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School-based management: leadership hand in hand

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School-Based Management: Leadership Hand in Hand

By

Terrence O'Connor, Jr.

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 2003

Approved by.

Date Approved _____

i

Abstract

Terrence O'Connor, Jr.

School-Based Management
May 2003
Dr. Dennis Hurley
School Administration/Supervision

This study, conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of the school-based

management team, occurred at the Reeds Road Elementary School. An action research

design, using both surveys and interviews, assisted in obtaining the data necessary to

make an appropriate determination of the initiative's effectiveness in providing staff with

more say in school affairs, as well as positively affecting the school's climate. Twenty-

two staff members, chosen randomly to best represent all areas of the school's staff

population, completed surveys regarding the school-based management team. In

addition, six different staff members were also chosen randomly to participate in an

interview process. (3 females and 3 males). The results of this study indicate that,

despite some areas of concern to staff, the school-based management team does, in fact,

provide staff with an outlet to voice their concerns and ideas about various school affairs.

The data reflected that the team does seem to enhance the overall atmosphere at the

school. This study found that staff appear to hold their school in higher esteem when

they feel that they can participate in its governance and that their concerns and ideas will

not only be heard but also addressed, as well.

Mini-Abstract

Terrence O'Connor, Jr.

School-Based Management
May 2003
Dr. Dennis Hurley
School Administration/Supervision

This study sought to determine the overall effectiveness of the school-based management team at the Reeds Road Elementary School. This study utilized an action research design by surveying and interviewing representatives from the school staff. The results appear to conclude that the team does in fact, despite some weaknesses, enhance the overall school environment.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my university mentors, Dr. Hurley and Dr. Capsso for their guidance. In addition, I offer special thanks to Dr. Zipparo and Ms. Wilson, the administrative team at the Reeds Road Elementary School, who served as my field mentors. Your support and direction is appreciated greatly. Thank you to the administration and staff at the Galloway Township School District for allowing me the opportunity to complete this administrative internship within the district. I wish to extend special thanks to my friends and colleagues, as well as my students past and present, at the Reeds Road Elementary School, in particular. Your support and encouragement means the world to me. I sincerely wish to acknowledge Kevin McGloin, my friend and colleague, and his family for their friendship, support, and encouragement. Thank you for being a most true friend and a wonderful professional colleague, as well. I wish to remember my great-aunt Jean for her support and encouragement during this experience. I also wish to acknowledge my family, my friends, my cat, and of course the love of my life. Each of you offers the unending love and support that are my salvation through wonderful, as well as difficult times. The road has been tough at times but manageable because of the special gifts you all continue to be to me. I love you all so very much. Above all, I wish to extend special thanks to God for giving me faith and the gift of learning, but most importantly—for providing me with a circle of love to surround my life.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Shared-leadership is becoming more popular in schools today more than ever. At the
Reeds Road Elementary School, staff participates in shared leadership in various ways.
The hiring of unit leaders at each grade level and specialty area, the formation of various
study groups and committees, as well as a school-based management team provide staff
with opportunities to assist in the decision-making processes at the school.

Despite the many ways in which the staff shares in leadership at the school, this study
examined the school-based management team, in particular. The study sought to
determine its effectiveness at the school. Ultimately, the study sought to answer the
questions of whether the program truly does afford staff a role in active leadership,
enhances school climate, and whether or not the program does work at the Reeds Road
Elementary School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of shared-leadership at the
school, particularly focusing upon the school-based management team. The intern
utilized a site-based action research design in the study. Information obtained through
surveys determined staff perceptions of the program, as well as gave insights into staff

1

knowledge and understanding of this initiative. In addition, interviews using a random sampling of the staff provided additional insights and data.

The overall purpose of the study was to determine whether or not the program provides staff with active leadership opportunities in the everyday workings of the school. The purpose was to determine whether or not the program truly works and if it is effective at the school. The main goal of the study was to answer the question, "Is the school-based management team working to bring about positive experiences for all members of the school community?"

<u>Definitions</u>

Unit Leader is a term that refers to a person appointed to serve as a liaison/representative for each grade level/specialty area. It is a position for which staff members apply each year. There is a monetary stipend for this position, as well.

School-based Management (SBM) is a form of shared-leadership in which members from various aspects of the school community meet to discuss ideas, issues, policies, or concerns. It is often viewed as a means for providing staff members with active leadership roles, as well as a means for giving them a voice in school affairs.

Site-based Management (SBM) is a term that is interchangeable with the term School-based Management. Please refer to the definition for School-based Management.

School-based Management Team is a group of people, generally appointed, or possibly selected by staff, who serve as representatives for various departments at the school. Team members may include administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and sometimes community stakeholders and students.

2

Recommendation-only Policy refers to a policy in effect at the Reeds Road Elementary School. This policy, serving as a safeguard for all staff, states that staff may make recommendations for change but that the administration has the final authority and responsibility for all decisions. The teachers' union sought to have this policy in place to protect all participants.

<u>Limitation of the Study</u>

The research of the study was limited to the Reeds Road Elementary School housed within the Galloway Township School District. Consequently, the research findings reflected the population and setting of only one of the six elementary schools within the district. In addition, school and district procedures and policies, which must be followed, further limited the study.

<u>Setting of the Study</u>

The study was completed during the 2002-2003 school year at the Reeds Road Elementary School in Galloway Township, New Jersey. Galloway Township is located in Atlantic County and has a population of approximately 32,000 people inhabiting an area that measures approximately 95 square miles. Galloway Township is a K-8 district in which high school students attend a regional facility. Galloway Township educates approximately 4,000 students under the direction of a Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, 2 Curriculum Coordinators, and a Director of Special Education. Students in kindergarten attend two kindergarten centers, students in grades 1 through 6 attend six elementary schools, and students in grades 7 and 8 attend the middle school.

Reeds Road Elementary School has a population of approximately 600 students in

3

grades 1 through 6. The school setting reflects a diversity of ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. In addition, the school culture consists of students speaking various languages, including 84% English, 5% Spanish, 2% Gujarati, 2% Philipino, 1% Vietnamese, and 6% others. Reeds Road Elementary School has extensive special education programs and is the only elementary school within the district that houses three self-contained classrooms for children with behavioral disabilities. Thirteen percent of the student population regardless of program or placement, have Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

The school is comprised of approximately 70 staff members, including a principal, vice-principal, two full-time counselors, one full and one part-time nurse, support personnel, teachers, and teacher assistants. Seventy-two percent of the staff hold BA/BS degrees, 26% hold MA/MS degrees, and 2% hold PhD/EdD degrees.

Reeds Road is located within a school district that is experiencing rapid growth as the result of the casino industry that employees many community members. Many seniors relocate to the area and reside in several local retirement communities. With the increase of the retired population, the school district has had major difficulties in passing the budget. The base budget was $17,939,014 and was narrowly defeated in 2002 by ten votes. The total cost per pupil in the district is $8,544. Reeds Road has a high mobility rate of 18.5%--5.1% higher than the state average for the 2000-2001 school year. Due to this mobility rate, class sizes have been increasing, but student to teacher ratio remained 11:1 for the 2000-2001 school year.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will enable the school to evaluate the school-based management intiative, recognizing its strengths, as well as areas in need of improvement. Additionally, the results of the study may serve as a guide for other schools within the district or elsewhere wishing to implement a similar program. The study is significant because it seeks to determine the effectiveness of the program in bringing about positive effects for the entire school community.

Organization of the Study

The preceding text contains a focus of the study, a purpose of the study, definitions, limitations of the study, and the setting for the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of literature related to school-based management in the educational setting along with recent research studies on this program and its effectiveness, in general.

The content of Chapter 3 addresses the design used for the study and a description of data collection and population. The material includes a sample of the survey and interview questions, as well as the plan used for analyzing the data. The fourth chapter contains an analysis of the accumulated data and interpretation of the results. Chapter 5 addresses conclusions and implications of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

<u>Introduction</u>

School leadership continues to experience significant changes in relation to overall

responsibility in decision-making. In many schools across the nation, leadership roles

have changed, giving teachers more power in assisting with making decisions and

recommendations for the good of the school (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998).

After all, instructional leadership, in particular, is the work of everyone involved in the

school, not just the work of those traditionally viewed as holding positions of power. It

must be the work of the community (Lambert, 2002). Site-based management has

become a means for enabling teachers to work in teams to make decisions that affect the

school community (Marks & Louis, 1999). Schools no longer need to run under the

power of one individual. In fact, one-person leadership does not tap into the talents or

capabilities of the various teachers on staff (Lambert, 2002). Despite some criticisms that

site-based management is necessary, but alone does not sufficiently empower teachers

(Marks & Louis, 1999), one can ask: Does site-based management give teachers more

say? Does it increase job satisfaction? Overall, do site-based initiatives create better

working and learning environments?

6

Currently, the intern is a third grade teacher at an elementary school located in

Southern New Jersey. The school implemented a school-based management program

approximately nine years ago. Annually, the administration appoints one teacher from

each grade level and specialty area, along with representatives from other school

departments, including administration, clerical, and maintenance to serve on this team.

The team meets to discuss various issues and concerns regarding anything from

instructional practices to school life.

Such a team is important to educators because it offers teachers a place to present their

issues and concerns. In addition to serving as a sounding board for teachers, it affords

them opportunities to collaborate in making decisions that ultimately affect everyday life

within the school. It also provides a medium for teachers to express and share new ideas

or suggestions for improvement. Teachers avoid isolation by working together to build a

consensus. Such collaboration in participatory decision-making is paramount to

restructuring schools, ultimately increasing teacher professionalism (Leonard & Leonard,

1999). Site-based management, therefore, impacts the teaching practice by providing

teachers with more satisfaction, encouraging others to view their work more

professionally.

Despite the fact that site-based management has been in effect for nine years at the

intern's particular school, it is important to note that there are critical factors that affected

this area of study. Nine years reflects that this program is fairly new. Published research

mainly focuses on schools located in urban settings. The intern's research examined a school that does not quite fit a definition of urban, suburban, or rural community. For argument's sake, the intern classified the school community as predominantly rural since it appears to match that definition most. Today, as well as throughout the years of its implementation, various members serve on the site-based team. There are, however, some that do not, including parent, PTA, school board, and community representatives. It is also important to note that the committee at the particular school in the study makes recommendations. They do not have final say or authority on final outcomes. The principal alone still reserves that right because the teacher's union did not want its teachers responsible for final decisions. Those who may not be knowledgeable of the union's influence on this "recommendation-only policy" may feel a sense of distrust with the site-based management initiative at the school. Without the right to make a final decision, they may feel that the team is nothing more than a facade.

The school's implementation of this form of management represents an interest in allowing staff to be involved in making recommendations. These recommendations greatly affect the quality of practices and life at the school. This study examined teachers' perceptions of site-based management. The research questions addressed included: Do teachers believe site-based management gives them a say in school issues? Does it truly seem to be working? Do teachers believe that site-based management improves school climate and morale? When the intern first initiated this research, the intern believed that his colleagues would determine that the site-based management team was effective. The

8

intern believed they would feel that it provided them a place to offer suggestions and make improvements. Additionally, the intern believed that the results of the research would prove that site-based management improved community relations and climate.

Site-based management is a form of restructuring that is occurring in several schools across the United States. It involves a shifting of power from central offices to individual schools (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000). Henkin, Cistone, and Dee (2000) contend that central administration shares power with principals, teachers, parents, and community stake holders in regard to decision-making via site-based management. Moving decision-making from central office control to the actual school enables educators, those with the most knowledge of local school and community issues, to better make decisions about pertinent situations and concerns (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). Site-based management is different from traditional modes of school leadership because it depends on open dialogue and collaboration among staff as well as those outside stake holders involved with the school (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000). Consequently, today's principal needs to create a shared vision with all members of the school community, promote open dialogue among participants, remain, as well as assist all members in remaining, focused on student learning, and promote and support the leadership abilities of others. In addition, the principal should model and participate in practices that enhance collaboration (Lambert, 2002). The role of the principal is a changing one. Rather than lead as one person, the principal draws upon the talents of others. A principal is most effective when he or she no longer leads but assists others in utilizing their leadership capabilities (Eisner, 2002).

According to research, roles in schools are changing before our very eyes as the result of site-based management. The role of the principal, once viewed as the sole authoritarian, is replaced by increased responsibilities on the part of teachers, collaboratively participating in decision-making processes (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998). Principals must now redefine their administrative roles and become better listeners. They need to discuss issues and help others reach a consensus rather than direct or command (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). Leadership should not rest upon the shoulders of one individual, but should encourage others to work together through collaboration (Leonard & Leonard, 1999). In reality, schools that focus on the management of only the principal represent just a small part of the leadership available to them (Barth, 2001). Therefore, the principal no longer serves as the "boss" and the teachers as his or her workers. Instead, the principal assumes the role of facilitator, and the teachers become collaborators and team members who work to improve school life (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998). Schools can only be improved when they recognize their teachers as strong reformers and leaders (Barth, 2001). Research contends that the most effective schools provide responsibility and authority to all members of the school community (Neuman & Simmons, 2000).

It is true that sometimes principals need to make decisions without consulting the site-based team. When situations require principals to make decisions on their own, site-based management still works to support their actions. By connecting with teachers, parents, and community stake holders via site-based teams, principals are better able to gain the support of others when situations arise that require more bureaucratic

decisions from time to time. Administrators gain teacher support in making decisions when they, in turn, support teachers in their work and show concern for their welfare (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998). Administrators gain more support in decision-making by building a stronger network of supporters than challengers (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). As the result of such close ties with members representing various groups, principals draw upon resources within neighborhoods and communities to further legitimate their decisions (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000).

Research provides evidence that conflicts often arise when members with opposing interests or views work together (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000). By applying a solution-orientation approach, the principal often serves as a successful mediator by assisting the team in resolving conflicts. This particular approach considers varying viewpoints, and it allows all parties to work together to resolve conflicts (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000). The manner in which a principal manages differences and disagreements within teams reflects whether or not site-based management leads to real school improvement, or if it is just another educational fad. Collaborative efforts in problem-solving best meet the needs of the school when differences of opinion surface (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000).

Site-based management, according to research, has positive effects on school environments. Data from research literature reflect that participatory decision-making increases professionalism for teachers (Leonard & Leonard, 1999). The creation of a professional community improves the capacity for organizational learning within a school (Marks & Louis, 1999). "The presence of authentic instructional leadership can be

witnessed in the everyday acts of people who take responsibility for improving teaching and learning in the entire school community, and its effectiveness will be revealed in a variety of measures of student achievement" (King, 2002). Site-based management improves teaching and learning when principals are willing to share authority with staff (Henkin, Cistone, & Dee, 2000). After all, all teachers can and want to lead within their schools. Schools are in dire need of their leadership (Barth, 2001). School-based management promotes improvement by moving power away from a central office. It also promotes improvement by giving various members of the school community more control over what happens in schools, including parents and other community members, in addition to school staff (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1993). Supporters of School-based management contend that such an initiative promotes higher quality decisions because they come from a group, rather than an individual (Oswald, 1995). Decisions of higher quality ultimately effect learning and school environments in positive ways.

In addition, site-based management empowers teachers when they feel they have more control in making school decisions. Teachers experience more empowerment when the principal presents himself or herself as a team member, rather than one who overstates his or her authority. Teachers experience this empowerment when principals act within the best interest of the school. Teachers experience a greater sense of empowerment when they actively participate in decision-making and openly express their opinions (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998). The roles of those in power, particularly superintendents and principals, must change in order to create an "empowering environment." Managers must be less directive and control-oriented and, instead, create an atmosphere that enables

12

teachers to try new approaches easily (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1993). Schools that promote teachers' abilities to influence school issues are most successful (Marks & Louis, 1999). Marks and Louis (1999) further state that schools must not only empower teachers, but must focus that empowerment on teaching practices and learning to obtain strong school performance. As conversations among school staff continue, relationships among staff grow as a whole (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). As a direct result, school climate improves, and a sense of community evolves within the organization.

Conclusion

The current literature reflects that there is not much information regarding school implementation of school-based management in suburban or rural areas. The intern's study evaluated a program similar to the ones formerly studied, but focused on a rural setting as opposed to an urban one. Previous research also tends to focus on schools where an administrator shares much of the power during the decision-making process. The school in this particular study, as earlier stated, relies on recommendations to provide the administration with some input to make final decisions. Unlike some of the other schools cited in this literature review, the administrators at the school in this particular study can choose to accept or reject such recommendations. As with the other studies outlined in this review, the intern's study utilized teacher and administrative responses in an attempt to determine teachers' perceptions of school-based management at the Reeds Road Elementary School. With these facts in mind, the intern sought to determine if school-based management worked effectively at the school. The intern also sought to

13

determine if, even without an official say, the staff at the school continued to support this initiative. Overall, the intern examined whether or not school-based management improved the school climate.

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

<u>Description of the Research Design</u>

This study reflects the compilation of data highlighting the various responses from

staff regarding the school-based management team at the Reeds Road Elementary School.

This information was completed during the 2002-2003 academic year. The utilization of

a survey eliciting staff opinions and insights regarding the initiative, as well as an

interview process provided the necessary data to determine the overall effectiveness of

the school-based management team. The study reflects an active research design in order

to provide evidence of the initiative's success at the school.

<u>Development and Design of the Research Instruments</u>

The study utilized a detailed questionaire that served as a survey, gaining pertinent

data from staff members at the Reeds Road Elementary School (see Appendix A). The

survey focused upon obtaining staff insights to determine the program's overall

effectiveness. The instrument's design enabled the survey to be both informative as well

as convenient for staff to complete to ensure active participation from as many as

possible. Staff completed the surveys, placing them in a box after completion to allow

for future compilation and analysis of the results. Specific information, such as number

of years of service and position at the school, was omitted from this study to ensure the

15

confidentiality of the participants.

A select population of the staff received surveys at the start of a week. These staff members answered various questions related to the school-based initiative, particularly questions that reflected their understanding of the initiative as well as their insights as to how effective the program is within the school community. Within the week, staff, per the request of the researcher, returned questionaires to the appropriate box for further action. These questions allowed for the determination of the program's strengths and weaknesses, ultimately providing evidence of the program's overall effectiveness.

In addition to utilizing surveys, this study also included the use of an interview process. Six teachers, randomly chosen ones who did not participate in the survey, participated in interviews at times most convenient to them. Each interviewee responded to the same interview protocol, however, data varied from person to person, as each and every interview was as unique as each individual participant. Such uniqueness is attributed to the fact that each participant beings his or her own personal experiences and opinions to the process. The interview protocol, tested before its actual implementation, consisted of questions seeking to obtain data regarding the effectiveness of the school-based management initiative at the school.

Description of the Sample

The study was conducted at the Reeds Road Elementary School, located in a rural-like area in Atlantic County. Due in part to the large amount of staff members employed

16

at the school, the sample was limited to a select group of members who accurately reflected the overall school community. The selected sample to complete surveys, comprised of twenty-two staff members, included teachers representing various grade levels and areas of specialization within the school, an administrator, a secretary, a custodian, and other support staff members.

Likewise, a random sampling of staff ensured fair representation for the interview process. The names of teachers not participating in the survey were placed into a box for a drawing. Six names selected determined the participants for the interview process—3 females and 3 males from various backgrounds and varying years of service. The interviews took place at the convenience of each participant.

Description of the Data Collection

After the selected areas of representation were identified, names from each area of representation were placed into a box for equal consideration for participation in the study. Names from each area of representation were drawn to acquire active participants for this study. After the drawing of the names, individuals were approached regarding participation within the study. Participants either completed surveys and returned them or participated in an interview process accordingly.

Description of the Data Analysis

The data analysis reflects information from representatives from all aspects of the school community from support personnel to administrators. Analysis of the surveys and interview responses provided evidence of the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

17

Surveys assisted with gauging staff perceptions and opinions, and interview questions

enabled staff participants to offer more-detailed insights regarding the effectiveness of the

school-based initiative.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

According to the research previously presented in this study, site-based

management empowers teachers, increasing staff morale. Increased staff morale, as

earlier discussed, builds a more positive environment in schools. This particular study of

the Reeds Road Elementary School in Galloway Township, New Jersey sought to elicit

teachers' perceptions in regards to current research findings on site-based programs in

schools. Comments obtained from interviews at Reeds Road provided the data that

determined site-based management's influence on teacher empowerment and staff

morale. It also provided for measurement of the effectiveness of the program on building

a positive school climate.

Regardless of the position held by each participant in the survey or their number

of years of service, the responses reflected interesting results. The results will be

classified according to four main areas of focus that emerged during the analyzing phase

of the survey process. Those areas include: (a) School Climate, (b) Knowledge and

Understanding of the Program, (c) Giving Voice to Staff, and (d) Overall Effectiveness of

the Program.

Three specific survey questions aimed at gauging how staff viewed the overall working climate at the school. When asked if they believed the overall climate was a positive one, 9% believed that it was not, 27% agreed that it was positive, and an overwhelming 64% said that they agreed strongly that the climate was positive. Similarly, 5% of the participants strongly disagreed that most staff at Reeds Road actively involved themselves in various aspects of the school. Interestingly, 36 % agreed that staff do, in fact, involve themselves in many areas of the school community. A total of 59% of the participants strongly agreed that the staff is very involved within the school community. The final question involving staff insights into the school's climate revolved around whether staff believed that the school-based management team enhanced the school's climate. In response to this particular question, 9% disagreed that the school-based management team positively affected the school's climate. On the other hand, 64% agreed that it does have a positive effect on the climate, and 27% strongly agreed that there is a positive school climate as the result of the team.

I would describe the overall atmosphere of this school as positive.

The staff at Reeds Road are generally involved in many aspects of the school.

The SBM team positively affects the overall climate at Reeds Road.
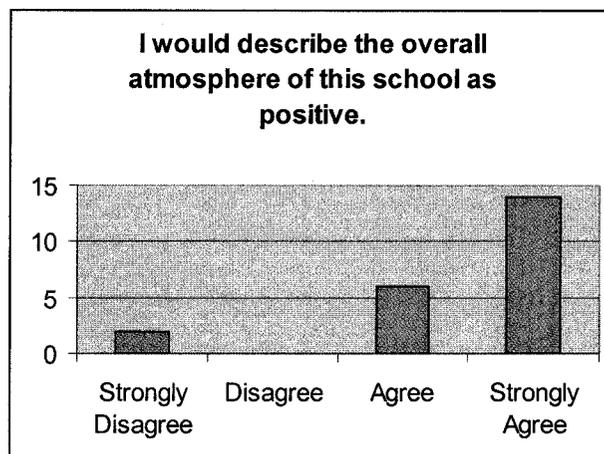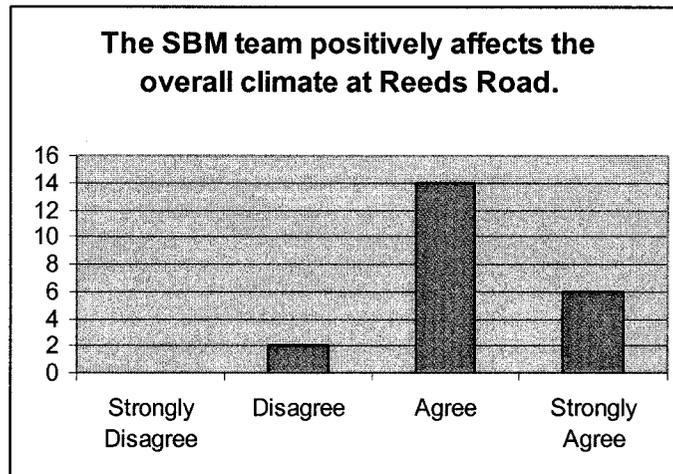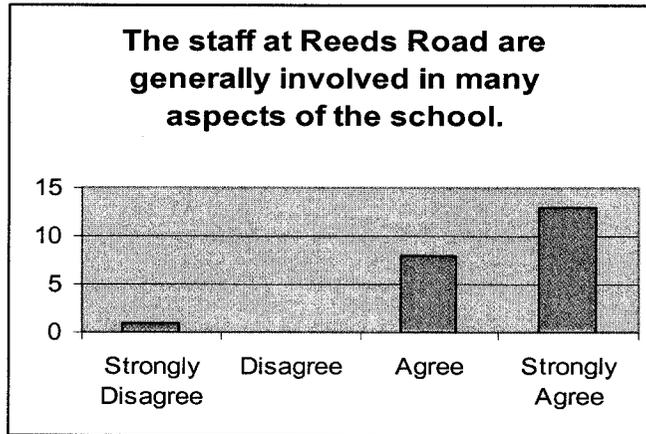
As earlier outlined, another area of focus according to the survey was staff's knowledge and understanding of the school-based management team at the school. Question number 4 of the survey sought to determine staff knowledge regarding this initiative. Only 5% disagreed that they had a "reasonable amount of knowledge regarding the school-based management team." Still, 45% agreed that they had a sufficient amount of knowledge, and 50% strongly agreed that they understood the purpose and function of the team.

I have a reasonable amount of knowledge regarding the school-based management team.
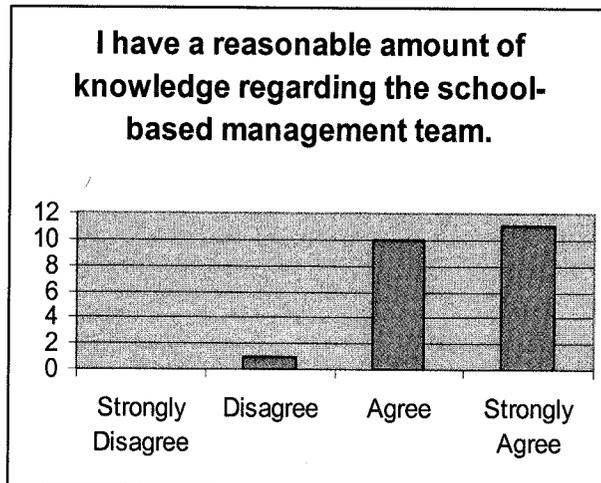
The survey also sought to elicit responses from staff members to determine whether or not this initiative actually gives staff a voice in school affairs. According to the survey results, 55% of the participants agreed that they believed the main intention of the administration to initiate such an initiative was to give staff more voice. Additionally, 45% of those surveyed strongly agreed that the initial intention was to increase staff say in school governance. When asked if the school-based management team "actually" gives staff a voice in the school, 5% disagreed, believing that it actually does not do so. In contrast, 68% agreed that it does give voice in reality, and 27% strongly agreed that it does, as well.

I believe that this school intended the SBM team to give more staff a voice in school affairs.

I believe that the SBM team does, in fact, give staff a voice in school affairs.
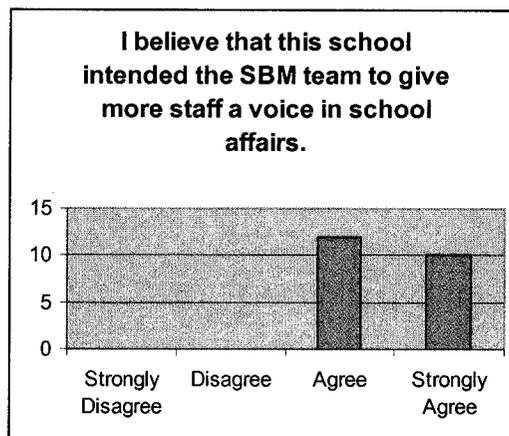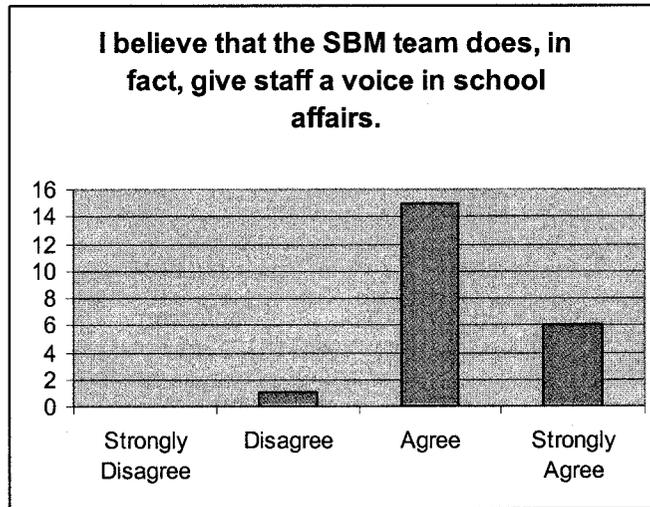
Perhaps the key area of focus emerging from the survey reflects whether or not the program truly works in the eyes of the staff employed at the school. When asked if they have ever had experience with or heard of concerns and/or ideas being brought before the team that received proper attention and follow-up, the results were quite interesting. According to the survey results, 5% surveyed disagreed that this is true in their opinions. On the other side, 50% agreed that this statement reflects truth, and 45 % strongly agreed that they have either experienced or heard of an effective outcome as the result of this school-wide initiative. The question that, perhaps, ascertains whether this initiative is effective the most revolves around each member's opinion as to whether or not he or she would either initiate or maintain a school-based management team at a school if he or she were the administrator. The results reflected that 5% disagreed that they would initiate or keep such a program. Another 50% agreed that they would include this initiative at their schools. Even 45% of those surveyed strongly agreed that they would continue such a practice in their schools.

I have had experience with or have heard of ideas/concerns brought before the SBM team that were addressed and followed through with as a result of the team.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Value	0	1	11	10

If I were an administrator, I would either keep or initiate a SBM team at my school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Value	0	1	11	10
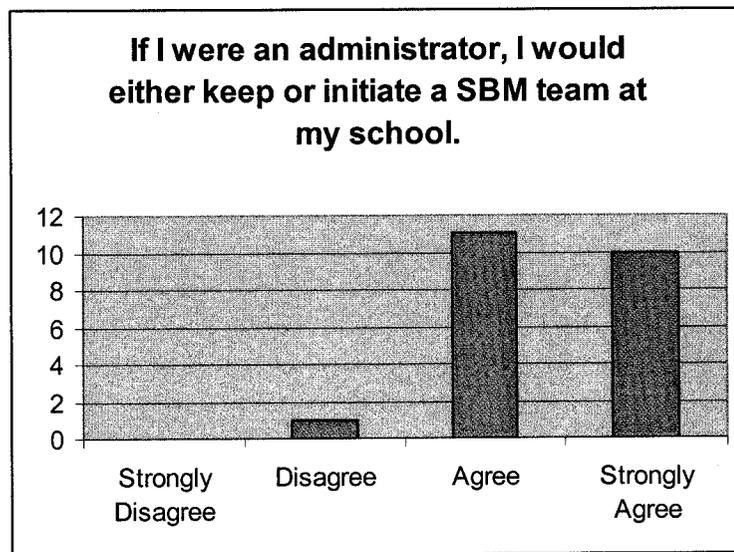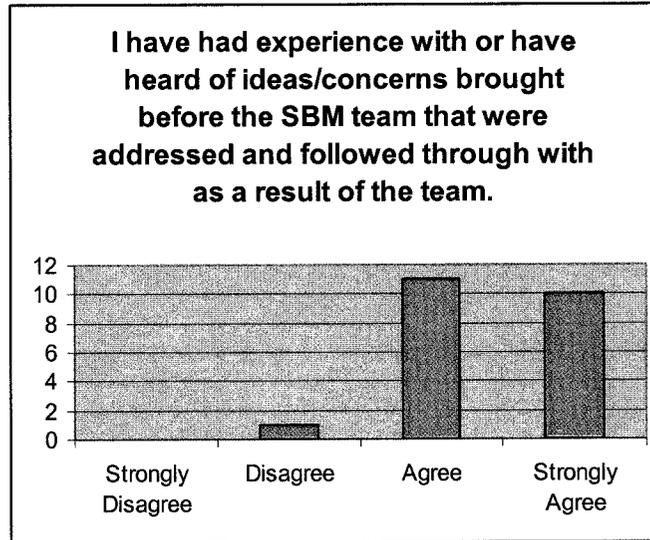
The data from the interviews reflected mixed results, as various opinions surfaced throughout the interview process. Despite some of the differences of opinion found in the results, five main themes, or patterns, emerged: (a) limitation of power, (b) lack of information and/or understanding, (c) staff empowerment, (d) support for administrators, and (e) increase in morale and climate. Each of these themes presented their own individual commendations or concerns.

Limitation of Power

Several teachers interviewed expressed concerns about the actual power given to school-based team members in making decisions at the school. When I asked Teacher B, a school-based team member, if he believed staff felt they played a part in decision-making, he responded, "I'd say some do and some don't. Everyone probably knows ultimately the final decisions are his [the principal]." In fact, later in the interview, I asked him, "You say the team [school-based management team] has some strengths. Do you see any weaknesses?" He responded by saying that a weakness was "probably a philosophy held by many that decisions are not made by the school-based management team but by the administration." Teacher C expressed a similar response when I asked her "What kinds of things have you heard [about the school-based team]?" She stated "Somebody said that the administration lets people discuss a lot of things, but that it really comes down to what the administration wants." I asked Teacher F, another site-based team representative, "Do you think there are any weaknesses [of school-based management] you could share?" He responded:

> ...Some issues, I feel, are already decided before they are even discussed. Sometimes I feel the things the principal doesn't want are not going to get through. I think its powers are limited. I think it is principal controlled. Because our principal is positive, we are lucky. If our principal wasn't positive, our school could fall apart if it is principal controlled.

Interestingly, Teacher A mentioned a similar weakness when he replied "...if all twelve

members [-he used twelve as a general number] agree on something, it can still stop there. They cannot go further unless it is O.K.'d by the supervisor."

Teacher D and Teacher E did not particularly comment on final say in regards to decision-making. Teacher D admitted that she was "not as closely involved to know many weaknesses at this point." Despite the fact that she had a good understanding of school-based and its positive effects on the school, she willingly spoke of her lack of knowledge of its bylaws and how exactly it is carried out at the school. Perhaps this lack of knowledge contributed to why she did not mention anything regarding final say on decisions. Teacher E did not reflect this pattern possibly because she served on the team for more than two years. Of all the people interviewed, she seemed to have the most accurate information about the team and its policies. Unlike the others who reflected no knowledge of the team's "recommendation only" policy, Teacher E possessed a deeper understanding of the school-based program at the school. Therefore, she did not comment on the final say issue at hand.

In addition to the final say issue, some members voiced concern about those situations that are too large that the team cannot effectively make a decision. They also discussed concerns about some issues that according to the words of Teacher F "are out of the school-based management team's hands." To highlight this point, I asked Teacher E "Do all issues get resolved the way the faculty want them to?" She answered by saying, "Not necessarily because sometimes we find it's a board policy and there is not much we can do." Teacher A learned from some faculty members when he first joined the staff that "there is no result to it[school-based management]." He continued, "I was told that you'll

26

do all this work and nothing will come of it." He stated that "the limitations of it are a weakness…it cannot implement a policy for every problem." Teacher F stated, "Our policy is limited. Some decisions are made only at a district level." In other words, many decisions are out of the control of the team. Teacher B emphasized this point when he responded to the question, "What is your overall impression as a team member?" He answered, "…sometimes I think it works, and sometimes I don't. It depends on what's being discussed—what decisions need to be made—the size of the problem…sometimes the site-based team can discuss it, but we don't have the power to fix it." He further stated, "To a certain point, some of the bigger decisions are out of our hands." Teacher C and Teacher D both commented about their lack of knowledge about the team's policies and procedures. Perhaps this is the reason why neither one responded by stating additional limitations of the team at Reeds Road.

<center>Lack of Information and/or Understanding</center>

Several of the comments from the participants in this study highlighted the fact that many staff members held misconceptions or a lack of complete understanding about school-based management and its purpose. When asked if she believed she could openly attend a school-based management meeting as a nonmember, Teacher C responded:

> You know, I'm really not sure. One time I was walking by and saw an administrator going into a room full of people. At first, I thought I was late for a faculty meeting that I may have missed. I asked the administrator if there was a meeting today. He told me it was a school-based management meeting, and that I

<center>27</center>

wasn't a member so I wasn't missing a meeting. I assumed from then on, that

meetings are open to SBM members only, but I am not sure.

Teacher A responded similarly in response to the topic of attending meetings as a

nonmember. He stated, "I did not know that anyone can attend meetings." He continued

discussing the minutes from the meetings that are available for all staff following a

meeting. He commented, "Yes, I am interested in them [the minutes]. In fact, they

always have who was in attendance [listed on them], but it seems to be only people on the

committee." His additional comments emphasized the point that there seemed to be an

issue with a lack of information and/or understanding of the process:

> If I knew that it was a policy that the supervisor needs to have final say, let's
>
> say as a means to protect the staff, or if I found that meetings were open to all
>
> staff, then my feelings would change on the negatives [weaknesses of school-
>
> based] for more positive [strengths]...[In such a case] we may not have final say,
>
> but knowing that our points were valued or appreciated would make it better.

Teacher F also shared a misconception when I asked, "Why do you think this

school initiated a site-based management team?" He answered, "I would think it was a

district policy to set it up—a way to let schools make their own decisions." The fact of

the matter is that our principal set up the school-based team approximately nine years

ago. In fact, we are the only school in our district that utilizes this form of shared

leadership. Again, Teacher D commented that she was "not as closely involved" to know

much about the program.

Teachers A, C, D, and F are fairly new staff members when compared with the years of service of Teachers B and E. Teachers B and E have both served as school-based representatives, and they had served on the team significantly longer than Teacher F who was also a representative. These findings most-likely had an effect on the patterns found in this area of concern. Those with less knowledge or less experience tended to provide responses that suggested there were misconceptions of which they were not aware.

Support for Administration

Some participants described how school-based management built support for administrators from staff at our school. I asked Teacher D, "If you became principal of Reeds Road, would you keep the site-based management team?" She responded, "Yes…[it] builds support for you…Being a teacher and being a principal are totally different…Teachers don't always see what's going on from the administrator's side, and vice versa. I think by having these perspectives, better decisions can be made." Teacher B held a similar position when asked the same question. He replied, "I think it is an important facet to have in a school because it gives the administration an opportunity to understand the feelings of his or her staff." When asked the same question, Teacher A responded that he would keep the team as well because "at meetings, I would feel more comfortable posing ideas to them [the team] before discussing them school-wide." Teacher F responded, "I think it [school-based management] helps you drum up allegiance to you and your cause. It is a good way for the principal to get support behind him. It is a powerful tool for him to discuss issues and help him get things done and passed." Teacher F also explained the program helps to "break down the wall between

29

administration and staff." These patterns exist because the participants agreed there was an overall benefit from school-based management. To them, it is a reality at the school that the principal does often gain the support of the staff on various issues and proposals. This reality contributes to why several teachers responded this way.

Staff Empowerment

All participants in this study supported how school-based management gave power, or a voice, to staff. Teacher D commented on the fact that our administrator included the staff in decision-making at the school. She further stated, "By involving staff, I think he [the principal] allows people to feel they have a say." When I asked her about her involvement with school-based management, she responded, "I haven't participated as a member...but I feel I have input into it...I know my ideas weren't just dismissed because I've seen my ideas brought before the team, and I've seen them carried out." She continued to support her case by stating, "I think it gives everyone a voice as far as decision-making in school." Teacher E contended, "If you get a say in the running of where you are whether it's your family, church, or business, etc., ...you feel more a part of it, rather than if you're told what to do." When I asked this same teacher if she would keep the team if she were a principal, she responded, "Yes...in some places, you [a school-based team] may be a figure head and be here for show. But, here, teachers really do have a say." I asked her, "What are the strengths of school-based management, and she responded, "The strongest thing is that this team does its job. If a decision is to be made...they actually go back and ask opinions of other staff."

30

I asked Teacher B, "Why would it be a good idea to have it [school-based management] here?" He claimed that it was important to have because the staff "would have the opportunity to communicate concerns and play a part in decision-making." When I asked him the strengths of the team, he emphasized the point that "it gives the staff an opportunity to voice opinions...It gives a voice from each and every level or department at the school—so everyone is basically represented." When asked about his opinions about its strengths, Teacher F contended, "Teachers can feel that decisions are not always coming down to them from the top. I think it's good that teachers feel they have a voice in school decisions."

In addressing strengths of the site-based team, Teacher C stated that the team was positive "because everyone has input and things get addressed quickly. Everyone has a say." Teacher A saw the team as a strength because it elicits the "opinions of staff before implementing something." He further proposed that "allowing your staff to speak out is a great asset." He also commented that he would keep the program if he were the principal because he found it to be "a good system that allows for feedback" from a faculty. Of the six people interviewed, four previously worked in schools where there was no opportunity to have a voice, let alone input into decision-making. On the other hand, all of us have a human desire to have others hear us—for our opinions to count. Therefore, even those with no other negative experiences to use as comparisons contributed answers that reflected the empowerment brought about by the school-based initiative. These patterns are evident because all of the participants felt that the team, despite some

31

weaknesses or misconceptions, in their opinions, has brought about a positive good at the school.

Increases in Morale/Climate

Interestingly, all six teachers interviewed made comments regarding school-based management and its effects on staff morale and school climate. I asked the participants, "In what ways do you think site-based management has affected the atmosphere or climate here at Reeds Road?" Teacher F claimed, "I think it has made it more positive. I think it has made a more positive impact." Teacher A stated, "Overall, it has affected the climate here in a positive way being that problems have been solved in a positive way here at our school. I know that if I have a problem, I can talk to a member who will bring it up. It may not be solved, but at least it will be brought up and discussed." Teacher C believed that site-based management "helps to improve the atmosphere." Teacher E felt confident when she said, "I think it [school-based management] has made it [the climate/atmosphere] stronger in that people in this building know, not even believe, but know they have a way to bring out issues." According to Teacher B, the program has made the school climate positive because it "makes them [the staff] feel more involved. It brings the family atmosphere back into it. It gives them more ownership." Similarly, Teacher D highlighted that:

> It has made it a more positive atmosphere...I think when people feel they have an input, they feel valued. The administration is giving the staff a voice. Having input makes people feel important and valued. When people feel valued, I think that brings staff morale up...I think when you involve staff, it raises morale.

These patterns surface within all of the participants' comments because each and every one of them expressed that the overall environment of the school was positive. This fact echoed in the comments I received from all interviewees when I asked each of them to "describe the environment here at Reeds Road." For example, Teacher A proudly shared, "There's a family atmosphere here." Teacher E elaborated on this when she described the building as "a great place." She continued, "I love the building—the tone that's here. We have a really great atmosphere!" Teacher B summed up the words of all the other participants' comments on the environment when he asserted, "There is a family-like atmosphere. The staff looks out for one another and for the kids. The kids look out for one another. It's a very caring environment—one you don't find other places."

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

This research study sought to gain teachers' perceptions in order to answer the question of whether or not school-based management worked effectively at the Reeds Road Elementary School. In an attempt to answer this question, it was important to look at the data to determine whether there was sufficient evidence of success or a lack of success for the site-based team.

While reviewing the survey data, it became obvious that four main themes surfaced as previously discussed in this study. Similarly, five main themes emerged from the reposponses given by the interviewees during the interview process. Upon analyzing these themes, or patterns, several issues or concerns with the school-based management decision-making process emerged throughout the research findings. Despite such concerns, the data reflect evidence that supports the idea that the staff believed that school-based management worked effectively at the school.

According to the survey data, a majority of the participants answered positively, agreeing that the school-based initiative does, in fact, work effectively, as well as enhances the climate at the school. Most participants in the survey concluded that Reeds Road benefited from the site-based initiative. Only 5% disagreed that they would either initiate or maintain a school-based initiative if they were administrators compared with the 95% that either agreed or agreed strongly with having school-based teams at their schools.

34

According to the interview data, three out of six teachers interviewed commented on the fact that members of the site-based team held limited power in regard to having a final say on pertinent issues. These teachers noted that, despite team discussions and decisions, the administration had the final say on any issue in actuality. The three teachers viewed this as an obvious limitation of power. All three of the members appeared to have no previous knowledge of the team's "recommendation only" policy. Instead, they tended to view site-based as a place to raise discussions about ideas, issues and concerns. They did not necessarily see it as a means for making decisions, at least not in all situations. The other three participants did not share comments that supported this particular pattern, however, they expressed other concerns that reflected additional limitations of the team's power.

Three teachers, two of which were different from the original three who shared concerns regarding final say, commented on other areas that they saw as limitations to the program. The data indicated that these specific members felt that the team could not solve every problem and that certain problems were "out of their hands." They commented that sometimes the size of the problem affected the decision-making process of certain issues. The data indicated that the larger the impact of the decision, the less likely the members would have the power to "fix" or resolve problems. On the other hand, however, all six participants claimed that site-based management did solve previous problems at the school. All six of the interviewees stated that several recommendations brought to the table became important decisions or policies at the school as results of the process.

Another pattern evident in the data emphasized the point that several staff members lacked important facts about site-based management and its purpose. The data suggested there was a lack of understanding among four of the six participants. Staff lacked knowledge on site-based policies and functions.

Interestingly, two of the four above mentioned discussed their lack of knowledge about attendance at site-based meetings. These two openly admitted that they were not sure if meetings were open for all staff to attend as they so pleased. When I asked my administrator about attendance requirements, he stated that meetings were open to all staff at all times. Ironically, two interviewees were unaware of this welcome. The other four made no comments in relation to the issue of meeting attendance. Judging from some of the participants' responses, as well as others' lack of discussion about the issue, it appeared that staff did not have a clear knowledge or understanding of this open door policy. The data reflect that site-based management's policies and procedures are, perhaps, not clear to all staff.

An additional theme, or pattern, presented in the data was the idea that school-based management helped to "break down the wall between administration and the staff." Four teachers believed that the site-based initiative built support for the administration at Reeds Road. They felt this enabled the administration to make better decisions at the school. With support, they believed the administration made better decisions that they could openly accept because they felt they had a genuine input into the decision-making process. Previous research supports these findings, emphasizing that administrators receive stronger support in making decisions by building a stronger network of supporters (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000).

The theme of teacher empowerment rang true throughout the entire interview process in this study. All six participants agreed that the site-based program gave people a voice—a say in some of the workings of the school. Despite some limitations of power previously discussed, staff found this input important in giving others a means for voicing opinion, ultimately, allowing them to share in the decision-making experiences at the school. Previous research supports these findings in stating that teachers become more empowered as they become active participants in decision-making (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998).

As a result of this type of inclusion, all six interviewees found that site-based management was instrumental in boosting school morale. All of the participants viewed site-based as a positive tool positively affecting the climate at the Reeds Road School. Past research reflects that increasing communication among staff improves their relationships with one another (Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). According to the data in this study, the school-based program added to the "family-like" atmosphere at the school.

When considering the original questions posed in this study, the data provided evidence that the school-based initiative at Reeds Road Elementary School does give teachers a say. As previously mentioned, all interviewees discussed their opinions and perceptions as to how the site-based program empowered them and gave them a voice in decision-making. They also expressed a sense of value they felt from being considered and included in decisions regarding everyday happenings at the school.

Does site-based management truly seem to be working at Reeds Road? Yes! The data indicates that site-based management, despite some limitations, provides the staff with an integral means for participation in decision-making processes. Staff believed that the administration welcomed and valued their input. Participants commented on personal accounts in which they witnessed the successes of the site-based program at Reeds Road. Clearly, school-based management at Reeds Road did live up to its standards in involving staff and including their ideas in the day to day operations of the school.

Lastly, does site-based management improve school morale and climate? Perhaps the strongest amount of evidence supported the idea that a majority of the people involved in this study spoke highly of school-based management's positive effects on staff morale and school climate. The data suggested that that the site-based program does, in fact, improve the atmosphere at Reeds Road.

From the data obtained in this study, clearly views and feelings vary about the site-based initiative at Reeds Road. These mixed feelings particularly revolved around the policies and procedures of the program and the way in which they operate in the school. It is of extreme importance to note, however, that there is a strong consensus from both the administration and staff that site-based works effectively at Reeds Road. Previous research suggests that schools are most successful when they give teachers more opportunities to influence school issues (Marks & Louis, 1999). Interestingly, the administrators, most of those surveyed, as well as the six teaching staff members interviewed agreed with the value and importance of site-based management. Almost all

participants either firmly explained or supported the importance for having the program in place at the school. They viewed it as an effective tool to include all school members, empower staff, increase staff morale, and improve school climate.

The data concluded that school-based management did contribute to a stronger sense of community at the school. Previous literature from other studies indicates that site-based management has positive effects on school environments. This is especially true because professionalism increases as staff experience more opportunities for participatory decision-making (Leonard & Leonard, 1999). According to the findings in this study, school-based management certainly is another positive element found within the Reeds Road Elementary School Community.

As an educator and a member of a closely knit school family, I believe the results found in this study will have much impact on my school community. When considering the data from the research, it is apparent that staff have concerns with the "processes" involved in site-based management, rather than the actual program itself. I firmly believe that the data obtained from this study give my school administration the necessary information to review and revamp the program in order to increase its effectiveness. To date, there has never been, to my knowledge, a survey, let alone an opportunity for administration or staff to gain or offer perceptions on this program. Perhaps, this study will open some doors for reflection and communication.

These findings will be presented to the administration team at the school. The administrators, aware of this research, openly welcome the results of this study.

Hopefully, this study will provide them with some insights into teachers' perceptions of this program.

In this research, issues have surfaced that suggest a need for changes to ensure additional success for the site-based initiative at Reeds Road. An awareness of teachers' perceptions will possibly bring about changes in such things as how to choose team representatives, how many consecutive terms a representative can serve on the team, and how to better inform staff of policies and procedures. Despite the fact that the administrative team provides copies of the policies of the school-based team on an annual basis, it is obvious that there is a break in communication about the team and its function. Whether the information is not clear or the staff members are not carefully reviewing the materials remains to be seen at this time in the study. It is evident now that more information regarding the team and its bylaws must be clarified for staff in an attempt to increase understanding of the program and the processes associated with it. This study not only introduces the need for changes in the processes of the program but also brings about the issue that it is perhaps time to open membership up to others outside the school walls. Further dialogue can include a need for parent, PTA, and outside community members in decision-making. Additional discussion about allowing staff more power in decision-making beyond that of a general recommendation may need to be revisited and discussed, as well. Hopefully these findings will encourage administration, staff, and union leaders to come together to discuss the benefits of staff participation in making final decisions.

Changes, as well as discussions, in these areas will greatly impact the site-based practice by allowing it to possibly become even more effective than it currently is today.

This study has changed some of the perceptions I previously had of the program prior to completing this research. I now understand, based on the findings of this study, that the school-based team does effectively meet the needs of the staff. The staff's responses and their support of the program touched me despite its current weaknesses. All in all, most have a strong foundation of what the team is all about, and most believe it serves its purpose. As a future administrator, I recognize the need to communicate clearly and often with my school family, as well as provide them with outlets to share their perspectives on school issues and programs. According to research and the results of this study, school-based management does appear to be a positive tool for both administrators and staff in maintaining a positive working environment that ultimately enhances the atmosphere for learning.

This study was strong in the sense that it elicited from teachers their true perceptions of the school-based initiative. Teachers provided the powerful data that can now only improve this program at our school. This study offered teachers a voice in the governance of their school. While this study reflects elements that make it strong, it would be more complete if there was more time to extend the research. With more time, in addition to surveying various staff members, I could have interviewed administrators, as well as support and clerical staff to obtain their perceptions. Perhaps field observations of school-based meetings at other schools would have added to this study.

Time is of the essence as they say. Unfortunately, there is not always enough time to accomplish all of the things we would like to in such a short period of time. Since this study only focuses on one school's perspectives, it would be most informative, perhaps, to extend this research to other schools currently utilizing site-based management teams. With that in mind, I might consider these additions while possibly extending this research in the future in order to compare and contrast the results. Extended research may focus on which practices of school-based management make for a most effective program. By extending the research and expanding upon the research questions of this study, one will be better able to determine how to ensure these initiatives are most conducive to everyone. Ultimately, this research, and studies like it, lead us in improving our school communities.

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Appendix A

School-based Management Survey

School-based Management Survey
Please check or circle only one answer for each question. Thank you for your time and responses. Please return to Terry O'Connor's mailbox when you have completed this survey. Thank you.

1. I have been employed at this school for: ____ 1 to 5 years ____ 6 to 10 years

   ____ 11 to 15 years ____ 15+ years

2. I would describe the overall atmosphere of this school as positive.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

3. The staff at Reeds Road are generally involved in many aspects of the school
   (eg. participate in extra activities, serve on committees, etc.).

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

4. I have a reasonable amount of knowledge regarding the school-based management team (eg. its purpose, how it works, etc.).

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

5. I believe that this school intended the SBM team to give more staff a voice in school affairs.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

6. I believe that the SBM team does, in fact, give staff a voice in school affairs.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

7. I have had experience with or have heard of ideas/concerns brought before the SBM team that were addressed and followed through with as the result of the team.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

8. The SBM team positively affects the overall climate at Reeds Road.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

9. If I were an administrator, I would either keep or initiate a SBM team at my school.

   Strongly disagree   disagree   agree   strongly agree

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about your past educational experiences prior to teaching.

2. Why did you decided to enter the education field and work within an elementary school setting?

3. Tell me about your teaching experience in this school.

4. Describe the school environment here at Reeds Road. Why do you perceive it to be this particular way?

5. Why do you think this school initiated a school-based management team?

6. What knowledge and/or experience with school-based management do you have or have you had at Reeds Road?

7. In your opinion, what are some strengths and/or weaknesses of school-based management at our school?

8. In what ways, do you believe, school-based management has affected the atmosphere/climate here at Reeds Road?

9. If you became the principal of Reeds Road, would you continue with the school-based management team? Why or why not?

10. Do you have anything else to add? Thank you for your time and for sharing your ideas with me today.

Biographical Data

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