL BUILDINGS SUPPLIES AND MAINTENANCE

Availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use	72.7	18.2	9.1
Quality of school's library and media materials	54.6	36.4	9.1
Number and quality of available school facilities	54.6	36.4	
Quality of maintenance of school grounds	72.7	18.2	
Quality of maintenance of school buildings	45.5	27.3	18.2
Speed with which repairs are made	18.2		72.7
Overall level of satisfaction with facilities, supplies and maintenance	27.3	27.3	27.3

COMMUNICATION

The speed with which you are informed about potential student problems	27.3	18.2	45.5
The quality of information you receive about policies/activities in the school	36.4	18.2	36.4
The speed with which administrators communicate important info to you	36.4	18.2	36.4
The extent to which given advance notice of topics for school board meetings	18.2	18.2	54.6
The ease with which you communicate with school administrators	54.6	9.1	27.3
Clarity of school forms and procedures	27.3	27.3	36.4
Overall satisfaction w/ extent/quality communication in school and district	45.5	18.2	27.3

*Top Box = summation of "Satisfied and "Very Satisfied" frequency percentages Mid = "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" frequency percentage

Bottom Box = summation of "dissatisfied" and "Very dissatisfied" frequency percentages DK= "Don't know"

Faculty's perceptions regarding the administration were explored: 82% are satisfied or very satisfied with feedback, while 64% are satisfied or very satisfied with the support they receive from their administrators, and they are also satisfied or very satisfied with the fact that administrators control or supervise their work assignments. Thirty-six percent of faculty is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the degree to which the administrators deal tactfully with problems and the amount of input the faculty have in terms of decisions that affect their classes (36.4% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied on both questions).

The faculty was questioned about compensation. Frequencies on this dimension reveal that only 18% of faculty is generally satisfied with compensation. Seventy-three percent of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their pay. Fifty-five percent are dissatisfied or

very dissatisfied with the benefits available to teachers, and only nine percent state that their salaries are meeting their financial needs. Eighty-two percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how their salaries meet their financial needs. Only 18% are satisfied with the quality of health benefits offered.

In terms of career development and opportunities for advancement, only 18% of teachers are satisfied with current opportunities, and 27% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Thirty-six percent are unsure. While 36% seem satisfied with the extent to which increasing skill levels translates to advancement, 46% are unsure of this issue. Only 18% are satisfied with the number of promotions that occur in the district. It was on the advancement dimension where teachers most often responded, “don’t know,” to questions posed.

Teachers were also asked about student discipline. Fifty-five percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with students’ behavior in the school. Faculty is divided on the question regarding students’ motivation to learn: 46% are satisfied or very satisfied with students’ motivation to learn, whereas 46% are also dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Sixty-four percent of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the degree of responsibility students show toward their schoolwork. Likewise, 64% of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with student self-discipline and in general with student responsibility and discipline.

Regarding curriculum issues, 45% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the range of courses offered in his/her area. Thirty-six percent of teachers are neutral about this issue. Teachers are both positive and negative about paperwork and grading. Thirty-six percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of paperwork and grading, but another thirty-six percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this work. Twenty-seven percent of teachers are unsure about the paperwork. Sixty-four percent of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the

sense of accomplishment they receive from their jobs. Only 18% of teachers are neutral about this issue. Seventy-two percent of teachers find their jobs challenging and believe that their curriculum, course content, and outlines are current. Eighty-two percent of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they are assigned to teach. Finally, 56.5% of teachers are satisfied in general with their curriculum and job tasks.

Teachers were asked about their co-workers: 73% indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied overall with their co-workers. Fifty-seven percent of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the range of interests of the staff and teachers at MMS, while 64% are satisfied or very satisfied with the competence of teachers in the school. Fifty-seven percent of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the extent to which teachers and staff support school improvement. Seventy-three percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the concern the staff shows for student learning. Another 73% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with their relationships with their co-workers. Finally, sixty-four percent say that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the extent to which their co-workers stimulate and support them in their work. On this question, however, 18% of teachers (the highest dissatisfaction response for this dimension) say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way their co-workers support their work. Finally, 9% of teachers also responded “don’t know” to each question asked regarding their co-workers.

Teachers also provided feedback on parental support. Teachers report a very low level of satisfaction with the parents and community where they work: only 9% state that they are satisfied or very satisfied with parents and the community and their support of the school’s programming. Fifty-five percent of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the degree of interest shown by parents in the education of their children; twenty-seven percent are neutral

on this issue, and 18% are satisfied or very satisfied. Forty-six percent of parents are neutral regarding the degree and quality of parent and community input with the school and its curriculum. Twenty-seven percent are satisfied, while twenty-seven percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with parental and community input. None of the teachers report a satisfaction level with the extent to which parents feel responsible for the children's school performance. Seventy-three percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with parental responsibility for children's school performance, and twenty-seven percent are neutral.

Teachers' overall level of satisfaction with facilities, supplies, and maintenance was as follows: 27% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied, another 27% are neutral and 27% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with facilities, supplies, and maintenance. Teachers seem to be more positive about a few issues such as the quality of maintenance of school grounds. Seventy-three percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality, whereas 18% are unsure and 0% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Fifty-seven percent are satisfied or very satisfied with library and media materials, as well as the number and quality of available school facilities. Only 46%, however, are satisfied or very satisfied about the quality of maintenance of school buildings, so there appears to be a perception difference between building maintenance and grounds maintenance.

Finally, 46% of faculty is satisfied or very satisfied in general with the quality and extent of communication within the school and district. In fact, 55% of faculty is satisfied or very satisfied regarding the ease with which they communicate with school administrators. Thirty-six percent of teachers are also satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of information they receive about school policies and activities, as well as the speed with which administrators communicate information. Teachers are most dissatisfied with the notice of board meetings (55% are

dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) followed by the speed with which teachers are informed about potential student problems. Forty-five percent dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Teachers also seem to believe that school forms and procedures could be clearer. Twenty-seven percent are satisfied or very satisfied, 27% are neutral and 36% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Analysis of this data reveals that faculty members are very pleased with the degree to which administrators manage their workload and the feedback faculty members receive from administration. Over seventy percent of teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they teach as well as with their sense of accomplishment regarding their job.

More than half of the teachers indicate that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the student behavior, and the level of responsibility and self-discipline of the students in the school. Teachers seem most negative about parental involvement and commitment. Over 90% of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with parental support of the school and its programs and general satisfaction with parents and community. These results will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

Parent Data

Surveys were sent home to twenty parents. Five completed parental surveys were returned and analyzed. All parents were female. This data is not analyzed in detail, as the sample is small.

Parents who returned surveys seemed most satisfied with school buildings and supplies and the curriculum. The survey respondents are satisfied with their involvement in the school. In terms of the curriculum, parents are happy with the range of topics taught and their currency. Additionally, most parents seem happy with support services and guidance. Parents are not as

positive about the range of student activities available. Their overall satisfaction with the teachers was fair to above average.

Summary

In summary, quantitative data indicates that students are very satisfied with their teachers, their activities, and their physical environment. Teachers are pleased with the curriculum and their positions, and their relationships with the administration. Only a few parents participated in the study. These parents were most satisfied with the range of topics taught in school and their currency.

Students were most dissatisfied with the curriculum, their choice of classes, and student discipline. This level of dissatisfaction seems to increase as students age. Although students are happy with their teachers in general, faculty are dissatisfied with students' behavior and their level of discipline. Finally, participating parents did not indicate high degrees of satisfaction with teachers or with the range of activities available. These results will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

Qualitative Data

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with students, faculty, parents and administrators in an attempt to triangulate data. The interview and focus groups questions complemented the survey data and provided a richer portrait of the issues in each of the research questions. All qualitative data was recorded manually and entered in to tables in Microsoft Access.

Student Data

Interviews

Student interviews were conducted with three students from the middle school, a male from fifth grade, and two females, one from sixth and seventh grade, in a classroom immediately following their lunch periods. This data complemented the data from the surveys. Students were in general satisfied with their school, the curriculum and teachers, and their schedules. Students were asked the following questions:

Tell me about your school. What do you like about your school? Is there anything that you would like to change about your school?

All of the interviewed students were positive about the school. The fifth grade male student was a little more withdrawn than the others, so he did not say as much. One complaint that was raised was the lack of time in between classes. All three students would like to have more time to switch from one class to another: “We don’t have enough time to get from one class to another.” The second student said, “I need to get to my locker in between classes; I have too many books to carry, but I might be late if I run back to my locker.” Another student stated, “A lot of our classes are on the other side of the building and it takes too long to get back there (to the lockers).” Although the students seemed relatively positive about their schedules, they did mention this lack of time.

The students made several other comments, such as “I really like my teachers here; they’re always ready to help if you have problems.” “They really make us feel good about school and want us to do well.”

What do you think about the work you do in school? Is it challenging? Do you have enough time to complete your work? What makes you interested in doing the work at school?

Two of the students said, “It’s okay,” One female student said, “I like it.” When asked if they thought the work was challenging, the male fifth grade student said that the “work was not too bad,” and the female sixth grade student said that “I don’t feel like it’s difficult.” The seventh grade female said, “The teachers make the work fun; they make me feel glad about the work that I have to do.” All three students said that they had no issues with time and their work. “Sometimes we can do our homework in study hall; then I can ask questions while I am there.” “I do my homework in class sometimes,” and “We don’t really have that much homework.”

What types of activities do you have at your school? What is good about the activities at your school? What activities or programs do you like or dislike in school? Why? Do you think these programs make you feel better about your school work or help you to do better in school? Why?

The female seventh grade student talked a good deal about her experience with the drama club. She loved the fact that a teacher encouraged her to join and then assisted her with different projects related to this activity. “My teacher was the one who told me about it and she said she thought I would be really good at it; I’m glad my teacher told me that. It made me feel like my teacher knows I can do it and that my teacher really knows all about me.” Another student discussed his involvement in a number of different sports; he said he was busy year round, and he loved it. “I do football and basketball; it’s great.” Both students said these programs “made me really enjoy school more.” The sixth grade female talked about band and how she enjoyed music and playing with her friends in the band. She agreed that the activities made her feel more positive about school. “If I don’t have a class with my friend, I might have a chance to see her after school at band or at stage crew; I also get to see my teachers there.” When asked if the students thought that the activities helped them to do better, they were all positive. “I love the

activities; I get to see my friends and do what I really like to do.” Another female student said, “They make me feel good about being here at school.” A male student agreed, “I think they help me do better at school because now I feel good about being here.”

Tell me about your schedule of classes. Does your school use block scheduling? What do you like or dislike about your schedule?

All three students described the differences in scheduling. The sixth and seventh graders have nine periods whereas the fifth graders follow block scheduling. Sixth graders: “We have nine periods in the day. They’re each 45 minutes long.” The seventh graders said “we have 45 minute classes.” Two of the students again complained about lack of time between classes. “We need more time to stop at our lockers and get to our classes.” The male student did not seem phased by the schedule and shrugged his shoulders saying that “it’s okay.”

How often do you see your guidance counselor? Do you like working with your guidance counselor? Why or why not?

All three students were very positive about the guidance counselor. All three also indicated that they would like more time with their guidance counselor. One student said, “I love guidance; it’s fun!” Another said, “We don’t have enough time to talk to the guidance counselor when she comes to our class. It would be nice if we could see her more.” At this time, the sixth and seventh graders see the guidance counselor once a month in class, while the fifth graders only see her a few times a year. The students did indicate, however, that they realized that they could go to see the guidance counselor whenever they felt they needed to. One female student remarked, “It’s easy to get in to see the guidance counselor, and I feel like I can talk to her about almost anything.”

What courses do you take at school? Which courses do you like? Why? Which courses do you dislike? Why?

The sixth grade female student likes Technology and Science classes most, while she dislikes keyboarding. “Keyboarding is boring! Technology is fun, and there is always something new – I like playing around with and learning about the computers and the Internet.” The seventh grade female likes Math and Science stating that they are interesting. She dislikes health most. “Math and science keep me thinking; there’s always something new to discover. I think I don’t like health because the teacher is not very good; the subject is okay, but the class is boring.” The fifth grade male student likes Science and dislikes English. “Science is more hands-on; I also sit by a lot of good friends in that class.” “My English class is hard...I don’t write very good and I don’t like reading too much.” Interestingly, a few students seem to agree that the math, science and technology courses are preferred.

How did you feel moving from elementary school to the middle school?

The students did not mention anything remarkable about the change from elementary to middle school. The two female students did recall the visit to the middle school prior to the beginning of the school year, but they did not have anything else to say about the actual “transition.” “Oh yeah, they have us all get together at the end of the year, and we have a chance to go through the building and meet our new teachers; it was okay. I don’t really remember anything else.” The male student said he felt “okay” about the change from one school to another “It wasn’t bad.....I knew people from the other school because I had an older brother there.” When asked if he wanted to add anything, he said “No.”

Describe the exploratories in which you have participated. What did you like or dislike about them?

The first female student said “We have all kinds of exploratories....drama, music, chorus. I did drama; it was really cool because I had acted in other groups but never with my friends at school.” “I don’t think there is anything I dislike; just wish there were more exploratories.”

The second female said “I liked my exploratory; I did chorus.” “Only sixth and seventh grade can do exploratories, so it’s not really fair to the fifth graders; exploratories are really fun!”

The fifth grader said “Fifth grade doesn’t have exploratories, but I always hear my friends and their friends saying how much fun they are and that it’s neat to see the teachers wrestling or doing those kinds of things.” Overall students seem to be very positive about exploratories and would like to see more.

Focus Groups

Eight students from fifth through seventh grade participated in a focus group on the school grounds immediately following their lunch period. Two males and six females participated in the group.

Students were asked the following questions:

Tell me about your school. What do you like about your school? Is there anything that you would like to change about your school?

Students indicated that in general they were happy with their school and that they enjoyed school. Some of the notable comments different students made were “teachers are trusting,” “we like all of the different activities they have here,” and “we like the fact that we can be creative in our project work.”

The majority of students said that they would like more time in between classes and have more text books available. Apparently some students have had to borrow books due to shortages.

“There’s not enough time in between our classes for switching. I don’t even have enough time to get my books.” Others complained about the book situation: “We need more books here.”

Another student added, “Sometimes teachers don’t have the books that we need, and we have to share books or we have to wait for a couple of weeks to get new books.” Three of the students complained about the responsiveness of cafeteria staff and the food. “I don’t like the cafeteria; they’re mean.” “Yeah and the food’s not good!” “The food looks terrible and it tastes disgusting. The cafeteria ladies yell at us a lot.”

What do you think about the work you do in school? Is it challenging? Do you have enough time to complete your work? What makes you interested in doing the work at school?

In terms of the work they do in school, students indicated that it is challenging but not too difficult. Most were nodding their heads saying “Yeah, it’s okay; it’s not bad.” “I don’t have any trouble getting my work done.”

“The teachers really make me feel like doing my best.” Another student said “The teachers give their 100% in helping us with school work.” “They want to see us do good.” “They even have a party for us after PSSAs if we have good scores!” Five others chimed in, “Yeah, that’s great.” “It’s so much fun!” This seems to be a big motivator for students in terms of performance. The PSSA party was mentioned relative to a few of the other focus group questions as well.

One of the students also mentioned “Extended Learning Time,” which is a before and after school program where teachers can provide additional one-on-one tutoring to students. “A lot of kids get help from the teachers in Extended Learning; they can get help to do better in school.”

What types of activities do you have at your school? What is good about the activities at your school? What activities or programs do you like or dislike in school? Why? Do you think these programs make you feel better about your school work or help you to do better in school? Why?

Students became very excited to discuss their activities. Four of the students mentioned activities, such as sports, drama, chorus, band, cross country and their exploratories. “We have so many different activities; it’s great!” “The exploratories are really fun.” “I’m in band and we get to travel sometimes; that’s really neat.”

When asked what is good about the activities, the students said “Everything!” “Yeah, I like it because the teachers help out and we get to see them outside of class” “I wish I could do drama, but it’s not for fifth graders.” “I can be with my friends in exploratories even though we don’t have class together.”

All eight students were very positive about the activities and did not think anything should be changed about the activities. They said the activities, in general, made them feel better about school. “Activities make me feel like coming to school,” “I love to be with my friends during activities,” “It makes me feel good about the other things I do in school.” “We get to know our teachers better too.” In general, students enjoy their activities at MMS. Activities give them an opportunity to become closer to their teachers and friends, and the positive feelings generated from activities translate to other schoolwork as well.

Tell me about tell me about your schedule of classes. Does your school use block scheduling? Do you like the way your schedule is set up? Why or why not?

The students described their classes, “We have 45 minute classes in 6th and 7th grade and 75 minute classes for the fifth graders. There are nine periods for the 45 minute classes. The

schedules are okay.” Five others nodded in agreement. Two others really didn’t say anything. “The only thing that’s hard is trying to change in between. We don’t have a lot of time, and it makes it hard to get books and get to where we need to be.” They all seemed to agree that they like the schedules, but no student made any specific comments about whether or not they would make changes to the schedule.

How often do you see your guidance counselor? Do you like working with your guidance counselor? Why or why not?

“We have guidance in class, every couple of weeks.” “Yeah, but we can go to see her anytime if we ask.” “I really like guidance.” “It would be nice to have more guidance.” Almost all of the students nodded their heads in agreement to the question about enjoying their time with the guidance counselor. Students said things like “I can talk about almost anything with her,” “I can tell her about my problems at school;” and “I like talking about jobs and where I might be someday.”

What courses do you take at school? Which courses do you like? Why? Which courses do you dislike? Why?

Students mentioned a few courses that they dislike. “I hate keyboarding.” Two or three others nodded and said “Yeah, I hate that too.” “I don’t like health; it’s so boring.” “I don’t really like the teacher.” “But it’s not really important so why do we even have to take it?” Three others nodded in agreement.” “I don’t like English; I’m not good at it and, uh, I really hate writing,” (some laughter here). One other student said “Yeah, I don’t like English either; too much to read.”

Five of the female students said that their favorite classes are physical education, math, technology education, and science. “I like science; I like the experiments.” “I see my friends in

gym,” “We like working with the Internet and on the computers.” “Yeah and we get to do these cool presentations,” students mentioned specifically. Students said they are able to use technology that enables them to apply “cool audio and video special effects.”

How did you feel moving from elementary school to the middle school? Describe any programs that were helpful in making you feel comfortable.

Students said “We know a lot of the kids so moving to a new building is not scary.” “The elementary school is not as much fun anymore; there is a new principal there.” One of the students mentioned the fact that they have a chance to see the middle school before they actually go there in the fall. “We have a chance in the spring to go and see the middle school and talk to teachers.” “But most of us have been in there anyway for sports and things like that so we know the place.” “And a lot of us have friends there too.” None of the students mentioned any type of formal programming for transitioning from one school to another.

Please describe any exploratories you may have participated in. What did you like or dislike about them? (if applicable)

All of the students smiled and laughed when asked about exploratories. “Exploratories are cool!” “Our teachers get involved!” Students quickly listed yearbook, softball, “Legomania,” and “scrapbooking” as some of the options available. “Legomania is really cool – we’ve built whole cities – it’s a lot of fun!” “Well, the sports exploratories are just like our sport teams at school....without all of the uniforms and practices.” Another student talked about another activity, “The scrapbooking is really neat because we get to turn our hobbies in to something we can do at school with our teachers and friends. I learned a lot there!” When asked what they didn’t like, they all looked at each other smirking...”nothing....we love exploratories!” They did mention that only sixth and seventh graders participate in exploratories.

When asked if there was anything they didn't like about exploratories, one student said "I haven't done them yet." Others said "No...we wish there were more!"

How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

Students again referred to their activities and the fact that they enjoy them so much. What was remarkable about this question was that each student, regardless of gender or personality, had some program that she or he enjoyed. One of the females mentioned the drama club, "I like being involved in activities; I have drama all year round and then some sports in fall and spring." Another female mentioned the chorus, "I really like singing, and I wouldn't have known that if we didn't have chorus here at school." "It makes school more interesting to be involved!" "I am involved in student government too; that's neat," said another student. One of the male students mentioned band as his favorite activity. "I've been playing an instrument....they offered that to us when we started school here; it's nice to know that there are other kids my age who like doing the same things."

What makes you feel safe and happy in your school?

Some of the statements students made were, "I don't worry about coming to school," "I like to see my friends, and I feel happy about coming to school," "I don't feel scared about school." Another student said, "My exploratories make me feel really good about school and my other classes." "I know there are some kids here who like coming to school because they don't like home so much." Another student said, "My teachers make me feel good about the work I do here."

Faculty

Interviews

Two faculty members agreed to and were available for interviews. One male teacher who had been with the district for six years and one female faculty member who had been with the district for eleven years participated. The data provided in the interviews corroborated the focus group and generally the survey results. There was a good deal of overlap in faculty responses to questions.

Can you comment on your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the MMS?

When asked about their degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the MMS, faculty members were positive. Both teachers were very positive and specifically mentioned the homogeneous grouping, exploratories, and advisory programs. “Grouping helps us to deliver better academic programs, and it helps us to develop our team approach.”

“Advisories are such a great way for us to connect with the kids. It gives us an opportunity to get to know them better and provides them with some one-on-one adult time. Exploratories are programs that focus on a number of different activities or subject areas, such as drama, chorale, poetry, and sporting activities such as wrestling. “We love the exploratories; not only do the kids enjoy them, but we believe they provide the students with an enjoyable academic experience.” “They definitely contribute to their progress.”

How would you describe your relationship with students?

Faculty described their relationship with students as “excellent,” stating that students appreciated teachers and enjoyed learning. “I’ve been here for eleven years and I am really

impressed with the kids.” “Students’ parents seem to want a better future for their kids than they had.” “The students are respectful here (for the most part),” which evoked a few chuckles from teachers.

Please describe your students’ overall academic progress in school.

The teachers agreed that students in general performed well academically and seemed committed to doing well. “Students work hard here. For the most part they seem willing to do the work to maintain higher levels of achievement.” One teacher commented that “parents seem to support the students, encouraging them to do well so that they can prepare better for their future and have a brighter future ahead of them.”

What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school? How do you believe the instructional programming at the school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners? How do you develop instructional programming?

“The PSSA preparatory classes have made a significant difference in the progress of students. We teach those each semester, and always have good attendance; well, we’re required to teach them, and students are required to attend” “We always encourage students with rewards for good performance.” “Classes are structured by ability level, creating smaller class sizes for students who are not proficient.” “This smaller class size creates flexibility in programming to meet the needs of all learners.” “We’re all involved in program development, so the curriculum is aligned with PSSA standards; we meet by department monthly to discuss instructional content and delivery.” “Each month, we’ll consider revision of the curriculum based upon state standards...what’s nice is that the administration is also involved to manage accountability.” The teacher explained, “Administrators are involved in our planning process, so while we’re

developing programs to teach the material, the administrators are assisting us with (and reminding us about) measuring our outcomes.”

What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your students’ progress in school?

“Remediation and advisories are probably two of the most important programs in terms of students’ progress. You can see it almost immediately; we work very closely with the students.” Another teacher commented, “In these programs students work one on one with us and it gives us a chance to really get to know them. They seem to feel more important, and they value this closer relationship with teachers – most of the time!” The teachers agreed that these programs assist them in getting “in to the students’ worlds.”

What type of effect do you believe exploratories may have on student achievement in your school?

One teacher said, “Again the exploratories give us a chance to work on one on one with the kids, and it also gives us a chance to identify problems or head problems off at the pass.” Another female teacher commented, “We see a direct connection between students’ enjoying these programs and better grades (or at least an attempt to try and enjoy school more).” Teachers seemed very positive about the exploratories. “Like the advisories and the remediation programs, this is an opportunity to get to know the kids and “find out what makes them tick.”

How would you describe your relationship with parents and the community?

A male teacher commented, “I would like to see more parental involvement; it’s almost as if after the elementary years we lose some interest from parents.” Another teacher commented, “Parental involvement really drops off after K-4....it seems that the parents are supporting their kids academically, but it’s difficult to tell how else they may be involved.” A

female teacher discussed how they are involved with the community. “We try to keep our kids in touch with the community through volunteer activities. We’ll take them to the Senior Center or to the local food bank to help out.” Another teacher said. “The community seems supportive of our kids and our schools.”

How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

“This is a way for us to connect with all of the students, regardless of background or academic ability.” “It gives you another perspective on the school and the students; it also gives us a chance to know their families better as well.” Teachers seemed positive about connecting with students outside of class time.

How do you feel support services provide a safe and effective educational environment?

“For a school this size and the background of the students, I think we have ample support services.” “I am pleased for the most part with support services. As a smaller school, we sometimes have our typical ‘small school’ issues, but our kids are safe and learning.” One final comment a teacher made was that the town’s motto is “the little town that could.” He believed that this translated to the school as well and that families don’t settle for mediocrity.

Focus Groups

Six faculty members participated in a focus group on the school campus conducted immediately after school and generated the following responses.

Explain your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the MMS.

Faculty, in general, are pleased with the school environment and with their relationship with students. One concern teachers agreed upon was that due to their teaming, they only see the teachers on their teams. “We don’t have a chance to sit down and talk and just find out what’s

happening or going on with students and our classrooms. I only see the teachers on my team.”

“A lot of times we’re asked to cover for other teachers – if someone is absent, sick or has a meeting – so I don’t even know if I am going to have a team time where I have some down time to talk to other teachers and plan.”

How would you describe your relationship with students?

“The kids here are great; we have the chance to stay pretty close to them.” “They’re good kids and they listen.” “I think that through some of our programs like exploratories and advisories we have a really good opportunity to bond with them and ‘get in to their world.’”

Please describe your students’ overall academic progress in school.

One of the teachers began by saying that, “Our students do well academically.” Another teacher jumped in and said, “Students really try hard. I think their parents have instilled this desire to do well because they want them to succeed and to have a better life than they did or to at least go a little further in life than they have.” Another female teacher added, “We also work hard on keeping those PSSA scores up.”

What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

Four of the teachers were in agreement that student achievement on the standardized tests has been positive. Teachers have developed courses specifically preparing students for the PSSAs in English and Mathematics. They believe these courses have had a direct influence on student PSSA scores. They also noted that “the end of the year PSSA party” for the students who perform well is a big success and really helps kids focus on doing well.

What about the instructional programming at your school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

“We’ve developed a co-teaching program which has been instrumental in meeting the needs of a variety of learners; different teachers are working in a variety of ways with students.” Teachers develop curriculum on a cyclical basis. The teachers did not have any comments about the development of instructional programming, but they did say “we do plan with our team members and a curriculum coordinator.” “We like the process.” Almost all nodded in agreement.

What do you like or dislike about the scheduling?

Teachers had a number of comments about the scheduling process, which varies by grade level, according to the teachers. Fifth graders are on a block modified schedule while sixth and seventh graders switch every 45 minutes. Faculty believed that “the schedule should be similar for all grades, with perhaps more block scheduling in place.” Teachers stated that “preparatory periods are not guaranteed, which also makes curriculum work and scheduling more difficult.” “There is no team time and teachers are expected to cover for other teachers in their absence on very short notice,” hence preparatory periods are not always guaranteed.

What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your students’ progress in school?

Faculty members stated that “our remediation programs work really well to help students do well in school.” “Advisories and exploratories have been really successful too; students love them, and they make them happy about being here.” Another teacher added, “It makes it easier to work with them.”

What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

Teachers were asked about the transitions between schools and what facilitates this process in the district. “There’s a transitional program for students moving from fourth grade to

fifth grade, but there is no formal transition for students to the high school.” Four of the middle school teachers expressed an interest in a transitional program that would include more time with fourth grade teachers in order to learn more about the incoming students. “We don’t have a chance to spend anytime with the fourth grade teachers; it would be nice to know more about these incoming students.” “Yes, it’s difficult enough for the kids to make the transition – we’d like to know what we can do to make things easier for them because middle school is such a big jump!”

Describe the guidance process in your students’ school. Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

Teachers were also asked about guidance and what they might change about this process. “Guidance is currently taught in seventh grade as enrichment; the guidance counselor visits the classroom on a weekly basis.” Teachers know that students enjoy this greatly and indicate that the benefits are tremendous. “The kids love it!” The teachers believe that having a guidance counselor available at any time on any given day is also extremely important to students’ well-being. Teachers would prefer to see guidance available in all grades. One female teacher said, “It would be nice if we could have guidance available on a consistent basis in all grades; this might also make the transition easier for all students coming up from the elementary school.” Another female teacher added that, “Yes, although the seventh graders have regular weekly access to the guidance counselor, the others don’t.” Another teacher jumped in, “They can make requests to see the counselor at any time though.” Teachers seemed to be in agreement that guidance is a great benefit to the students, and they would like to see it delivered on a more consistent basis throughout the year at all grade levels.

What type of effect do you believe exploratories may have on student achievement in your school?

The exploratory experience is another way for adults to more closely connect with students at MMS, and exploratories have been very positive at the middle school. Students mentioned the exploratories as a favorite activity in both the focus groups and the one-on-one interviews. The faculty was just as positive. “The kids love exploratories.” “It’s nice because we’re encouraged to develop new ideas for the exploratories; we can get direct feedback from the students and incorporate them in to our exploratories.” “The kids get really excited about them, and it seems to translate to school work!”

Two of the faculty commented that “the only caveat is that students must meet a specific GPA to qualify, so not every student can partake of this program, which is a disadvantage” About 70% of the students qualify for the exploratory programs.

What changes would you make to the activities and facilities at the school? Why?

When asked about the changes faculty would make to the activities and facilities at the school, the only changes teachers requested in the facilities at the school were having a location for fifth grade recess and a nine-week marking period versus a six-week marking period. “We just don’t have ample space for fifth graders at recess, and they need room to move!” “Many of the fifth graders are much smaller in size than the older kids, and that can create safety issues on the playground.” Teachers also mentioned the length of marking periods. “The six-week time period is just too short; too much grading needs to be done in a very short period of time.” Another teacher added that “We also think it would give students more time to digest material.”

How would you describe your relationship with parents and the community?

Teachers were also asked about parental involvement. “Parents are involved to some extent, but I see much less involvement after fifth grade.” Another teacher jumped in to the conversation: “We’re not sure if this is a function of parental behavior or if students just don’t like their parents coming to school any longer.” Another teacher commented as well, “We also lose many parents because of the activities such as in class story time reading etc...we don’t bring parents in for those activities after fourth grade.” Although teachers say parents are involved, they see more parents involved at the elementary level and not enough involvement from parents at the middle school level. Teachers agreed that they would like to see more parental involvement at the middle school level.

For the first time in 2008, teachers were able to employ an online grading system. This was a first time experience for many teachers. There were some technical and development issues relative to this system, but the teachers know that this system will facilitate communication with parents and administration and ultimately contribute to the goal of accountability. “The online grading system was great!” Several teachers nodded in agreement. Another teacher added, “We definitely had some problems at the beginning.” In reaction, there were several laughs here. The teacher continued, “In the long run this is a really nice way for parents to be made aware of what the kids are doing and when. No one can hide their grades this way!” Another teacher added, “We also know this is important for measuring achievement in addition to PSSAs; the district will be able to use these scores more easily.”

How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

“I think it’s really important for students to see the role that they (students) play in the community, and I think most faculty would agree with that.” Four other teachers nodded in agreement to this statement. “I think as teachers we also have a chance to meet other parents,

students and community members, and we get to see the kids in a different setting.” The teachers in general believe involvement in the school environment is a positive experience for stakeholders.

Parents

Interviews

Interviews were conducted via phone with three parents, all female, two whose daughters were in sixth grade, and one whose daughter was in seventh.

Please describe your child’s overall academic progress in school

All parents described their students as high achievers. Two parents said their girls were “studious and doing well academically.” Parents thought that MMS provided numerous opportunities for students to perform well academically. One parent said, “I’m happy with what the school does for students.” Another said, “My daughter is very conscientious about her grades and wants to succeed.”

Explain your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment

Parents seemed to be relatively satisfied with the general environment at the school, but none of the parents was extremely positive about the school environment. Two of the parents commented on the exploratories and how these made their children feel very positive about school. “My daughter loves her exploratories.” “I know she has a chance to see a lot of her friends in exploratories.” Another parent said, “This is something that I think is very unique and positive about our school!” One of the parents was cautiously optimistic...”Well I think the students here for the most part are pretty positive about school...I guess I’m pretty happy about the school environment in general....I wouldn’t say it’s fantastic, but my daughter likes it okay.”

What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school? What particular elements of the program made it effective?

Parents described summer enrichment programs and exploratories as programs that they believe make a difference in their children's education. "The summer programs are great because it gives our kids a chance to continue exploring academic subjects in the summer." "If your child is having trouble with math or reading, she can also do a summer program to catch up." Parents also stated that their children enjoy the variety of programs available. One of the parents mentioned the importance of guidance and how this seemed to have made a difference in how her daughter felt about school. "I'm so glad (she) has the chance to speak to a counselor whenever she needs to. The guidance so far has been great!"

What about the instructional programming at your school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

This question seemed to be too difficult for parents to answer, as two of them said they "weren't sure what this meant." When the researcher attempted to explain, one parent stated "I think the guidance and exploratories make the learning experiences unique for each student."

Please tell me about your child's schedule of classes. Does the school employ block or intensive scheduling? What do you like or dislike about this form of scheduling?

Since the parents had children in sixth and seventh grades, these parents were familiar with 45 minute classes and nine classes per day. One of the parents thought this was too much changing for sixth and seventh graders, and she would prefer block scheduling. "I think block scheduling is more like a college classroom, and what they need to get used to; I wish they had block scheduling for everyone."

What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your child's progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your child's progress.

Two of the parents mentioned exploratories and advisory. "My daughter talks a lot about her exploratory because she sings in chorus and happens to be really in to singing. I think her advisor pays some extra attention to her and that makes her feel special." Additional programs that parents believe provide a productive and safe learning environment are the DARE and enrichment programs. This was the first time someone had mentioned the DARE programs. "The DARE programs definitely give the kids a chance to learn about and understand the consequences of drug use. I really worry about what goes on once she leaves home, so the DARE program provides me with a sense of security."

What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

In terms of transitions, parents said "we like the fact that our children tour their new school when "moving up," and that "students had an opportunity to meet the new teachers." One mom said, "I know my daughter was terrified, and when she came home that day after seeing the new school she was relieved – and so was I!" Another mom nodded and said, "I wish they had a better introduction to the middle school...it's such a big step!" It seemed that parents were in agreement that the formal transition program is important to both them and their kids, and they would like to see more in place at the school.

Describe the guidance process in your child's school. Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

Parents are very positive about the guidance process. One parent said "I believe it's integrated in the curriculum to the greatest extent possible. Students are able to connect with the

guidance counselor whenever they have questions or issues or if they would just like to chat.”

Another mom did say that she would “like to see more guidance and would like there to be a process in place so that parents are aware of what was discussed and what types of issues or questions the kids have.”

Please describe any exploratories in which your child has participated.

One parent mentioned chorus and how her daughter truly enjoyed the work. Another mentioned drama and said “this has opened up other extra-curricular events to my daughter!” The moms were very positive about exploratories and said their kids really enjoyed them.

How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

“I think it’s easy to become involved in the school environment because there are a lot of opportunities to get involved.” One parent said she just can’t be too involved because she works full-time. “I do find time to participate in some activities throughout the year; I think it’s a good way to stay connected to my kids.” One parent said she just doesn’t have time between work and her family with other children.

Please explain the support services which exist to provide your child with a safe and effective educational environment

This question also seemed to confuse parents. Both parents mentioned guidance here again. Additional programs that parents believe provide a productive and safe learning environment are the DARE and enrichment programs. “I think it’s great that we have a program that actually teaches kids about drugs and what to look for and stay away from.”

Administrators

Interviews

Two administrators from the middle school building were interviewed for the study. Overall administrators are very satisfied with the middle school environment. They perceived the faculty and staff to be supportive and encouraging to each other and to their students. Additionally, administrators described their relationships with students as “good.” Administrators believe student academic performance can vary on an individual basis. However, according to PSSA results, the students seem to be doing very well.

While the administrators believe a variety of factors contribute to effective instructional programming, administrators believe the dedicated teachers and staff are the foundation of the successful program. The school provides tutoring twice a week and teachers remain after school to assist students when necessary. A number of programs such as remedial programming, IST / SAP, Inclusion, an after-school program with a tutoring component and large group or individual meetings with the counselor to discuss study skill strategies and organizational skills exist. In addition, the school also utilizes an honor roll field trip to an amusement park at the end of the school year and an end of year award ceremony for outstanding student academic success. The teachers are devoted to the students’ learning and respect individual learning skills and adjust instructional programs to meet their students’ needs. Special education programs, remediation, inclusion, enrichment and tutoring provide flexibility in instructional programming in order to meet the needs of a variety of learners.

Student progress is a result of faculty efforts. The teachers provide classroom activities which contribute to their students’ development (i.e. provide lots of hand-on activities, inferential activities, etc.). The school as a whole provides activities such as Student Council,

Chorus, DARE, Guest Speakers, Hurricane Helpers (an after-school tutoring program), Exploratory, and Advisory.

In order to provide smooth transitions for students, the district provides two orientations and tours for the fourth graders entering into fifth grade, one at the end of the school year and then one during the summer with their parents. During the first few months the school guidance counselor meets with the fifth grade classes to discuss transitions and differences between buildings. The seventh graders attend an orientation at the high school with their parents during the summer. During the school year, the school guidance counselor discusses transitions in classes during guidance time.

The guidance process is student-centered at the middle school. Students are invited to approach the guidance counselor for consultations, either by approaching the counselor, or requesting a meeting through the teacher. Administrators report that teachers are supportive and understand if a child must be counseled during class time. Counseling may include anything from individual to small group and cover topics such as: peer relationships, bullying, anger management, divorce or recent parental separation, family issues, study skills, and grieving issues. More recently, administrators report that counselors have had to deal with cutting behaviors and cyber bullying.

The only change administrators hope to see is in the availability of the counselor. Working in a small school, the counselors will often be pulled for teacher coverage. Additionally, the counselor monitors two lunch duties and bus duty on a daily basis. This time could be better spent with students.

Administrators discussed school exploratories. They believe that through exploratories, students are able to demonstrate their “other” abilities, such as athletic ability, cooking skills, and

mechanical abilities. When a student experiences some success at something he or she is familiar with, it seems the student will want to extend that feeling to other areas such as academics.

There are not many changes administrators would suggest making relative to activities, as they appeal to all students. In terms of facilities, the building is in need of a new heating and air conditioning unit, and larger-sized classrooms are also necessary.

Administrators believe they maintain professional relationships with parents and the community and that they manage their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. Finally, support services provide a safe and effective educational environment in order to facilitate a high achieving, well-functioning school environment. The staff and custodians keep the school running smoothly, and supplies are ample to support the current structure of curriculum and programs.

Comparison and Synthesis of Focus Group, Survey and Interview Data

Students' Perceptions

In summary, students in both interviews and focus groups were positive about their school. Students mentioned both teachers and activities as some of the positive features of their school environment. This is supported by the survey data collected as well. Seventy-one percent are happy or very happy in general with their teachers while only 9% are unhappy or very unhappy with their teachers. Thirteen percent are neutral. Fifty-nine percent are happy or very happy with how often teachers tell them they do good work, and sixty-two percent are happy or very happy with the assistance they receive from teachers when they are having trouble. Fifty-eight percent are happy or very happy with how much teachers help them with schoolwork.

Students were asked specifically about activities in another question, but they brought up activities initially when asked about their school environment. Survey data also indicate that students are pleased with their school activities. Fifty-seven percent are happy or very happy with the number of sporting activities offered at the school, while 59% are happy or very happy with the number of activities they participate in. Fifty-nine percent of students are happy or very happy in general with the way they feel about student activities in school. The students are most unhappy with the number of social events at school. Twenty-four percent indicate they are either unhappy or very unhappy with this issue. The interview and focus group data indicate that through activities, students develop positive relationships with teachers and fellow students. Also, they have a chance to do something they really enjoy or might be good at; a few even comment that it makes them feel good about school in general.

Students were also asked about scheduling in another question, but it was brought up by several students in interviews and focus groups when asked about what they like/dislike about their school environment. Students say that the schedules do not give them enough time in between classes to switch or retrieve their books. Although one or two students did not have much to say about the schedules, several others voiced their concerns right away. The survey data do not address this topic specifically, but closely related to scheduling is class choices. Twenty-six percent are happy or very happy with the choices they have for classes, 36% are unhappy or very unhappy about class choices and 24% “don’t know” how they feel about their class choices.

When asked about the work they do in school, students in focus groups and interviews stated that they manage their work fine. They do not seem overwhelmed and do not find it too challenging. They have ample time to complete their work. The survey data indicates that most

students are satisfied with the rigor of their classes. Forty-five percent are happy or very happy with how much their classes challenge them. While 30% are happy or very happy with the number of tests they have, 34% are unhappy or very unhappy and 25% are neutral about this question. Fifty percent of students state they are unhappy or very unhappy with how exciting their classes are. Only 17% are happy or very happy about how exciting their classes are and only 18% are happy or very happy with the amount of homework they have. Twenty-six percent are neutral about this question and 39% are unhappy or very unhappy about homework.

Students were questioned about guidance. In focus groups and interviews, students were very positive about their guidance experiences. Guidance is currently limited for fifth and sixth graders. Students would like to have more consistent guidance. Students felt very comfortable about their guidance counselors and like discussing issues with the counselor. Students also liked the in-class guidance delivery. The first survey question related to these issues is “How much time I spend talking with others about classes and school activities” Forty-seven percent of students are happy or very happy with this while 19% are neutral and 23% are unhappy. An additional 10% of students indicate that they “don’t know” about this topic. Another survey question relative to this issue is “How easy it is to talk with the principal or other school administrators.” Thirty-six percent of students are happy or very happy about this while 17% are neutral, 27% are unhappy or very unhappy and 19% “don’t know.”

Students discussed the courses they liked and disliked. Keyboarding and health were mentioned as courses students dislike in both the focus groups and interviews with students. Math and science were noted in both focus groups and interviews as courses students like. Survey data does not directly relate to the types of courses students take, however, when asked how students feel in general about classes and schoolwork, 46% are happy or very happy with

their classes and schoolwork, 26% are neutral, 17% are unhappy or very unhappy and 10% “don’t know.”

When asked about the transition to middle school, the students recall visiting the middle school, but they did not mention anything remarkable about this visit. Most said that they already had friends there and had been in the building for sporting events and activities.

Students were very positive about their exploratory experiences and wished for more exploratories. The students commented on exploratories like drama, chorus, wrestling, “Legomania” and “scrapbooking.” Students said that these programs made them feel good about being in school and made them feel good about the other work they do in school.

When asked about what makes them feel safe and happy in school, students mentioned teachers, exploratories and friends. Teachers were described as people that made the students feel good about the work they do in school. Students also mentioned exploratories as something that made them feel good about coming to school. Also, students mentioned their friends as important to a successful school environment. The survey data indicate that student discipline may play a role in how students feel about their environment. While 58% of students indicate that they are happy or very happy with how safe they feel at school, only 26% are happy or very happy with how students behave in class and in school. In fact, 37% are unhappy or very unhappy with how students behave in school. Twenty-seven percent are unhappy or very unhappy with student discipline in general. Students did not raise student discipline as an issue in the focus groups or interviews.

Faculty Perceptions

When asked about school environment in focus groups and interviews, faculty described grouping, advisories, exploratories as positive features of their school environment. The only issue faculty raised was the fact that due to teaming, they do not have the opportunity to see other teachers in the school on a regular basis and just sit down to spend time or talk to them. In survey data, 73% of teachers say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationships they have with their co-workers, which would support the fact that teachers seem to want more time to spend with other faculty. Sixty-four percent say their work is stimulated by their co-workers.

When asked about their relationships with students, faculty say they have close relationships with students, and in interviews and focus groups, faculty indicates that the kids are “great and respectful.” In survey responses, 55% of the faculty stated that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with students’ behavior in school. In fact, overall 64% of faculty is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with student responsibility and discipline in school.

When questioned about students’ academic progress, teachers state that their students do well in general and that students work hard to perform well academically. Several noted that students are encouraged to “do better than their parents did.” Faculty noted that they work hard to keep PSSA scores high. Survey data indicates, however, that while forty-six percent indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied with how motivated students are to learn, another forty-six percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the extent to which students are motivated to learn. Further, 64% say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the responsibility students show toward their schoolwork.

Teachers believe that the PSSA course they have developed and deliver on a regular basis is responsible for students’ progress and success on PSSAs. Teachers also offer students an end-

of –year-party for those who perform well on the tests. Teachers believe these contribute directly to student achievement. The curriculum, developed by teams of teachers, is very closely aligned with the PSSAs. Teachers also discussed remediation and exploratory programs that they believe can be tailored specifically to individual student learning needs, providing flexible learning experiences. Classes are structured by ability level which enables teachers to work with smaller class sizes. Instead of having one large heterogeneous class, teachers can work with smaller teams of students. Survey data related specifically to these issues include responses to “The extent to which curriculum, course content, and course outlines are current.” Seventy-three percent of faculty is satisfied or very satisfied with the curriculum. Fifty-seven percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the curriculum and job tasks.

Teachers were questioned about student achievement and instructional programming. Teachers again stated that they believe the PSSA courses they’ve developed and delivered have had a significant impact on achievement. Additionally, the students are very motivated by the PSSA party that teachers provide for students at the end of the year. Teachers agree that because students are grouped by ability level, it enables to them to work more flexibly with the needs of a variety of learners. The teachers are all involved in curriculum development along with administration so they believe accountability is facilitated as well. Survey data indicates that 64% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the degree to which their co-workers and staff support school improvement, 73% are satisfied or very satisfied with the degree to which teachers show concern for student learning, and 73% are satisfied or very satisfied in general with the way they work with their team members.

Teachers agreed that they would like to see more block scheduling. Currently, the fifth graders follow block scheduling while the upper grades follow nine, 45 minute periods. Teachers

are not guaranteed preparatory periods and must fill in on a moment's notice for other teachers. This directly relates to the interviewing comments regarding the fact that teachers believe they don't have time to spend with other faculty and staff. The only survey item that provides some support to this issue is faculty's overall satisfaction with the extent and quality of communication in the school and the district. Forty-six percent of faculty feels satisfied or very satisfied, while 27% feel dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with communication within their school and district. Twenty-seven percent of faculty is not satisfied with the communication within the district which could translate to frustration with lack of time to spend communicating with their team members, other faculty, staff and administrators. This would corroborate what was indicated in the qualitative interviews.

When asked about activities that contribute to student progress, faculty mentioned advisories, exploratories and the remediation programs specifically in both interviews and focus groups. Teachers cite the fact that advisories and exploratories provide crucial one on one time with students, an opportunity to "get to know" the students. In a question specifically related to exploratories, teachers did say that they believe the exploratories are directly related to student's achievement. Students seem to enjoy school more because of the exploratories.

Teachers were also questioned about the transition to middle school. In focus groups again teachers wished for more time with teachers from the other school. They would like to know more about the incoming students. Survey data also indicates the fact that teachers would like more communication and time to spend together and that they value the relationships they have with their colleagues (73% satisfied or very satisfied with colleagues' relationships). Additionally, teachers indicated in the survey that they do believe that their colleagues have students' best interests at heart (73% satisfied or very satisfied).

In terms of guidance, teachers would like to see more at all levels. The students have indicated that they enjoy guidance, and it seems to have a positive impact on them. Guidance was not addressed in survey research.

Faculty described support services and the facilities at their school. In interviews faculty indicated that they were relatively pleased with services given the small size of the school. In fact, 73% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use and with the quality of maintenance of school grounds. Only 55% of faculty, however, is satisfied or very satisfied with library and media materials, as well as the number and quality of available school facilities. Those satisfied or very satisfied with school buildings, supplies and maintenance in general is only 27%.

In terms of relationships with parents and community, teachers indicate in interviews and focus groups that parents are less involved after fifth grade. In survey responses, only 18% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with the degree of interest shown by parents in the education of their children (55% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with parent interest). Forty-five percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the financial support the community provides for the school. Fifty-five percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school programs. Only 9% of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied in general with the parents and community of MMS.

Parents' Perceptions

The parental data must be interpreted with caution, as only five parents returned surveys to the school. Three parents participated in one-on-one interviews. More investigation of the parental community may be necessary in this type of school environment. In interviews, parents stated in general that they are pleased with the environment at MMS, and they believe that their

children are doing well academically. In terms of the survey data relative to this topic, parents are happy with the range of topics taught and their currency. In fact, out of all issues measured in the survey, parents seemed most satisfied with the curriculum. Enrichment and exploratory programs were mentioned specifically by parents in interviews. Guidance was also mentioned by parents. The parents interviewed seemed to be confused by the question on instructional programming. Parents again mentioned guidance. One parent stated that guidance made a difference in how her daughter felt about school. (In survey responses, parents seem most happy with support services and guidance). Parents expressed the desire for more guidance. Parents thought that the schedule followed by sixth and seventh graders required too much changing. Parents would like to see more block scheduling to prepare kids for college.

When asked about activities that contribute to academic progress, parents specifically mentioned exploratories and advisory. Parents mentioned the fact that they focus on activities students enjoy and students have the opportunity to work closely with teachers. Parents also mentioned the DARE program as being beneficial.

Parents seemed to feel the same as faculty regarding the transition to middle school. Two of the interviewed parents liked the fact that their daughters had an opportunity to see the school and meet the teachers. All parents expressed a preference for some formal transition program.

Parents believed it's easy to become involved in the school environment, but most indicated that they don't have time to dedicate more time to become involved between other children and work. In the surveys parents indicated that they are satisfied with their involvement in the school.

When asked about support services and what they believe makes the school a safe and effective learning environment, parents again referred to guidance and the DARE and

enrichment programs. Parents did indicate in surveys that they are most satisfied with school buildings, supplies and maintenance.

Finally, administrators agree that students in general are performing well academically. The administrators also agree that teachers are key to this success. Administrators described their relationships with teachers, students, and parents as positive. Students, however, are not as positive about their relationships with administrators. Twenty-seven percent are unhappy or very unhappy with their communication with administrators, and thirty percent are very unhappy with their opportunities to participate

Relevance to Prior Research and Findings

As indicated in chapter two, there are factors, programs, and initiatives that are critical to students' well-being in the middle school environment. These factors and programs are explored in the study via qualitative and quantitative research.

Students' Sense of Self, Less Dependence on Home, Stress and Peer Pressure

In early adolescence the youngster transitions from acceptance of adult direction to challenging authority and moving toward self-direction. Advisors must provide a blend of challenge and support that will promote identity development in early adolescence as students begin developing their paths of self-direction. Effective counselors are essential to helping students find a clear sense of self. This is the important beginning of adolescence (Marcia, 1980). At the school studied, it is clear that parents, students, faculty and administrators value the guidance program. They do, however, indicate that more time must be developed in the curriculum at all grade levels for guidance. Guidance class is offered on a regular basis as an enrichment program for seventh graders. Students in other grades see the guidance counselor

only once a month and upon request. Teachers would like to see more guidance in grade five in the middle school.

Middle school advisors also need to have a close relationship with parents and family members in order to be aware of family lifestyles in order to develop counseling strategies and guidance programs that can support young adolescents (Wegscheider, 1981). The data collected indicates that faculty and administration would like to see more involvement from parents. In fact, faculty indicated in the surveys that they are most dissatisfied with the support of parents and community of any element surveyed. Likewise, parents indicated that they are not very positive about their satisfaction with teachers at the school.

Academics

Research indicates that guidance counselors play an important role in creating an environment conducive to academic achievement and success (Gerler, Drew, & Mohr, 1990). Moreover, students' perceived relationships with their teachers affect the development of their motivation; higher quality teacher student relationships predict stronger motivation (Murdoch, 2003). At Miller Middle School, students liked the guidance program so much, that they would like to have more guidance sessions. Additionally, they are very satisfied with their teachers. Based on Gerler and Murdoch's conclusions, theoretically, these factors should lead to higher levels of student achievement. This does seem to be the case at MMS. In interviews, students, administrators and teachers indicated that they felt well-prepared academically and that teachers emphasized positive performance in school. Students feel motivated by teachers. The student test score data collected indicates above state average level performance on PSSAs, the standardized measure of achievement for the state's schools, corroborating the positive effect of academic preparation on the school.

Program Concepts Which Affect Student Achievement: Teaming and Block Scheduling, Advisories and Guidance, Varied Instruction, Exploratories, Transitions

Previous research has indicated the importance of programming, such as advisories and guidance as well as exploratories, (George and Alexander, 2003) to student achievement. It is evident at Miller Middle School that students truly appreciate and see the value of these programs. Interview, focus group, and survey results demonstrate that students believe these programs support their academic curriculum and actually make them “feel better” about what they are doing in school. Students indicated that these programs enable them to spend more one-on-one time with faculty. Faculty agreed that these programs actually contribute to students’ success and progress in school. Teachers see the direct relationship between enjoying what students know they do well and academic progress. Students’ activities, communication, and teachers were constructs students felt most positive about in the study. These constructs would best represent students’ relationships within their school environment outside of the classroom. Additionally, the teacher construct plays an important role as students mentioned in interviews and focus groups how the one-on-one time with teachers in advisory, for example, has had a positive impact on their learning. Transitions in this school were not easily recalled by students or parents, and teachers commented that they would prefer to see better transitions. Teachers would like to have more time with teachers in transition grades, and students did not seem to have much recollection about the transition process.

Interdisciplinary Teaming and Block Scheduling

Both of these programming features are in place at MMS. Homogeneous grouping has been employed at MMS with teaming and block scheduling. The MMS transitioned to homogeneous grouping between 2002 and 2004. Teachers enjoy the teaming concept; with the

scheduling and teaming concept, teachers believed they were best able to develop targeted teaching programs to address every student's learning needs. However, one complaint teachers expressed was that they do not often see teachers from other teams. Additionally, they are often expected to assist with other teachers' responsibilities as needed.

Advisories and Guidance

A guidance program provides access to an adult who has the time and responsibility for each student, assuring familiarity and continuity in providing advice on academic, personal, and social matters. Advisories also should provide another opportunity for students to be paired with an adult to discuss issues related to academics and other topics. It was clear from both the quantitative and qualitative research that students valued the advisories programs, and faculty, parents, and administration saw a clear connection between advisories, guidance, and success in school.

Varied Instruction

Varied instruction means developing learning experiences appropriate to the middle-level phase of schooling and appropriate teaching strategies. Teachers described being very student-centered and developing a number of programs to support students' academic efforts. Faculty and administration collaborate on the curriculum, and the curriculum is regularly reviewed by teacher teams to determine if content and methods are appropriate. Seventeen percent of students are unhappy or very unhappy about how their classes challenge them, and fifty percent are unhappy or very unhappy with how exciting their schoolwork is. It is unclear from this data if varied instruction is effective from the student perspective.

Exploratories

Exploratory programs expose students to a range of academic, vocational, and recreational subjects for career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment. Exploratory topics include foreign languages, intramural sports, health, clubs, music, art, speech, drama, careers, and other special areas of study. It was clear from the qualitative research that students and teachers are very positive about the exploratory experiences and all agreed that the outcomes of the exploratory programs translate positively to other academic areas of schooling. Teachers, students, administrators, and parents describe exploratories as very successful at MMS.

Transitions

Schools should ensure a smooth transition between elementary and high school by orienting students and providing close articulation and coordination of learning experiences. Many middle schools facilitate this transition with visits to the middle school while students are still enrolled in the elementary school. Although there is a transition program which includes two opportunities for visits before the school year, students and teachers did not seem completely pleased with the current transition process. Teachers would like to see a formal, more comprehensive transition process, while students seemed somewhat uncertain about this concept (in fact, two of the students didn't seem to realize that there was a "transition"). A few parents, however, did comment on the transitions and were pleased with the fact that students had the opportunity to tour their new building and participate in an orientation session.

Characteristics of Exemplary Middle Schools

Via document review and the qualitative and quantitative research, the following middle school characteristics were identified in the MMS: interdisciplinary team organization,

advisories, flexible scheduling, enriched curriculum experiences, opportunities for student success, active instruction and learning, shared decision making and parent and community involvement.

A middle school program that is effectively implemented produces outcomes which please parents, policy-makers and practitioners alike: student behavior and attitudes improve, home-school relationships become closer, students enjoy school more, teachers are appreciative of the opportunity to work together, and academic achievement is maintained or improves (George and Alexander, 2003).

Teaming is a concept employed at MMS. Additionally, faculty at Miller has developed a co-teaching program which they believe is integral to their students' success and achievement. Teachers plan with their team members on a daily basis. Flexible scheduling is also employed at MMS, and teachers and students seemed very pleased with these programming options.

Teachers, students, administrators and parents commented in their interviews and in focus groups about exploratories and the advisory programs. All parties believed that this program has played an important role in creating a positive school environment and in making students feel good about themselves and their schooling. Students specifically mentioned exploratories as one of their favorite school activities. Further, they commented that advisory makes them feel good about themselves and make them feel as if they can get to know their teachers better in school. Parents also mentioned exploratories and advisory as some of their children's' favorite programs at MMS.

Indicators of Student Achievement

PSSA scores and survey data were used as quantitative indicators of student achievement. PSSA scores demonstrate a significant increase in scores from 2004-2008. The correlation

analyses (Table 7) indicated relationships among all of the general satisfaction items on the student survey data. This includes measures of satisfaction with student activities, relationships with teachers and fellow students, schoolwork, discipline, decision making opportunities, and communication. For example, a moderate positive relationship exists between student activities and decision making opportunities. This is interesting, as decision making opportunities was one of the lowest scoring dimensions while student activities was the highest. This may suggest the opportunity to facilitate student involvement in decision making via student activities. These relationships will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Since there was such a low response to the parental and faculty surveys, interpretation of these correlations on the survey dimensions may be misleading. Although it is clear from this data, that student satisfaction may be related to student achievement, it is not evident from the other stakeholder quantitative data that there is a relationship between other stakeholder data and student achievement.

PSSA Data at MMS

Miller Middle School's PSSA scores were above the state average in 2002 when the school was identified for this study at that time. The school was selected to participate in the study due to the fact that PSSA scores were above the state average for this rural district while the school's poverty levels were also above the state average. Research indicates that typically lower income socioeconomic status would translate to lower test scores. Table 10 presents proficiency levels for MMS from 2002 through 2008. This includes those students performing at proficiency and advanced proficiency levels.

Table 11

PSSA Historical Average Proficiency Levels in Math and Reading at MMS

Year	Proficiency Levels			
	Math	AYP	Reading	AYP
2002-03	74%	35%	82%	45%
2003-04	60%	35%	66%	45%
2004-05	52%	35%	66%	45%
2005-06	70%	45%	66%	54%
2006-07	71%	45%	70%	54%
2007-08	78%	45%	70%	54%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/>, 2008

An analysis of this data does indicate a dip in proficiency levels from 2002 to 2004, and then an increase above original 2002 proficiency levels in the year 2008. During this six year time period, PSSAs were restructured to include fifth through seventh grade versus the original fifth and eighth grade included in the years 2002-2004. Additionally, the district also experienced a restructuring of organizational levels, and the MMS changed its make-up organizationally and structurally as well. The MMS is now comprised of fifth through seventh grade, versus its original fifth through eighth grade. A major construction project was also initiated to update and expand the old middle school building, which had some serious structural issues. Additionally, the school transitioned in 2003-2004 to homogeneous grouping. The effects of this construction and restructuring are not necessarily known, but there is a precipitous decline in proficiency levels during this time.

An analysis of variance reveals a significant positive difference ($p < .05$) in the proficiency levels from 2002 to 2008: and overall increase from 74 to 78%. As academic achievement is defined by maintenance of or improvement in scores, this increase in proficiency levels would certainly have favorable implications for the MMS. It is not clear, however, what exactly caused the dip from 2003-05, although the construction, restructuring and grouping

efforts certainly may have had some impact. Regardless, the data indicates that the district is exceeding expectations.

Document Review

Several documents were reviewed from the Miller Middle School and School District. The Student Parent School Contract is essentially a document detailing each party's responsibility to the district and community. The school district and the parents of the students participating in activities, services, and programs funded by Title 1 agree that this compact outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and the students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership that will help children achieve the State's high standards (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

The Parent Involvement Policy provides information relative to the planning and formation of programs and activities for Title I families. The school must operationalize programs, activities and procedures for the involvement of Title I, Part A parents, consistent with section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Those programs, activities and procedures will be planned and operated with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

During the 2007-2008 school year, the school district conducted strategic planning. All district stakeholders participated in the year long-process. Addressed in the strategic plan are issues relative to Academic Standards, Assessment, Educational Technology, Professional Development, Special Education, Student Services, and Teacher Induction, and the Parent Involvement Policy – Title I.

In terms of academic standards, the district has clearly defined its vision and mission, as well as its short and long term academic goals. It has standards and assessments to measure those standards in place. A committee of more than 30 faculty members and staff were responsible for contributing to the strategic planning process. Plans are in place for achieving academic goals in every discipline, and plans for targeted intervention for struggling students are also identified. Expected parental and community participation and involvement are also defined (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

The district has also evaluated educational technology by discipline and has measures in place to ensure that technology is transparent and supports student learning and outcomes.

A “Professional Education Committee” meets every year or on an as-needed basis to evaluate professional activities. The evaluation process involves the cooperative efforts of teachers, building principals, curriculum supervisor, central office administration, parent and community advisory groups, strategic planning committees, and student advisory groups. The review will assess all professional education activities and include:

- Monitoring of the professional development plan
- Addressing emerging needs in the district
- The selection and scheduling of learning activities and approved providers
- On-going evaluation of all professional education activities
- A review of an annual evaluation and needs assessment of the plan

(<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

Special and regular education staff works collaboratively in an effort to help students succeed in the general curriculum. Special education and regular education teachers co-teach at the middle school level. The middle school was awarded an inclusionary practices grant for the

2007-2008 school year. Accommodations, supplementary aides, and/or paraprofessionals are utilized to effectively address the needs of students and, at the same time, are provided to maintain students in general education classes. Special education curriculum is aligned with state standards and general education curriculum (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

Finally, a needs assessment has been conducted for each building relative to student services. Student services are in place according to the following identified needs:

Elementary Needs

- A guidance scope and sequence
- A more frequent good reward or incentive for good attendance
- Updated guidance curriculum
- Anti-bullying program
- More time to analyze and interpret data
- More training through the Intermediate Unit consultants on various components of the Student Assistance Team

Middle School

- Needs anti-bullying program
- Guidance classes at the fifth and sixth grade levels to address character education, career awareness, etc.
- Transition programs
- Updated guidance curriculum in the areas of character education, career awareness, etc.
- More training for staff on the process, function, and goals of student assistance

High School

- Needs updated guidance curriculum, implementing a career portfolio, as well as addressing social, emotional and academic issues
- Improved discipline using a full time position

(<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

Summary

This chapter attempted to answer the three research questions that frame this study by presenting and discussing both quantitative and qualitative data:

- 1) What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?
- 2) Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”
- 3) Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school’s programming, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

The data were derived from five sources: students, faculty, administrators, parents, Pennsylvania Department of Education: Proficiency Levels for PSSA Testing, and school documents.

Surveys were delivered to 279 students and 15 teachers at the end of a school day.

Twenty surveys were sent home to parents; however, only five were returned. Due to the low response rate on the parental survey, those statistics must be interpreted with caution. Survey questions were derived from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Task Force on Effective School Climate study (Halderson, Kelley, Keefe and Berge, 1989). The surveys were scored, and data was entered into SPSS 17 for analysis.

The surveys all employed a six-point Likert scale ranging from one to six (with one representing very dissatisfied, five representing very satisfied and six representing “I don’t

know,”) to measure the extent to which each group is satisfied with a variety of features and programming of the MMS.

Descriptive statistics were analyzed for each of the surveys. Mean scores on the items and summary scores were calculated and presented and interpreted to describe students’, teachers’, administrators’ and parents’ perceptions of and satisfaction with a variety of features and characteristics of MMS. Because the response rate for the student survey was higher than the others, Pearson Product Moment Correlations were calculated to determine the degree of linear relationship between the dimensions of the student survey. Several relationships were significant and positive. Table 7 provides the correlation statistics for further investigation.

The next section of this chapter presented the qualitative data. Focus groups were conducted with eight students and six teachers, and interviews were conducted with three students, two teachers, three parents, and two administrators. George and Alexander (2003) identified the components of the exemplary middle school purported to foster student academic achievement and well-being. Questions were developed for the focus group based on these elements and interviews (see Appendix). Responses were summarized and prepared for presentation. The results led the researcher to determine that MMS was indeed developing and including exemplary middle school features in its programming.

Research Question One: Factors Important to Student Achievement

Interview and focus group responses were evaluated with survey results to examine the three research questions. The first question addresses the factors stakeholders believe to be important to student achievement. It is clear from the quantitative and qualitative research that parents and students see great value in exploratories, advisory, guidance, transitional programming, and the number of activities available. Survey data, reliable for the student and

teacher groups, revealed that students are pleased with the maintenance of their buildings and the availability of material from the library, and they are very satisfied with the availability of teams and activities in which they can participate in school. Students also believe that teachers understand their problems, encourage and assist with learning, and in general, they feel very positive about their teachers.

Faculty members are very pleased with the degree to which administrators manage their workload and the feedback faculty members receive from administration. Over seventy percent of teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they teach as well as with their sense of accomplishment regarding their job.

Parents seemed most satisfied with school buildings and supplies and the curriculum. Generally, parents are satisfied with their involvement in the school. Parents are happy with the range of topics taught and their currency, and most parents seem happy with support services and guidance. Parental data should be interpreted with caution, as parental response to the study was low.

Administrators are also very positive about the middle school environment. They describe their relationship with students and faculty as good, and they believe a number of factors contribute to the effective educational programming at the school. They perceive that faculty is critical to the successful programming at MMS. The team concept, flexible scheduling, and the varied curriculum all contribute to student achievement.

Research Question Two: Exemplary Middle School Components

The second research question addresses the programming at MMS and whether or not it is aligned with the characteristics of the exemplary middle school. Alexander and George (2003) identified the exemplary middle school components as: interdisciplinary teaming and block scheduling, advisories and guidance, varied instruction, exploratories, and transitions. The teaming and block scheduling have been quite successful at MMS and have led to homogeneous grouping as well. Teachers, administrators, and students seem to enjoy this approach to education at MMS. This approach appears to be effective in terms of student achievement, as student proficiency and advanced proficiency levels have been maintained or improved from 2006-2008. Faculty members believe this is the best vehicle by which to target specific student learning needs.

A guidance program provides access to an adult who has the time, and advisories and guidance were described positively by all parties in the qualitative research. Students and faculty would like to see more guidance time, but this may be an artifact of scheduling. The advisories provide an opportunity for students to spend one on one time with an adult who can provide advice and guidance relative to academics and other issues as well.

Varied Instruction

Varied instruction means developing learning experiences appropriate to the middle-level phase of schooling and appropriate teaching strategies. Varied instruction eventually led to homogeneous grouping at MMS. Faculty and administration specifically mentioned the fact that through their teaming they develop programming tailored to the needs of a variety of learners.

Exploratories

Exploratory programs expose students to a range of academic, vocational, and recreational subjects for career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment. Students specifically mentioned exploratories as programming they “love” at school. The students were also clear about the fact that these programs made them “feel good” about themselves and other aspects of school such as their schoolwork. Faculty was very positive about exploratories.

Transitions

Schools should ensure a smooth transition between elementary and high school by orienting students and providing close articulation and coordination of learning experiences. Students and faculty did not recognize the transition process as significant or satisfying at MMS.

According to survey, focus group and interview data, the MMS does possess the components of an exemplary middle school. Although there are a few areas addressed by subjects as deficient or needing some modification, the programs are all operational and, in general, have been well-received.

Research Question Three: Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school's programming, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

Keefe and Kelley (1990) found that parent, teacher, and student perceptions of the learning environment and their satisfaction with the learning environment correlate with student achievement. These have been identified as “inputs” to the student achievement process in schools. Thus, this study attempted to measure student achievement in a middle school environment with traditional data, such as standardized test scores and data regarding perceptions and satisfaction gathered from parents, faculty, administrators, and students.

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to determine stakeholders' satisfaction

with student activities, relationships with teachers and fellow students, schoolwork, discipline, decision making opportunities, and communication. Other features of the school reviewed in this study were support services, school building and supplies, student discipline, administration and information services.

Data indicate that students are most satisfied with school buildings and upkeep, student activities, and their teachers. It is important to note that the student survey data were also explored for gender, race and grade effects. Only grade level seemed to play an important role in the analyses in that as students progressed to higher grade levels, their perceptions of and satisfaction with the middle school declined. Parents seemed most satisfied with school buildings and supplies and the curriculum, while teachers were most pleased with their curriculum and job tasks, as well as their relationship with the administration. Overall administrators, faculty, students and parents appeared very satisfied with the middle school environment. Faculty and staff are supportive and encouraging to each other and to their students. Additionally, administrators described their relationships with students as “good.” Administrators believed student academic performance can vary on an individual basis. However, according to PSSA results, the students seemed to be doing very well.

The high number of surveys returned for students warranted further data analysis. Correlation analyses were conducted on all general satisfaction items for each survey dimension. All of these items were significantly correlated. The fact that these items are correlated and that there is a significant positive change in students’ proficiency levels on the PSSAs would indicate that student satisfaction is indeed related to student achievement. Only grade level seemed to play an important role in the analyses in that as students progressed to higher grade levels, their perceptions of and satisfaction with the middle school declined.

Analysis of standardized test score data reveals a significant positive difference ($p < .05$) in student proficiency levels on the PSSAs from 2002 to 2008: an overall increase from 74 % to 78%. As academic achievement is defined by maintenance of or improvement in scores, this increase in proficiency levels would indicate that student achievement has been attained. Since there was such a low response to the parental and faculty surveys, more sophisticated analysis of this data is not possible, so although it is clear from this data that student satisfaction may be related to student achievement, it is not evident from the other stakeholder quantitative data that there is a direct linear relationship between other stakeholder groups' satisfaction and student achievement.

This chapter presented results of quantitative and qualitative data related to student achievement and the exemplary middle school. As indicated by qualitative data, student and parental stakeholders in this school identified guidance, advisories, teachers, school activities, transitions, administration and the curriculum as important in terms of their satisfaction with the school and their students' success in school. Faculty and administration identified each other as critical to student success, and teachers additionally identified the curriculum, their team teaching and their sense of accomplishment in this position as important to their well-being in the school. Parents discussed the close relationship teachers have with students, and teachers believe that it is these relationships that may create successful learning experiences for students. These items: guidance, advisories, teachers, school activities, transitions, administration and the curriculum do fall under the framework of the exemplary middle school as defined by Alexander and George (2003), but they are not comprehensive as defined by Alexander and George. There are other components identified in George and Alexander's model that are not employed in the MMS. Further, perhaps reconsideration of these items from perspectives of all stakeholder

parties must be identified to define academic achievement and success in the middle school environment. For example, it was clear faculty felt a sense of accomplishment in their jobs, which translates to happiness at work, a closer relationship with students, and finally student success. Alexander and George's model, however, includes exemplary features specific to other stakeholder groups not identified in this study. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. Finally, it appears that the school has maintained or improved student achievement which could be linked to stakeholders' satisfaction with a number of different dimensions of the school environment.

Chapter five will include a summary of the results of the study, followed by a discussion of the results with a special emphasis on the broader implications of the research and suggestions for the direction of future research relative to student achievement and the exemplary middle school.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempts to answer the question, “What factors may contribute to and foster student achievement at the middle level?” The goal of this study was to explore through a variety of both quantitative and qualitative methods factors that may be contributing to student achievement in a low socioeconomic rural public middle school. A document review, interviews, focus groups, survey research and statistical analyses were employed to explore programs, curricula, and student, teacher, and administrator perceptions of the school and its programs.

In 1987, The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD) established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. This group of leading educators, academicians, researchers, and government officials identified early adolescence as a period of opportunity for significant emotional and intellectual growth. Recommendations were made in its 1989 report, *Turning Points*, which provided a comprehensive approach to educating young adolescents (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Although preliminary results from the research evaluating the implementation of *Turning Points* recommendations suggested that many of the practices have been effective at the middle level, the research did not indicate this in all situations, particularly in rural and lower income urban educational settings (Balfanz and MacIver, 2000). Further empirical research on middle school effectiveness is necessary to determine successful practices and their effects on student achievement in different contexts.

In 2001, President George Bush signed the “*No Child Left Behind*” legislation (*NCLB*), which seeks to improve achievement through expanded testing, more stringent quality requirements for teachers, yearly monitoring of student progress, and sanctions for schools that fail to improve achievement. This requires schools to measure and track student achievement for

evaluation purposes. Thus, in the next decade, more schools will need to determine factors affecting student achievement and develop methods to accurately evaluate factors affecting student achievement.

Current research addressing middle school practices and student achievement has been sparse, has focused on select middle school practices, such as teaming and organizational structure, or has had a significant focus on standardized test scores, specifically, reading, mathematics and writing. Further, multiple measures of student performance have been subjective and lack evidence of external validity (Nichols, 2008; Cavanagh, 2005; Tonn, 2005; Brown, 2004; George & Alexander, 2003; Lynley, 2003).

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and triangulated to address the following research questions:

- 1) What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?
- 2) Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”
- 3) Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school’s programming, climate, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

Discussion of Research Questions

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed to address the three research questions. Quantitative measures included descriptive statistics, regression analyses, and Pearson Product Moment correlations. Qualitative information was obtained from focus groups and interviews with administrators, faculty, parents and students.

Discussion of Research Question One

What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?

The educational stakeholders participating in this study are the students, faculty, administrators, and parents involved in the MMS. Qualitative research was conducted to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the school. The following is a summary of the results of the interviews and focus groups indicating these stakeholders' perceptions of factors that contribute to middle school achievement: teachers, activities such as exploratories and advisories, other school activities and guidance, PSSA preparatory programs and other instructional programming, such as remediation and extended learning.

Students

Since student achievement is measured by scores on PSSAs and school grades, and school grades are based on test scores and assignments, students were questioned about the work they complete in school. Students were asked what made them like their school work. One of the students mentioned teachers. "Teachers make me interested in my school work." "I really like my teachers here; they're always ready to help if you have problems." "They really make us feel good about school and want us to do well."

Another one of the interview questions confirms this sentiment. One of the interviewed students discussed her involvement in an exploratory program where she had an opportunity to work with a teacher one-on-one and how that made her feel very positive about the project. All of the students expressed that the exploratories made them feel better about the work they did in school and about being in school, so there is a direct correlation it seems between the students' relationships with teachers, their exploratories and their achievement in school. Another student

interviewed said that “the teachers made the work fun and made her feel glad about the work that she had to do.” This is yet more evidence that teachers play an important role in student achievement at MMS.

Several dimensions are measured in the student survey: relationships with teachers and fellow students, school work, student activities, student discipline, decision making, supplies, buildings and upkeep, and communication. A more detailed exploration of the student survey dimensions reveals some interesting trends. On relationships with teachers, seventy-one percent are happy or very happy in general with their teachers while only 9% are unhappy or very unhappy with their teachers (13% are neutral). The other most positive perception students have of teachers is how teachers provide them with assistance. Sixty-two percent are happy or very happy with the assistance they receive from teachers when they are having trouble. Finally, fifty-eight percent are happy or very happy with how much teachers help them with schoolwork, and 55% believe teachers really enjoy teaching.

The schoolwork dimension reveals more about the students’ perceptions of what they are doing in the classroom. Over one third of the students are generally unhappy with the choices they have for classes (36% are unhappy or very unhappy about class choices), the number of tests they have (34% are unhappy or very unhappy); and half of the students state they are unhappy or very unhappy with how exciting their classes are). So although they seem happy in general with their teachers, many are not totally happy with what is happening in the classroom.

The lowest reported scores were on the disciplinary dimension. Only 26% are happy or very happy with how students behave in class. In fact, 36% are unhappy or very unhappy with how students behave in school. On a positive note, safety, addressed in this dimension, is viewed very positively. Fifty-eight percent of students indicate that they are happy or very happy with

how safe they feel at school. While students often mentioned “friends” in the interviews and focus groups and seemed to place emphasis on the importance of friends’ involvement in activities and the school environment, the survey data shows that fifty-four percent are happy or very happy with how easy it is to make new friends at school, while only 27% are happy or very happy with how students treat each other. It is unclear as to how important a factor friendships are relative to student achievement in the school and the school environment. Perhaps students feel safe and happy around their friends or students they would consider as friends but not as comfortable around the general school population.

Although students did not mention building maintenance supplies and upkeep in focus groups and interviews, students reported top box frequencies of 55% or greater on all items related to these issues. Students seem to be positive about their physical environment and the library tools which facilitate their education. Sixty-three percent of students are either happy or very happy with how easy it is to use the library. Fifty-eight percent of the students are pleased with the condition of the library, while 51% are pleased with the school grounds. Fifty-five percent of the students are happy or very happy with the way school buildings and grounds are maintained and how classroom supplies help them learn, while 57% of students are happy or very happy in general with the way school grounds, buildings and supplies are maintained at the school.

A correlation analysis on the general satisfaction statements for each dimension reveals significant correlations among several general satisfaction items ($p < .05$). The strongest relationships exist between student activities and communication (.456), and student discipline and decision making (.436). There may be opportunities for faculty, administration and students to improve communication among these stakeholders via school activities. This may be

facilitated in the marketing of events or in training opportunities. Further, the school should recognize that perhaps students who demonstrate good discipline habits may be rewarded by providing them with opportunities to participate in shared decision making.

Regression analyses were conducted to determine any gender, grade or race effects on general student satisfaction within each dimension. Grade plays a role in all but the students' satisfaction with their schoolwork. Grade level influences how students feel about teachers, their fellow students, communication, their student activities and discipline, their role in decision making, and facilities ($p < .05$). The students in the higher grades report lower levels of satisfaction on these dimensions. Gender is significant ($p < .05$) in predicting student satisfaction with schoolwork and communication, while race is a predictor of satisfaction with fellow students and building and maintenance ($p < .05$). These results would indicate that from the student perspective, older students in general feel less positive about their middle school environment. Students in upper grades do not feel as positive about fellow students, teachers, communication in the school, student discipline and their role in decision making. Programs tailored specifically to male and female students may be effective in communicating with each of these student groups. Further, it may be necessary for the district to consider different channels of communication for different ethnic groups as well.

Interviews and focus groups indicate that students are very positive about the activities and they believe that the activities, in general, make them feel better about school. Students' favorite classes are physical education, mathematics, technology education, and science. Students also enjoy the time they spend with their guidance counselor. Additionally, students say their teachers and friends make them feel safe and happy in their schools. Students seemed indifferent about the transitioning process from the elementary school to the middle school.

Students have a very positive perception of the environment, their activities, and teachers as well as communication in their school. The qualitative data corroborates the survey data. It is important to include as qualitative data the fact that the school did experience a restructuring and new construction in the last five years, which may have been disruptive to the academic process. Additionally, this may have affected the older students who report less satisfaction on a number of issues.

In summary, students cite teachers, and opportunities to work closely with teachers, such as in exploratories and school activities, as important to their academic success. Additionally, they say that the work completed with guidance counselors is very important, and that they would like more time with the guidance counselor. Students seem to become less satisfied with the teachers and school activities as they move in to higher grades.

Faculty

The faculty survey measured a number of different dimensions: administration, compensation, opportunities for advancement, student discipline, curriculum and job tasks, co-workers, parents and community, facilities, and communication. Teachers seem most pleased with their curriculum and job tasks, as well as their relationship with the administration. Eighty-two percent are satisfied or very satisfied with feedback from administrators, and 64% are satisfied or very satisfied with the support they receive from their administrators. They are also satisfied or very satisfied with the fact that administrators control or supervise their work assignments.

Teachers are most dissatisfied with their compensation and the support of parents and community. Seventy-three percent of teachers are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their pay.

Fifty-five percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the benefits available to teachers, and only nine percent state that their salaries are meeting their financial needs. Eighty-two percent are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how their salaries meet their financial needs. However, analysis of this data reveals that faculty members are very pleased with the degree to which administrators manage their workload and the feedback faculty members receive from administration. Over seventy percent of teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they teach as well as with their sense of accomplishment regarding their job. More than half of the teachers indicate that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the student behavior, and the level of responsibility and self-discipline of the students in the school. In focus groups and interviews, faculty indicated that the students, for the most part, are “good kids.” It is unclear how serious the student discipline problem may be and how much it may be impacting student achievement.

Teachers believe that the PSSA course they have developed and deliver on a regular basis is responsible for students’ progress and success on PSSAs. Teachers also offer students an end of year party for those who perform well on the tests. Teachers believe these contribute directly to student achievement. The curriculum, developed by teams of teachers, is very closely aligned with the PSSAs. Teachers also discussed remediation and exploratory programs that they believe can be tailored specifically to individual student learning needs, providing flexible learning experiences. Classes are structured by ability level which enables teachers to work with smaller class sizes in order to more effectively individualize instruction. Survey data related specifically to these issues include responses to “The extent to which curriculum, course content, and course outlines are current.” Seventy-three percent of faculty is satisfied or very satisfied with the curriculum. Fifty-seven percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the curriculum and job tasks.

Teachers are very positive about the homogeneous grouping, exploratories and advisory programs. Not only do they enjoy them, but they believe they provide the students with an enjoyable academic experience as well and contribute to their progress. Faculty at the middle school believes that remediation and opportunities to build teacher/student relationships through advisories and exploratories contribute to students' progress in school. Teachers would like to see more time for transitioning in the schools. Both students and faculty are dissatisfied with disciplinary issues. Faculty is also dissatisfied with parental involvement. Early adolescence is difficult for most youngsters. It is the time during which they begin to challenge one's self and the ideas learned in childhood. Further, it is the beginning of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth (George & Alexander, 2003; Carnegie Council, 1995). Disciplinary issues may impede this process and create difficulties in students' developing a clear sense of self which is the foundation for academic and social well-being, and student achievement and success.

Parents

Parents describe summer enrichment programs and exploratories as programs that they believe make a difference in their children's education. Parents also state that their children enjoy the variety of programs available. When asked about activities that contribute to academic progress, parents specifically mentioned advisory, exploratories and guidance. Parents described that exploratories focus on activities students enjoy and students have the opportunity to work closely with teachers. In terms of transitions, parents like that their children tour their new school when "moving up" and have an opportunity to meet the new teachers.

Although administrators believe the school building is in need of some upgrades, they believe that student-centered teachers and guidance counselors provide a rich educational environment for students. They, too, believe that activities and exploratories enable students to express themselves in ways complementary to academics.

It is clear that these educational stakeholders believe teaming and varied instruction, extra-curricular activities, guidance, exploratories, and extended learning and remediation all play a role in student achievement in the MMS. Many of these elements are the same as identified in previous research (Felner, Kasak, Mulhall & Flowers 1997; Russell, 1994). It is less clear in this study as to whether or not transitions or class schedules play a role in MMS student achievement.

Discussion of Results for Research Question Two

Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”

Teaming and block scheduling, advisories and guidance, varied instruction, exploratories and transitions are all identified as key components of an exemplary middle school environment supporting student achievement (George & Alexander, 2003; National Middle School Association, 1996).

Teaming and Block Scheduling

As indicated by survey and qualitative data, teaming and block scheduling have been employed at MMS. Although teaming was described by faculty and administration as key to the success of the delivery of academic programs, the data regarding scheduling is less clear. One of the first issues raised by students in focus groups and interviews was the fact that they don’t feel

as if they have much time between classes. Teachers also indicated in focus groups and interviews that they would prefer block scheduling, thinking that it would be more favorable academically and would provide them with more opportunities to enhance instruction. Parents also commented on the scheduling process, desiring their children to have more opportunity to experience a college type schedule, or block schedule. Survey questions were not directed specifically to scheduling issues, but it is clear from the qualitative data that block scheduling is not universal in the school and three of the four stakeholder groups raised the issue independently.

Teaming is employed at MMS, and although not addressed by parents and students in focus groups and interviews, the concept was raised as a positive contribution to academics by teachers. Teachers believe their continual review of the curriculum as teams and the programs they have developed to prepare for PSSAs have significantly impacted student achievement. In survey data, 73% of teachers say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationships they have with their co-workers and with the degree to which faculty show concern for student welfare, which would support the fact that teachers seem to want more time to spend with other faculty. Sixty-four percent say their work is stimulated by their co-workers. The only negative issue faculty raised was the fact that due to teaming they do not have the opportunity to see other teachers in the school on a regular basis and just sit down to spend time or talk to them. They often need to cover for others on their teams, which means no preparatory periods.

Students commented in both interviews and focus groups about the faculty and the fact that they believe they have a close relationship with them and that they really seem to care about students. Parents indicated the same. All involved parties enjoy this approach to education at MMS and it seems to be effective in terms of student achievement, as student proficiency and

advanced proficiency levels have been maintained or improved (exclusive of the 2003-2005 school years) from 2002-2008. Faculty members believe this is the best vehicle by which to target specific student learning needs.

From the data gathered, teaming has had a positive impact on student achievement. It would be accurate to conclude that teaming at MMS is the same as those identified by Alexander and George (2003) as necessary for a successful academic program. Block scheduling is not employed universally, and its effect on the fifth grade is unclear. Further research on this component of a successful middle school environment would need to be explored in more detail.

Advisories and Guidance

The guidance and advisory programs provide access to an adult who has the time and responsibility for each student, assuring familiarity and continuity in providing advice on academic, personal, and social matters (George and Alexander, 2003). Guidance is typically offered to students as enrichment at MMS, although students are welcome to meet with the guidance counselor upon request. Advisories are a weekly part of the curriculum at MMS.

Advisories were also mentioned and described positively by all parties in the qualitative research. Students specifically mentioned the advisory programs. They enjoy the opportunity to spend some one-on-one time with their teachers because they do not have a significant amount of time to spend with their guidance counselors.

The advisories provide an opportunity for students to spend individual time with an adult who can provide advice and guidance relative to academics and other issues as well. Faculty would like to see more guidance available to students at all grade levels. Students also commented on guidance; they like their guidance program and know that although the integrated

guidance program is currently limited, they can request access to their guidance counselor at any time. Parents are pleased with the guidance process at the school.

Students, faculty, parents and administrators all discussed guidance in the focus groups and interviews. If not questioned directly, guidance was still mentioned as a positive program at the middle school. In fact, the only complaint about guidance was that there is no consistent guidance program delivery for two of the grades. Students, faculty and parents requested more time with the guidance counselor and mentioned its very positive impact on the students.

Administrators believe the guidance process is student-centered at the middle school. Teachers are supportive of the guidance process and understand if a child must be counseled during class time. Counseling may include anything from individual to small group and cover topics, such as: peer relationships, bullying, anger management, divorce or recent parental separation, family issues, study skills, and grieving issues. More recently, counselors have had to deal with issues such as, students self mutilation cutting behaviors and cyberbullying. Administrators would like to see more time for guidance in the schedule. Currently, counselors are used for class and lunch coverage, which reduces the time they may spend working with students.

Both advisories and guidance are present as described by George & Alexander (2003) and positively received at MMS. The only concern regarding these programs is that teachers, administrators, parents, and students would like to see more time offered for guidance.

Varied Instruction

Varied instruction means developing learning experiences appropriate to the middle-level phase of schooling and appropriate teaching strategies (George & Alexander, 2003). Varied

instruction eventually led to homogeneous grouping at MMS. Teachers indicated in interviews that classes are structured by ability level, creating smaller class sizes for students who are not proficient. They believe this smaller class size creates flexibility in programming to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers are heavily involved in program development, and they ensure that the curriculum is aligned with PSSA standards.

Teachers stated that they have also developed a co-teaching program which they believe has been instrumental in meeting the needs of a variety of learners. Teachers develop curriculum on a cyclical basis, and they plan with their team members and a curriculum coordinator. One negative aspect of planning is the fact that the teachers are not provided with team time, and the teachers must often cover for other teachers without notice.

The teachers are devoted to the students' learning and respect individual learning skills and adjust instructional programs to meet their students' needs. This supports earlier research where educators have begun to recognize students' overall needs in formulating educational goals (Popham, 2003; Parrish, 2002; NMSA, 1995). Special education programs, remediation, inclusion, special education services, enrichment and tutoring provide flexibility in instructional programming in order to meet the needs of a variety of learners. This is recognized by students, parents, and administrators in the qualitative research; however, survey data indicates that fifty percent of students state they are unhappy or very unhappy with how exciting their classes are. Thus, they may not all be engaged in the MMS class environment.

Administrators believe a variety of factors contribute to effective instructional programming. The school provides tutoring twice a week, teachers remain after school to assist students, and a number of programs such as remedial programming, IST / SAP, inclusion, an after-school program with a tutoring component and large group or individual meetings with the

counselor to discuss study skill strategies and organizational skills exist. In addition, the school also provides incentive programs for students, such as amusement park trips and honors ceremonies for student achievement. Administrators believe the dedicated teachers and staff are the foundation of the successful program. The teachers are devoted to the students' learning and respect individual learning skills and adjust instructional programs to meet their students' needs.

Despite the fact that teachers are most dissatisfied with their compensation, they are most pleased with their curriculum and job tasks (3.61). Over seventy percent of teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they teach as well as with their sense of accomplishment regarding their job. Based on the pluralistic research, varied instructional programming is in place and effective at the MMS.

Exploratories

Exploratory programs expose students to a range of academic, vocational, and recreational subjects for career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment (George & Alexander, 2003). Students specifically mentioned exploratories as programming they "love" at school. The students were also clear that these programs made them "feel good" about themselves and other aspects of school such as their schoolwork. The faculty is also very positive about exploratories.

As indicated in the surveys, students rate their activities highest in terms of their satisfaction with their school. In interviews and focus groups, students consistently mention exploratories as a favorite part of their academic programming. Teachers also realize the importance of exploratories in shaping students' overall perceptions of school. Not only do the students enjoy becoming closer to teachers, but teachers have an opportunity to develop creative

programming for students and have fun incorporating hobbies and other activities in to the curriculum. Students stated that they have the opportunity to work with friends and teachers on other fun activities that make them “feel good about me and schoolwork.”

Administrators and parents also discussed the exploratories as being important to the students because they enable students to express themselves in other ways and demonstrate their abilities. Additionally, it provides students with an opportunity to “get to know their teachers better.” The only negative aspects of the exploratories that were mentioned were that first, students must meet a certain GPA requirement to be eligible to participate, and fifth graders do not participate in exploratories. Exploratories as defined by George and Alexander (2003) are present and structured in the MMS in sixth and seventh grade levels.

Transitions

Schools should ensure a smooth transition between elementary and high school by orienting students and providing close articulation and coordination of learning experiences (George & Alexander, 2003). Students seemed indifferent about the transition from elementary to middle school. A few of them recalled touring the school, but many said they were already familiar with the building from their activities or from having friends there. Faculty mentioned that they would prefer to work more with fourth grade teachers. Teachers also believed there was not much of a transition process from the middle school to the high school. “Yes, it’s difficult enough for the kids to make the transition – we’d like to know what we can do to make things easier for them because middle school is such a big jump!” Parents and administrators seemed to have different perceptions of the transition process. Administrators described a more elaborate “moving up” program, and parents stated in interviews that they were pleased that students had

an orientation. It is unclear as to the consistency and formality of the transition from elementary to middle school at MMS. This may be an area that warrants further exploration.

Discussion of Results for Research Question Three

Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school's programming, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

Keefe & Kelley (1990) found that parent, teacher, and student perceptions of the learning environment and their satisfaction with the learning environment correlate with student achievement. They developed instruments to measure this satisfaction which have been applied in this study. The reliability coefficients for these instruments were calculated only for the student and faculty surveys, as the number of parent surveys returned were very few. The reliability coefficient for the students' surveys (.89) certainly indicates that the items are measuring a one-dimensional concept. Concurrently, the teacher survey coefficient (.86) is also strong, indicating unidimensionality.

Student Data

Standardized student achievement data in the form of PSSA scores were also evaluated in this study. Data indicate that student achievement levels, on average, have remained at above average proficiency levels. It is important to note that during the measured time period, the school underwent an organizational restructuring and construction, so during the six year time period (2002-2008), there was some variation in student scores. Overall, however, the achievement levels have remained above average.

In terms of student data collected, students are most satisfied with school buildings and upkeep, student activities and their teachers. It is important to note that the student survey data were also explored for gender, race, and grade effects. Only grade level seemed to play an important role in the analyses in that as students progressed to higher grade levels, their perceptions of and satisfaction with the middle school declined. This may be because of schedule changes. Fifth graders follow a different schedule than sixth and seventh graders. Older students have the opportunity to participate in guidance and exploratories, whereas the younger grades do not. This result may require further exploration and analysis.

The number of surveys returned for students warranted further data analysis. Correlation analyses were conducted on all general satisfaction items for each survey dimension. All of these items were significantly correlated. The fact that these items are correlated and that there is general maintenance of higher than average student proficiency levels on the PSSAs would indicate that student satisfaction is indeed related to student achievement.

Faculty Data

Teachers seem most pleased with their curriculum and job tasks, as well as their relationship with the administration. Analysis of this data reveals that faculty members are very pleased with the degree to which administrators manage their workload and the feedback faculty members receive from administration. Over seventy percent of teachers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they teach as well as with their sense of accomplishment regarding their job. Teachers are very positive about the homogeneous grouping, exploratories, and advisory programs. Not only do they enjoy them, but they believe they provide the students with an enjoyable academic experience as well and contribute to their

progress. Teachers stated in focus groups and interviews that they believe their focused curriculum and instruction do directly affect student achievement. Teachers did indicate however, that they were not satisfied with their compensation or student discipline. Although most of the data reported by teachers was positive, further exploration of compensation and disciplinary issues should be conducted before any definitive link between teacher satisfaction and student achievement can be reported.

Parent Data

In terms of quantitative data, parents seemed most satisfied with school buildings and supplies and the curriculum. Insufficient response rates on the surveys, however, create limitations in analyzing and interpreting the data. Qualitative data revealed that parents are very pleased with exploratories, guidance and academic programming at the school. Parents did not discuss instruction or school buildings and supplies as much as they did the exploratories and advisories. Future research of parents' satisfaction and the relationship to student achievement may be necessary, as the response rate in this study was low.

Administrators

Overall administrators, as well as the faculty, students and parents are very satisfied with the middle school environment. Faculty and staff are supportive and encouraging to each other and to their students. Additionally, administrators describe their relationships with students as "good." Administrators believe student academic performance can vary on an individual basis. However, according to PSSA results, the students seem to be doing very well. More definitive research including a larger sample of administrators from low income rural schools should be

pursued to identify a clearer link between administrator's satisfaction and student achievement.

Summary

As this research was largely exploratory, the three research questions addressed were:

- 1) What factors as perceived by educational stakeholders have a relationship with middle school student achievement in a rural, low socioeconomic status school?
- 2) Are these relational factors the same as those identified as “exemplary middle school components?”
- 3) Is satisfaction on the part of the educational stakeholders with a school's programming, climate, activities, facilities and administration related to student achievement?

The general factors educational stakeholders perceive as important to student achievement at MMS are exploratories, advisories, guidance, after school and remediation (varied instruction), teacher relationships (teaming), and the curriculum. These programs are the same programs George and Alexander describe as essential to the exemplary middle school (2003). It is less clear as to whether or not transitions and block scheduling play a role in MMS student achievement. These are also considered by George and Alexander to be essential to a successful academic environment in the middle school context.

Finally, the relationship between student achievement and satisfaction seems to be most clear for students. The relationships between student achievement and parents, administrators' and teachers' satisfaction with the school and its programming requires further quantitative and qualitative study with larger rural populations.

Discussion of Broader Implications

Several implications for practice and for further study can be drawn from the results of this study. Implications include first, a more definitive understanding of the exemplary middle school components and their relationship with student achievement. In this study the key components of advisory programs, as developed by George and Alexander, are evaluated with pluralistic research. One conclusion of this study is the multidimensionality of programs as they may exist in different districts. This study identifies the need to more definitively define the features of these programs in order to measure and assign value to the construct of “exemplary middle school” as defined by George and Alexander (2003). This would provide standardization in measuring the success of middle schools in developing and improving student achievement. Many schools, today, however, do not yet practice standardization and do not have data measurement policies in place. This could certainly mean more expenditure dedicated to these developments. One result of NCLB has been the development of data driven decision making districts. This could have positive implications for student achievement in that more definitive concrete data will enable districts to track progress in developing student achievement.

If indeed, stakeholder satisfaction can predict student achievement and school health and well-being, districts will need to monitor stakeholders’ perceptions and satisfaction on a continual basis in order to truly measure student achievement. This proved difficult in this study, as the researcher was unable to acquire sufficient data from groups such as parents. Additionally, although the numbers were small, there was a disconnect between faculty perceptions of parental involvement and parents’ sense of their own involvement. Although the district does have a vision and plan in place for parental and stakeholder involvement, as indicated via the strategic plan (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009) there seems to be a disconnect in this

area. Districts may need to consider developing an ongoing research plan for the acquisition, maintenance, and analysis of data from a number of different parties, such as parents, administrators, students, faculty and staff.

Faculty and administration identified each other as critical to student success, and teachers additionally identified the curriculum, their team teaching and their sense of accomplishment in this position as important to their well-being in the school. These items do fall under the framework of the exemplary middle school as defined by Alexander and George (2003), but they are not comprehensive as defined by Alexander and George. For example, although teachers said that they valued their relationships with their fellow teachers, they felt as though their team structure did not give them the opportunity to communicate well with their fellow teachers outside of their team in order to exchange ideas and teaching strategies. Additionally, although teachers felt accomplished regarding certain aspects of the curriculum and course delivery, they were clearly unhappy about their compensation, their overall financial well-being and their security in their jobs. Faculty and parents seemed pleased with their interaction with the administration in the school; however, “decision making opportunities” was one of the lowest scoring dimensions on the student survey. This may warrant further investigation as shared decision making is an important characteristic of exemplary middle schools.

George and Oldaker conducted a study in 1983 exploring the effects of adopting true middle school practices in schools in 34 states. Ninety-five percent of the schools reported those students’ attitudes about school and feelings towards teachers became moderately or strongly positive. Ninety-four percent reported better staff morale and rapport as a result of reorganization. Positive parental support was also noted (George & Oldaker, 1983). Perhaps adoption of all true exemplary middle school practices at MMS (advisories and guidance, varied

instruction, exploratories, transitions, and teaming and block scheduling) would have a positive impact on student discipline and parental involvement at MMS.

Further, reconsideration of these items from perspectives of all stakeholder parties may need to be identified to define academic achievement and success in the middle school environment. For example, it was clear faculty felt a sense of accomplishment in their jobs, which translates to happiness at work, a closer relationship with students, and finally, student success. Alexander and George's model, however, would need to be expanded to include exemplary features specific to different stakeholder groups such as parental relationship with teachers, parental relationship with students, and parental involvement in the school environment.

Although this study focuses on a rural district, it is clear that there are issues exclusive to rural districts that may impact the results. Urban districts may present a host of other issues with various socioeconomic statuses. These factors must also be considered by districts in developing middle school programs.

Recommendations for Low SES Districts

Based on the results of this study, there are several recommendations for fostering student achievement in a middle school environment with low socioeconomic status. First, a close relationship between students and teachers seemed to be very important to this district in this study. Throughout the qualitative findings, it is obvious that teachers believe that their programming enables them to stay "close to the students." Document review revealed the process the school conducts on an annual basis to ensure appropriate programming. A "Professional Education Committee" meets every year or on an as-needed basis to evaluate

professional activities. The evaluation process involves the cooperative efforts of teachers, building principals, curriculum supervisor, central office administration, parent and community advisory groups, strategic planning committees, and student advisory groups (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009).

Additionally, students and parents mentioned several times in focus groups and interviews that they were motivated by the fact that their teachers worked so closely with them, and knew who they were. A possible shortcoming of this student environment was the fact that teachers and administrators reported that parental involvement and parental role in student academics was not what they would envision as supportive or conducive to long-term student achievement. Although parents state that they feel as if they are very involved and have many opportunities to do so, teachers were less enthusiastic about parents' involvement. This may warrant further investigation. Research indicates that students' perceived relationships with their teachers affect the development of their motivation; higher quality teacher student relationships predict stronger motivation (Murdoch, 2003), ultimately impacting student achievement. Further, previous research suggests that parents' location in the socioeconomic structure has a strong impact on students' academic achievement (Sirin, 2005). Given that the MMS is a low socioeconomic status district, this is an issue that should be monitored and addressed. Teachers commented that the close relationships they were able to maintain with students and the one-on-one attention that they provided was crucial in many students' cases where the parents may not be active in their academic and social well-being.

Second, directly related to maintaining a close relationship with students are programs such as advisories and exploratories. These programs are unique in that students work very closely with teachers and they have the opportunity to focus on non-academic subjects such as

wrestling and drama. These topics enable students to “get to know” their teachers in a different and fun way and strengthen the student/teacher relationship an important catalyst for improved student achievement.

Third, closely related to these strong teacher/student relationships is varied instruction. Due to the fact that students may vary significantly in ability, teachers must be able to reach these students via differentiated and individualized instruction. Varying instruction provides teachers with that opportunity. In qualitative research in this study, respondents indicated that student grouping enables teachers to deliver a more tailored program, and the students indicate that they enjoy working with their teachers. Seventy-one percent are happy or very happy in general with their teachers while only 9% are unhappy or very unhappy with their teachers (thirteen percent are neutral). Forty-nine percent are happy or very happy with how well teachers understand their problems. Fifty-nine percent are happy or very happy with how often teachers tell them they do good work. Sixty-two percent are happy or very happy with the assistance they receive from teachers when they are having trouble.

Finally, faculty and administrators both agreed that their special focus on developing programming to address the PSSAs was extremely important to student achievement on these academic measures. Teachers and administrators worked very closely on curriculum development to support topics and methods covered in these tests (<http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>, 2009). They also provided students with additional incentives such as end-of-year PSSA parties. Teachers, administrators and students all reported that these were motivating and important to student achievement.

Limitations

This study attempted to discover the factors that may influence student achievement in a middle school environment. Specifically, the goal was to explore a low income, rural school district demonstrating above average student achievement. A few limitations of the study must be noted.

First, focus groups may not be representative of the target populations to be studied. Small groups of parents, teachers, students and administrators were questioned regarding the middle school environment. These small groups are intended to provide exploratory insight in to the research issue and to complement other research methods.

Second, as the researcher employed interviews and focus groups to capture data from a number of parties, the possibility of interviewer bias may exist. Participants may have responded to questions as they believe researchers would like them to, or they may have been influenced by those around them and responded accordingly.

Results are also limited by the many intervening variables that might affect student performance on standardized tests over which the principal and the school have no control. Demographics, faculty and staff, and geographic location of the school are some of the variables affecting the outcomes of this study. The extent to which PSSA accurately measures student academic achievement limits the study as well.

The samples of each group studied may be questionable in terms of generalizability. Although the student sample is reliable, the number of parents included in the study is questionable. Data was collected only from a few parents. Response to survey distribution and interviews was low. Parental feedback would need to be studied on a more extensive basis in the future.

Finally, this was a case study of one isolated district in the state of Pennsylvania. More comprehensive research including several different districts should be conducted for comparison purposes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study provides an opportunity to explore student achievement. Many studies have addressed the issue of student achievement. Particular to this study is the fact that the school is part of a low income district, and the students have scored at above average proficiency levels for several years.

In this research, the researcher attempted to study several stakeholder groups: however, only the student group seemed sufficient in numbers in terms of the qualitative data. Future research should include more detailed research with larger numbers from all of these stakeholder groups. Likewise, future research will need to provide replication of this study in a number of districts. Both low and high socioeconomic communities could be studied to address and control for the socioeconomic status variable.

From the pluralistic research conducted, several factors play a role in student achievement in this case study. What is evident from the primary and secondary research is the fact that there may be many methods by which we can determine which factors play a role in student achievement. Tonn (2005) describes standardized data and expectations as more accurate measures of achievement, while Cavanagh (2005) identified teacher training and curriculum as predictors of student achievement. Future research should explore other assessment tools and data points that may enable us to determine more concretely relationships among school environment, stakeholders, and student achievement. Other measures of success may determine

student achievement, such as college acceptances, SAT scores, ACT scores, school to work program transitions, service learning experiences, and vocational placements in addition to student, teacher and parent data.

George and Alexander (2003) identified key components, but they also described characteristics of exemplary middle schools that are more comprehensive. More research is necessary to expand upon key components and how they facilitate the characteristics – are there other programs or elements that might be included?

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a synthesis of the pluralistic research conducted for this study. Additionally, broader research implications are considered as are study limitations. Finally directions for future research are discussed.

While the quest continues to improve our schools and student achievement, districts will continue to grapple with issues of standardization, measurement and data analysis. Most positive about this study is the fact that a rural, low socioeconomic status school has been able to attain and sustain such levels of student achievement. From this study, districts can begin to understand the importance of continually collecting and tracking data in efforts to improve school environments, satisfy stakeholders, and develop a more comprehensive and clarified understanding of student achievement to better serve students and communities.

The middle level curriculum needed today must respond to more demands than ever, including newer state and federal standards. However, this study demonstrates that this does not translate into the abandonment of middle school philosophy, or that the curriculum should be uninspired and completely standardized. Middle school programming such as that implemented

at MMS school, meets the needs of adolescents and provides them with the curriculum and experiences that not only promote achievement as defined by No Child Left Behind, but promotes the development of attitudes and behaviors needed for a full, productive, and satisfying life. The environment at MMS fosters these life-long learning skills and beliefs that go well beyond scores on standardized tests.

REFERENCES

- Accountability for Schools*. Retrieved April 19, 2006, from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln>.
- Alexander, W. and Kenneth McEwin. (1989). *Schools in the Middle: Progress 1968-1988*.
Schools in the Middle: A Report on Trends and Practices. National Association of
Secondary School Principals, Reston, VA.
- Alexander, W.H. (1970) What educational plan for the in-between-ager? In G. Hass K. Wiles, &
J. Bondi (Eds.) *Readings in Curriculum* (2nd edition, pp. 540-44). Boston: Allyn and
Bacon.
- Alexander Wm and E.L. Williams. (1965). Schools for the middle years. *Educational
Leadership*, 23(3), 217-23.
- Alexander, W. (1964). The junior high school: A changing view. *NASSP Bulletin*, 48(290), 22.
- Alspaugh, John and R. Gui (2003). *School Size as a Factor in Elementary School Achievement*.
ERIC Report: (ED475062).
- Alspaugh, J. (1991). Out-of-school environmental factors and elementary-school
achievement in mathematics and reading. *Journal of Research and Development in
Education*, 24(3), 53-55.
- American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the
National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for Educational and
Psychological Testing*. Washington DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Amrein, A. L. & Berliner, D. C. (2002). *High-stakes testing, uncertainty, and student learning*.
Education Policy Analysis Archives, 10 (18). Retrieved May 15, 2005 from
<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>.

- Anderman, L. (2003). Academic and Social Perceptions as Predictors of Change in Middle School Students' Sense of School Belonging. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 72(1), 5-22.
- Anyon, J. (1995). Race, social class, and educational reform in an inner city school. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 69-94.
- Anyon, J. (2005). What "Counts" as Educational Policy? Notes toward a New Paradigm. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(1), 65-88.
- Arnold, J. (1990). *Visions of teaching and learning: Exemplary middle school projects*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Babbie, Earl R. *Survey Research Methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1973.
- Balfanz, R. and MacIver, D. J. (2000). *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 5(1&2).
- Baker JH (1913). *Report of the Committee of the National Council of Education on Economy of Time in Education*. Bulletin 1913 no 38. Washington DC: Department of Interior Bureau of Education.
- Berliner, D. C. & Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis. Myth, fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Brannen, J. (Ed.) 1992. *Mixing methods: Qualitative and quantitative research*. Hants, UK: Aldershot/Brookfield, VT: Avebury.
- Briggs, T.H. (1920). *The junior high school*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brough, J. (1995). Middle level education: an historical perspective. In M. Wavering (Ed.) *Educating Young Adolescents: Life in the middle* (pp. 27-51). New York: Garland.
- Brown K., V. Anfara, and K. Roney. (2004). Student achievement in high performing, suburban

- middle schools and low performing, urban middle schools. *Education & Urban Society*, Aug. 36(4), 428-456.
- Brown (2002). Opportunities and Accountability to Leave No Child Left Behind in the Middle Grades: An Examination of the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Edna McConnell Clark Foundation , New York, NY. ERIC ED464158 *Urban Education Clearinghouse* October.
- Browne, M. M. (2002). A study of the relationships between organizational climate and school performance in New Jersey urban elementary schools. (Doctoral dissertation, Seton Hall University, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63, 33.
- Caissy, G. (1994). *Early adolescent*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989). *Turning points; Preparing youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995). *Great transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a new century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Cavallo, L. (2002). Self-perception of competence and its relationship to the academic achievement of students attending middle school. (Doctoral Dissertation, Indiana State University, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*. AAT 3061563.
- Cavanagh, Sean. (2005). Core Knowledge. *Education Week*. (25)3.
- Cawelti, G. (November, 1988). Middle school a better match with early adolescent needs, ASCE Survey Finds. *ASCD Curriculum Update*. p. 1-12.
- Compton, N. (1976). The middle school: A status report. *Middle School Journal*, 7 3-5.

- Corder, Gregory. (1999). *Motivating Middle Grades Students Using a Cooperative Learning Approach*. ERIC ED437217 Urban Education Clearinghouse.
- Dean, Mensah. (2005). Philadelphia students score higher in state tests. *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Aug 23.
- Denzin, N. (1978). *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- DiPaola, M.F. and W.K. Hoy. (2005). Organizational Citizenship of Faculty and Achievement of High School Students. *High School Journal*. Feb/Mar 88(3), 35-44.
- Education Commission of the States, (2002). Retrieved January 3, 2004 from <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=195>.
- Education Commission of the States, (2002). *No Child Left Behind Policy Brief: Teaching Quality*. Retrieved January 3, 2004 from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/34/63/3463.pdf>.
- Edwards, Debi (2003). Parent involvement and the relationship to academic success. *Dissertation Abstracts International*. AAT 3061770
- Edwards Sarah. (2002). Achieving Standards without sacrificing my own 10(1). *Voices from the Middle*, September, 31-34.
- Education Policy and Leadership Center (2006) *Rising Tide: The Current State of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* www.eplc.org/ARisingTide.pdf.
- Eichhorn, D. H. (1987). *The middle school*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Eichorn D (1966) *The middle school*. New York, NY: Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc.

- Elkind, D. (1990). Stress and the middle grader. In E. R. Gerler, C. C. Hogan, & K. O'Rourke (Eds.), *The challenge of counseling in middle schools* (pp. 149-163). Ann Arbor, Michigan: ERIC/CAPS and The American School Counselor Association.
- Erikson, H. E. (1968). *Identity youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Espelage, D.L.; Holt, M.K.; Henkel, R.R (2003). Examination of **Peer-Group** Contextual Effects on Aggression During Early Adolescence. *Child Development*, Jan/Feb. 74(1), 205-220.
- Feagin, J., Orum, A., & Sjoberg, G. (Eds.). (1991). *A case for case study*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Felner R.D. Kasak, D. Mulhall P. and Flowers N. (1997). The project on high performance learning communities. Applying the land grant model to school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78, 520-27.
- Fountain, J. (2001). Using Performance Measures in K-12. *School Business Affairs*, November 67(11), 6-11.
- Freshcom, E. L. (2000). *School transition and students' academic growth in reading and mathematics*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
- Gay, L.R. (1996). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (5th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- George, P. S. (2005). K-8 or Not? Reconfiguring the Middle Grades. *Middle School Journal*, 37(1), 6-13.
- George P. & Shewey, K. (1993). *New evidence for the middle school*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

- George, P.S. and Alexander, W. M..(2003). *The exemplary middle school*. (3rd Ed.)
Fort Worth, TX: Thompson/ Wadsworth.
- George, P. , and Anderson, W. G. (1989). Maintaining the middle school: A national survey.
NAASP Bulletin, 73(521), 67-74.
- George, P., and Oldaker, L. L. (1985). *Evidence for the middle school*. Columbus,
OH: National Middle School Association.
- George P. and Shewey, K. (1994). *New evidence for the middle school*. Columbus, OH:
National Middle School Association.
- George, P., and Stevenson, C. (1989). The “very best teams” in the middle schools as
described by middle school principals. *TEAM* 4(7), 6-17.
- Gerler, E. R., Drew, N. S., & Mohr, P. (1990). Succeeding in middle school: A multimodal
approach. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 24, 263-271.
- Good, Robert. (2002). *Using Discriminant Analysis as a Method of Combining Multiple
Measures of Student Performance*. Paper – Annual meeting of the American educational
Research Association. New Orleans, LA April 1-25, 2002. ED 464 951.
- Hackmann, Donald G. V. Petzko, J. Valentine, D. Clark, J. Nori, S. Lucas. (2002). Beyond
Interdisciplinary Teaming: Findings and Implications of the NASSP National Middle
Level Study. *NASSP Bulletin*, 86(632), 33-47.
- Halderson, C. E. A. Kelley, J. W. Keefe, and P.S. Berge. (1989). *Technical Manual (School
Climate Survey, Student Satisfaction Survey, Teacher Satisfaction Survey, Parent
Satisfaction Survey), Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE)*.
Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

- Hall Daria and S. Kennedy. (2006). Primary Progress, Secondary Challenge: A State-By-State Look At Student Achievement Patterns. *Education Trust*, March 2006.
- Hamel, J., Dufour, S., & Fortin, D. (1993). *Case study methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hansen J. H. and A. C. Hern. (1971). *The Middle School Program*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Henderson, C. L., et. al., (2005). Organizational Health and Student Achievement in Tennessee Middle Level Schools. *NASSP Bulletin* 89, (September), 54-75.
- Hess F. (2005). Facing a messy reality. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(1), 47.
- Hillman, Arnold. (2003). State of Rural Education IN PA [http: //www.parss.org /bulletin / Hillman_presentation.asp](http://www.parss.org/bulletin/Hillman_presentation.asp). *Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools*.
- Hough, David L. (2003). "No Child Left Untested [sic]" Battle or Battle Cry Guiding Research and Practice? Making Research User-Friendly. *Middle School Journal*, 35(1), 59-61.
- Howe KR. (1988). Against the quantitative qualitative incompatibility thesis or dogmas die hard. *Educational Researcher*, 17, 10-16.
- Isaac, S. & Michael, W. (1981). *Handbook for research in evaluation* (2nd ed.) San Diego, CA: EdITS.
- Jackson, A. and Davis, G. (2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Janesick, V. (1994). *The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning*. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 209-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Keefe, J.W. and E. A. Kelley (1990). Comprehensive Assessment and school improvement. National Association and school improvement. *NASSP Bulletin*. 74(530), 54-63.

- Koos L.V. (1927). *The junior high school*. Boston: Ginn and Co.
- Learning First Alliance, (2002). *Major Changes to ESEA in the No Child Left Behind Act*.
Retrieved January 3, 2004 from <http://www.learningfirst.org/pdfs/nochildleft.pdf>.
- Lee, V. (2005). Evaluating Rural Progress in Mathematics Achievement: Threats to the Validity of Adequate Yearly Progress', *Journal of Research in Rural Education*,
<http://www.ume.maine.edu/%7Ecofed/research/jrre/>
- Lee, V. E., and D.T. Burkham. (2002). *Inequality at the starting gate*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Lewis, Anne (2006). Middle Schools Lag. *Education Digest*, 71(6).
- Lightfoot, S.L. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lipsitz, J. (1984). *Successful schools for young adolescents*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Lounsbury, J. (1960). How the junior high school came to be. *Educational Leadership*, 18, 145-147.
- Lounsbury, J., Till, V., & Vars, G. (1961). *Modern education for the junior high school years*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Lounsbury, J., & Vars, G. (1978). *A curriculum for the middle school years*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Lounsbury, J.H. (1992). Perspectives on the middle school movement. In J.L. Irvin (Ed.) *Transforming middle level education: Perspectives and possibilities*. (pp. 3-15). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- MacIver, D. (1991). Responsive Practices in the Middle Grades. *American Journal of Education*, 99, 458-464.
- Manning L. and K. Bucher (2000). Middle Schools Should Be Both Learner-Centered and Subject-Centered. *Childhood Education*, 77(1), 41-42.
- Marcia, J. E. (1980). *Identity in adolescence*. In J. Adelson (Ed.), Handbook of adolescent psychology (pp. 159-181). New York: Wiley.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mathematics Assessment Handbook. (2001). *Pennsylvania Department of Education Division of Evaluation and Reports*. Retrieved January 3, 2004, from <http://www.pde.state.pa.us>
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mizell H. (2002). *What Parents Need to Know about Middle School Reform*. ERIC: Elementary and Childhood Education Clearinghouse. Nyack , NY. October 16.
- Morgan D.L. (1997, 2nd Edition) *Focus groups as qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Murdock, T.B., Anderman, LH and Hodge, SA (2000). Middle grade predictors of high school motivation and behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15, 327-351.
- Murdock, T. and A. Miller (2003). Teachers as sources of middle school students' motivational identity: variable-centered and person-centered analytic approaches. *The Elementary School Journal*, 103(4), 383(18).
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). An open letter to the American people. A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. *Education Week*, 2-12.

- National Middle School Association. (1995). *This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle level schools*. Columbus, OH: Author.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, (2002). Pub. L. 107-110(115), Stat. 1425.
- Neill, M. (2003). The Dangers of Testing. *Educational Leadership*. 60(5), 43.
- Newman I. and C.R. Benz. (1998). *Qualitative/Quantitative research methodology exploring the interactive continuum*. Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Nichols, Sharon (2008). An Exploration of Students' Belongingness Beliefs in One Middle School. *Journal of Experimental Education*, Winter2008, 76(2), 145-169.
- Ogle, L., Sen, A., Pahlke, E., Jocelyn, L., Kastberg, D., Roey, S., and Williams, T. (2003). *International comparisons in fourth-grade reading literacy: Findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2001 (NCES 2003-073)*. U.S.
- Olson L. (2005). Education Department Convenes Working Group on 'Growth' Models. *Education Week*, 24(42), 20-21.
- Parish J. (2002). School climate and state standards: A study of the relationships between middle school organizational climate and student achievement on the Virginia Standards of Learning Tests. *Dissertation Abstracts International* AAT 3041368
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education, (2006), www.pde.state.pa.us
- Popham, James. (2003). Trouble with Testing. *The American School Board Journal*, 190(2) 14-17.

- Popper, S. H. (April), 1968, Institutional integrity and middle school Organization. *Journal of Secondary Education*. 3(150), 184-191.
- Powell R.A. and Single H.M. (1996) Focus groups. *International Journal of Quality in Health Care*, 8(5), 499-504.
- Poynton, Timothy, Matt Carlson, James Hopper, John Carey, (2006), Evaluation of an Innovative Approach to Improving Middle School Students' Academic Achievement. *Professional School Counseling*, Feb, 9(3).
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black-white achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rural School and Community Trust (2005). <http://www.ruraledu.org>
- Russell J. F. (1994). *An evaluation of middle level schooling: Implementation of programming concepts in relationship to student achievement*. Dissertation Abstracts International 55(10) 3058A (University Microfilms No. AAG95-07825).
- School Profiles (2003). *Pennsylvania Department of Education Division of Evaluation and Reports*. Retrieved March 17, 2008, from <http://www.paprofiles.org/profiles/>
- Schuylkill Haven School District Website (2008). *Reports*. Retrieved March June 1, 2009 from <http://www.haven.k12.pa.us/strategic.html>., 2009
- Schunk, Dale. (1989). Self-efficacy and cognitive skill learning. In C. Ames and R. Ames (eds). *Motivation in education*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, Inc.
- Seghers, Myles M.; Meza, James, Jr.; Kirby, Peggy C.; (1997). More evidence for the implementation of middle level practices. *NASSP Bulletin*, 81(591) 98-107.

- Smith, B., et. al. (2005). , Extended Learning Time and Student Accountability: Assessing Outcomes and Options for Elementary and Middle Grades. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(2) April, 195-236.
- Smith, P. A. (2002). The organizational health of high schools and student proficiency in mathematics. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), 98-104.
- Spera, C. (2005). A Review of the Relationship Among Parenting Practices, Parenting Styles, and Adolescent School Achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 125-146.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A., & Glaser, B. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Sutton, A. and I. Soderstrom, (1999). Predicting elementary and secondary school achievement with school-related and demographic factors . *Journal of Educational Research*, 92(6), 330.
- Sweetland, S. R., and W.K. Hoy (2000). School characteristics and educational outcomes: toward an organizational model of student achievement in middle schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36, 703-729.
- Tajalli, H. and C. Opheim (2005). Strategies for Closing the Gap: Predicting Student Performance in Economically Disadvantaged Schools. *Educational Research Quarterly*, Jun 28(4), 44-54.
- The Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association* (1918). Bulletin 1918 no. 35 Department of Interior, Bureau of Education.
- Toepfer, C., F., Jr. (1980). Brain growth periodization data: Some suggestions for reorganizing middle grades education. *The High School Journal*. 63(14): 224-226.

- Tonn, J. (2005). Improvement Factors For Schools Identified, *Education Week*, 25(10).
- Valente, M. E. (1999). *The relationship of organizational health, leadership, and teacher empowerment*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Van Lier, L. (1988). *The classroom and the language learner*. New York: Longman.
- Van Zandt, L.M. and Totten, S. (1995). The current status of middle level education research: a critical review. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 18(3), 1-25.
- Vasallo, Phillip (1990). Muddle in the middle. *The American School Board Journal*, September 26-37.
- Wegscheider, S. (1981). *Another chance: Hope and health for the alcoholic family*. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books.
- Weinstein, R. S. (1989). Perceptions of classroom processes and student motivation: Children's views of self-fulfilling prophecies. In C. Ames, & R. Ames (Eds.), *Research on motivation in education: Vol. 3. Goals and cognitions*. New York: Academic Press.
- Weiss, C. C. (2006). Reexamining Middle School Effects: A Comparison of Middle Grades Students in Middle Schools and K-8 Schools. *American Journal of Education*, 112(2), 239-72.
- Wentzel, K. R. (1998b). Social relationships and motivation in middle school: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 202-209.
- Wentzel, K. R. (2002). Are effective teachers like good parents? Teaching styles and student adjustment in early adolescence. *Child Development*, Jan-Feb. 73, 287(15).
- Williamson, R. (1993). *Scheduling the middle level school to meet early adolescent needs*. Reston, VA. National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Yin, R. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods* (1st ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

Yin, R. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT PARENTS

Focus Group Purpose Statement: To explore perceptions of and satisfaction with school programming.

1. Please describe your child's overall academic progress in school.
Can you provide some detail?
2. Explain your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the SHAMS.
3. What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

What particular elements of the program made it effective?

4. What about the instructional programming at your school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

Please explain.

5. Please tell me about your child's schedule of classes.

What about this type of schedule helps your child to achieve?

6. What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your child's progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your child's progress.

7. What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

8. Describe the guidance process in your child's school.

Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

9. Please describe any exploratories (may need to describe) in which your child has participated.
10. Describe your involvement in the school environment.

How have you been encouraged to be involved in school programs?

11. Please explain the support services which exist to provide your child with a safe and effective educational environment.

12. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT STUDENTS

Focus Group Purpose Statement: To explore students' perceptions of and satisfaction with school programming.

1. Tell me about your school.

What do you like about your school?

Is there anything that you would like to change about your school?

2. What do you think about the work you do in school?

Is it challenging?

Do you have enough time to complete your work?

What makes you interested in doing the work at school?

3. What types of activities do you have at your school?

What is good about the activities at your school?

What activities or programs do you like or dislike in school? Why?

Do you think these programs make you feel better about your school work or help you to do better in school? Why?

4. Tell me about tell me about your schedule of classes. Does your school use block scheduling?

Do you like the way your schedule is set up?

Why or why not?

5. How often do you see your guidance counselor?

Do you like working with your guidance counselor? Why or why not?

6. What courses do you take at school?

Which courses do you like? Why?

Which courses do you dislike? Why?

7. How did you feel moving from elementary school to the middle school?

Describe any programs that were helpful in making you feel comfortable.

8. Please describe any exploratories you may have participated in.

What did you like or dislike about them? (if applicable)

9. How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

10. What makes you feel safe and happy in your school?

11. What else would you like to talk about today?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT FACULTY

Focus Group Purpose Statement: To explore perceptions of and satisfaction with school programming.

1. Explain your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the SHAMS.
2. How would you describe your relationship with students?

3. Please describe your students' overall academic progress in school.

Can you provide some detail?

4. What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

What particular elements of the program made it effective?

5. What about the instructional programming at your school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

Please explain.

6. How do you develop instructional programming?

What do you like or dislike about this process?

7. What do you like or dislike about the scheduling?

8. What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your students' progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your students' progress.

9. What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

10. Describe the guidance process in your students' school.

Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

11. What type of effect do you believe exploratories may have on student achievement in your school?
12. What changes would you make to the activities and facilities at the school?
Why?
13. How would you describe your relationship with parents and the community?
14. How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?
15. How do you feel support services provide a safe and effective educational environment?
16. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

Focus Group Invitation Letter for Parents

(DATE)
(CONSTITUENT NAME)
(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how parents perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, we are interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected parents. Your feedback is important to help the SHAMS design programs that will better meet the needs of your children. We invite you to share your feedback at a focus group discussion on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). A gift from the school store will be provided to you for your participation in the group. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by mailing the attached RSVP form or sending it to school with your child. Please do not hesitate to contact the school if you have any questions at (PHONE) or (EMAIL).

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis,	570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Focus Group Discussion

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)

FROM: _____

- ☐ Yes, I will attend the Focus Group on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).
☐ No, I cannot attend.

Focus Group Invitation Letter for Faculty

(DATE)
(CONSTITUENT NAME)
(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how faculty perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected faculty members. Your feedback is important to help the SHAMS design effective educational programming. I invite you to share your feedback at a focus group discussion on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). Breakfast will be provided. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by returning the attached RSVP form to the principal's office.

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis	570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Focus Group Discussion

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)

FROM: _____

- ☐ Yes, I will attend the Focus Group on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).
☐ No, I cannot attend.

Focus Group Invitation Letter for Students

(DATE)
(CONSTITUENT NAME)
(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study. I'd like to know if there are any changes or improvements that can make your school a better place. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

I am interested in talking to you about the school. I'd like to invite you to a group discussion during lunch period on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). I'll buy you lunch, and you'll receive a gift from the school store for your participation in the group. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by giving the attached RSVP form to your teacher.

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis,	570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Group Discussion

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)
(KIDS COUNT FAX NUMBER)

FROM: _____

- ☐ Yes, I will attend the Discussion Group on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).
☐ No, I cannot attend.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCRIPT PARENTS

1. Please describe your child's overall academic progress in school.
Can you provide some detail?
2. Explain your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the SHAMS.
3. What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

What particular elements of the program made it effective?

4. What about the instructional programming at your school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

Please explain.

5. Please tell me about your child's schedule of classes.

Does the school employ block or intensive scheduling?

What do you like or dislike about this form of scheduling?

6. What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your child's progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your child's progress.

7. What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

8. Describe the guidance process in your child's school.

Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

9. Please describe any exploratories (may need to describe) in which your child has participated.
10. How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?

11. Please explain the support services which exist to provide your child with a safe and effective educational environment.

12. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

INTERVIEW SCRIPT STUDENTS

Questions

1. Tell me about your school.

What do you like about your school?

Is there anything that you would like to change about your school?

2. What do you think about the work you do in school?

Is it challenging?

Do you have enough time to complete your work?

What makes you interested in doing the work at school?

3. What types of activities do you have at your school?

What is good about the activities at your school?

What activities or programs do you like or dislike in school? Why?

Do you think these programs make you feel better about your school work or help you to do better in school? Why?

4. Tell me about tell me about your schedule of classes. Does your school use block scheduling?

What do you like or dislike about your schedule?

5. How often do you see your guidance counselor?

Do you like working with your guidance counselor? Why or why not?

6. What courses do you take at school?

Which courses do you like? Why?

Which courses do you dislike? Why?

7. How did you feel moving from elementary school to the middle school?

8. Describe the exploratories in which you have participated

What did you like or dislike about them?

9. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about today?

INTERVIEW SCRIPT FACULTY

1. Can you comment on your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the SHAMS?

2. How would you describe your relationship with students?

3. Please describe your students' overall academic progress in school.

Can you provide some detail?

4. What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

What particular elements of the program made it effective?

5. How do you believe the instructional programming at the school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

Please explain.

6. How do you develop instructional programming?

What do you like or dislike about this process?

7. What do you like or dislike about the scheduling process in your school?

8. What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your students' progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your students' progress.

9. What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

10. Describe the guidance process in your students' school.

Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

11. What type of effect do you believe exploratories may have on student achievement in your school?
12. What changes would you make to the activities and facilities at the school?
Why?
13. How would you describe your relationship with parents and the community?
14. How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?
15. How do you feel support services provide a safe and effective educational environment?
16. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

INTERVIEW SCRIPT ADMINISTRATORS

1. Can you comment on your degree of satisfaction, in general, with the school environment at the SHAMS?

2. How would you describe your relationship with students?

3. Please describe your students' overall academic progress in school.

Can you provide some detail?

4. What instructional programs do you believe have made a difference in improving student achievement at the middle school?

What particular elements of the program made it effective?

5. How do you believe the instructional programming at the school provides flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of learners?

Please explain.

6. How do you develop instructional programming?

What do you like or dislike about this process?

7. What do you like or dislike about the scheduling process in your school?

8. What activities at the school do you believe contribute to your students' progress in school?

Please describe how you feel the activities contribute to your students' progress.

9. What do you believe your schools do to provide smooth transitions from one school to another?

10. Describe the guidance process in your students' school.

Is there anything you would like to change about this process?

11. What type of effect do you believe exploratories may have on student achievement in your school?
12. What changes would you make to the activities and facilities at the school?
Why?
13. How would you describe your relationship with parents and the community?
14. How do you feel about becoming involved in the school environment?
15. How do you feel support services provide a safe and effective educational environment?
16. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

Interview Invitation Letter for Parents

(DATE)

(CONSTITUENT NAME)

(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how parents perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected parents. I invite you to share your feedback in a one-on-one telephone. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by mailing the attached RSVP form or sending it to school with your child.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis	570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Interview Participation

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)

FROM: _____

- ☐ Yes, I will attend the interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).
☐ No, I cannot attend.

Interview Invitation Letter for Faculty

(DATE)

(CONSTITUENT NAME)

(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how faculty perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected faculty members. I invite you to share your feedback in a one-on-one interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). If it is more convenient, I would be happy to conduct the interview by telephone. You'll receive a gift from the school store for your participation in the interview. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by returning the attached RSVP form to me via the administrative offices.

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry 610.562.3990

Dr. Faith Waters 570.422.3363

Dr. Shala Davis 570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Interview

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)

FROM: _____

☐ Yes, I will attend the Interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).

☐ No, I cannot attend.

Interview Invitation Letter for Students

(DATE)

(CONSTITUENT NAME)

(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study. I'd like to know if there are any changes or improvements that can make your school a better place. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

I would like to invite you to a one-on-one interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). You'll receive a gift from the school store for your participation in the interview. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by giving the attached RSVP form to your teacher.

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry 610.562.3990

Dr. Faith Waters 570.422.3363

Dr. Shala Davis 570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Interview

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)
(KIDS COUNT FAX NUMBER)

FROM: _____

- ☐ Yes, I will attend the interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).
☐ No, I cannot attend.

Interview Invitation Letter for Administrators

(DATE)

(CONSTITUENT NAME)

(CONSTITUENT ADDRESS)

Dear (CONSTITUENT NAME):

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how administrators perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected administrators. I invite you to share your feedback in a one-on-one interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME) at (LOCATION). You will receive a gift from the school store for your participation. The data collected during this session will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please let me know if you will be able to attend by returning the attached RSVP form to me via the administrative offices.

I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE)!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,

Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry 610.562.3990

Dr. Faith Waters 570.422.3363

Dr. Shala Davis, 570.422.3336

RSVP SHAMS Interview

TO: (NAME), (TITLE)

FROM: _____

☐ Yes, I will attend the Interview on (DATE), from (TIME) to (TIME).

☐ No, I cannot attend.

APPENDIX C

Survey Invitation Letter for Parents

April, 2008

Dear SHMS Parents:

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how parents perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected parents. I invite you to share your feedback in the attached survey. Please complete the survey and return it to the school in the self-addressed stamped envelope by (DATE). The data collected from this survey will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data. I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please complete and return the survey as soon as possible. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,



Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis,	570.422.3336

Survey Invitation Letter for Faculty

April, 2008

Dear Faculty Member:

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I am interested in exploring how faculty perceive the school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As part of the evaluation, I am interested in obtaining feedback from randomly selected faculty members. I invite you to share your feedback in the attached survey. Please complete the survey and return it to the person administering the survey. The data collected from this survey will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified by the data. I would greatly appreciate your participation. Please complete and return the survey as soon as possible. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,



Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis	570.422.3336

Survey Invitation Letter for Students

April 2008

Dear Student:

I am a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania conducting research in order to fulfill requirements for the doctorate of education. The Schuylkill Haven Area Middle School (SHAMS) has agreed to participate in this study in order to evaluate its curriculum and programs and their effects on student achievement. I'd like to know what you think of your school. The data collected will be used for dissertation research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Please complete the survey and return it to the person administering the survey in your classroom. The data collected from this survey will be completely anonymous and confidential. It will be coded so that you cannot be identified. You are encouraged to, but not required to complete the survey.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Dr. Faith Waters or Dr. Shala Davis at East Stroudsburg University if you have any questions (please see contact information below).

Sincerely,



Eugene McGorry, Doctoral Candidate, IUP

Contact info:

Eugene McGorry	610.562.3990
Dr. Faith Waters	570.422.3363
Dr. Shala Davis	570.422.3336