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HAS THE ADOPTION OF WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM BENEFITTED  
EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS AT CANTRELL MIDDLE SCHOOL?

By  
Derrick L. Carrington

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
Of  
The Graduate School  
At  
Rowan University  
May 16, 2002

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Date Approved May 16, 2002

## ABSTRACT

Derrick L. Carrington

Has the adoption of Whole School Reform benefited eighth grade students at Cantrell Middle School? 2002  
Dr. Kathy Sernak  
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of Whole School Reform on the delivery of instructional services to eighth graders using a community-based action research design. The study will result in a feasibility report to inform parents, teachers, students, administrators, and board members. The use of Whole School Reform for eighth graders is a means of providing them with creative learning processes while learning in an efficient manner.

This particular study was directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students who attended the Cantrell Middle School as fifth graders. There was also a focus on fifth through eighth grade teachers. The Intern gathered opinions, knowledge, and experiences via a Likert scale survey as they related to Whole School Reform. The Intern wished to study the negative and/or positive aspects of Whole School Reform as to whether or not the student's skills have been addressed in Language Arts Literacy and Math. It was also important to study the academic records of the 2001-02 eighth graders in order to determine how their grades have been affected since the implementation of Whole School Reform. Additionally, the Intern focused on 39 randomly selected students for the academic grade evaluation. The results of the teacher survey and grade evaluation were recorded in a line graph and table respectively.

From the information the Intern gathered during this study, the Intern came to the conclusion that various problems existed within the Cantrell Middle School. There was a lack of teacher involvement in the development and implementation of the Whole School Reform model. Second, there was a lack of curriculum alignment to support the WSR model. Additionally, there was a lack of community involvement and professional development training to address student needs. Finally, there was a tremendous lack of leadership via school administration with the implementation of Whole School Reform.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Derrick L. Carrington

Has the adoption of Whole School Reform benefited eighth grade students at Cantrell Middle School?  
2002  
Dr. Kathy Sernak  
School Administration

The Intern revealed the effectiveness of the Cantrell Middle School's Whole School Reform program on eighth graders' Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics ability in order to enhance their basic skills so they will increase their learning potential and pass state required tests.

From the information the Intern gathered during this study, the Intern came to the conclusion that various problems existed within the Cantrell Middle School. There was a lack of teacher involvement in the development and implementation of the Whole School Reform model. Second, there was a lack of curriculum alignment to support the WSR model. Additionally, there was a lack of community involvement and professional development training to address student needs. Finally, there was also a tremendous lack of leadership via school administration with the implementation of Whole School Reform.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Change in academic programming can bring effectiveness or disruption to the teaching and learning environments of students. Whole school reform is a term that has become popular in recent years. This term has forced teachers to change their teaching methods as well as the students' ability to complete projects and/or assignments.

The focus of this study was to determine whether or not the eighth grade students at the Cantrell Middle School on the East Coast have acquired the basic skills in order to succeed in their core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This particular project was directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students and teachers. The intern planned to discover the effectiveness of the school's whole school reform program.

The purpose of the study was to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of whole school reform on the delivery of instructional services to eighth graders using a community-based action research design. The study has resulted in a feasibility report to inform parents, teachers, students, administrators, and board members. The use of whole school reform for eighth graders was a means of providing them with creative learning processes while learning in an efficient manner.

This study made a contribution to the interests of its participants in order to determine if whole school reform is beneficial to students and teachers.

*Change -To be or cause to be different; alter.*

*Academic - Of or pertaining to a school or college.*

*Effective - Having an intended or desired effect.*

*Disrupt - To throw into confusion.*

*Teach - To impart knowledge or skill (to).*

*Teaching - The work of teachers.*

*Learn - To gain knowledge, comprehension, or mastery (of) through experience or study.*

*Learning - Acquired knowledge.*

*Acquire - To gain possession of.*

*Environment - The surroundings of anything that has life.*

*Student - One who attends a school, college, or university and makes a study of something.*

*School - An institution for instruction and learning.*

*Reform - To improve by correction of error or removal of defects.*

*Popular - Widely liked or appreciated.*

*Method - A systematic means or manner of procedure.*

*Ability - The power to do something; skill.*

*Focus - To produce a clear image of.*

*Study - A branch of knowledge.*

*Determine - To decide, establish, or ascertain authoritatively or conclusively.*

*Succeed - To accomplish something attempted.*

*Core - The innermost or most important part of anything.*

*Cluster - A group of things growing or gathered closely together.*

*Subject - A course or area of study.*

*Intern – An advanced student or recent graduate, as of a medical school, undergoing supervised practical training.*

*Discover – To arrive at through search or study.*

*Efficient – Effective production with a minimum amount of waste or effort.*

*Whole school reform – A process that seeks to simultaneously change all elements of a school’s operating environment so those elements align with a central, guiding vision. The ultimate goal is to improve student performance.*

In addition, the study was limited to students and teachers of the eighth grade. There was also a focus toward a small cluster of eighth grade students who had attended the Cantrell Middle School as fifth grade students.

Furthermore, this study took place in the Cantrell Public School District located in the City of Cantrell. Cantrell is a city united by strong community business relations and an aggressive redevelopment program. It is strategically located just 5 miles from downtown Parker Island and is ready to meet the challenges of rapid economic growth. Cantrell features an active mix of retail, professional, and light industrial businesses.

Cantrell’s proud heritage is built on a firm foundation of cultural and business diversity. Together, these two forces have created a whole new era of economic expansion, not to mention a renewed sense of community spirit. Poised and ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead, Cantrell is truly a “City On The Move.”

Also, Cantrell is comprised of a solid mix of urban characteristics. Lead by an active mayor and city council government, the community features full-time police and fire departments, a public library, and a recreation center. The city runs efficiently through

comprehensive utility services, which include public sewer and private water, electric, natural gas, and cable television.

Cantrell's housing is diverse and includes single family, duplex and multi-family homes, apartments and condominiums. The city's population is 16,945, median family income is \$34,905, median age is 32.8, there are 6,601 households, and the total civilian labor force is 8,499.

The City of Cantrell is conveniently located near highways, airports, bus terminals, and railroad lines. It offers easy access to all major East Coast communities.

The City of Cantrell uses the mayor-city council form of government. There are nine members of City Council including the council president. Other city officials include: the City Administrator, Treasurer, City Clerk, Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) Coordinator, City Solicitor, Fire Chief, Chief of Police, Recreation Director, Economic Development Coordinator, Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, Housing Director, Zoning & Construction Coordinator, and Public Works Superintendent.

Cantrell has recently celebrated the opening of two beautiful brand-new schools. They are, a ninth through twelfth grade high school and a fifth through eighth grade middle school. As always, Cantrell continues to provide children with the guidance they need to carry on with their educational goals. There are two state-of-the-art facilities, serving as another learning reinforcement, as well as the educational tools it takes to provide students with the knowledge they need to move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the completion of these two new schools – parents, teachers, and children have benefited from reduced class sizes district-wide. Plus, Cantrell has also instituted several new initiatives aimed at improving student performances. All of these factors, along with strong parental involvement, can lead to an optimal learning experience for any child!

The school district has 9 board members. Four are female and 5 are male. Board meetings are held bi-weekly starting at 6:00 pm. The Superintendent of Schools is Dr. Malcolm Johnson. The district currently has 21 school administrators. This allows each of them 171.5 students and 15 faculty members.

The city of Cantrell has six schools. They are the following: one high school (9-12), one middle school (5-8), and four elementary schools (pre k-4). The median salary for district administrators was \$84, 404 and for faculty it was 37,378. The median years of experience for district administrators is 28, however, for faculty it is 7. At the Cantrell Middle School, the student to faculty ratio was 11.6 to 1 and the length of school day was 7 hours whereas instruction time was 6 hours. Cantrell's curriculum follows its state mandated standards and is focused on project based learning.

There was a 1.5-cent reduction in school taxes on the Cantrell Public Schools 2001-02 Budget from last year, decreasing the tax rate from \$1.193 to \$1.178 per \$100 of assessed property value. Over 90 percent of the funding came from the state and federal government because Cantrell was classified as a Special Needs District. This funding allowed Cantrell to implement the needed programs in the district without overly burdening city taxpayers. The student population has continued to increase while during the 2001-02 school year the district had enrolled over 609 new students.

The following chapters were integral parts in developing this Report. Chapter One discussed the change in academic programming and its effect on student achievement. Chapter two presented a Review of Literature on Whole School Reform. A Design of the Study was described in Chapter three. Chapter Four gave a clear picture of the research findings and Chapter Five presented conclusions of the entire study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, change in academic programming can bring effectiveness or disruption to the teaching and learning environment of students. As previously stated, whole school reform has become a popular term in recent years. This term has forced teachers to change their teaching methods as well as the student's ability to complete projects and/or assignments. The focus of this study was to determine whether or not eighth grade students at the Cantrell Middle School have acquired the basic skills in order to succeed in their core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This particular project was directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students and teachers at Cantrell.

The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of whole school reform on the delivery of instructional services to eighth graders using a community-based action research design. The Cantrell Middle School adopted Co-Nect as its model. The study has resulted in a feasibility report to inform parents, teachers, students, administrators, and board members. The use of whole school reform for eighth graders was a means of providing them with creative learning processes while learning in an efficient manner.

#### Review of the Problem

This study was directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students who attended the Cantrell Middle School as fifth graders. The 2001-02 eighth grade students were the first class of fifth graders to attend the Middle School that opened in September 1998. The 2001-02 school year was their fourth year attending the school. There was also a focus on eighth grade teachers so that the Intern may gather their opinions, knowledge, and experiences as they relate

to whole school reform. The intern wished to study the negative and/or positive aspects of whole school reform as to whether or not their basic skills had been addressed. It was imperative to study the academic records of the 2001-02 eighth graders in order to determine how their grades have been affected since the implementation of whole school reform. This project was focused on a very diverse class of students who have the longest tenure at the Cantrell Middle School.

### Review of Major Concepts Related to the Problem

McChesney found, in recent years, a new generation of programs had become available to educators with a promise that they will help all students succeed in school. These programs have in common, the assumption that school reform, to bring about measurable improvement, must embrace the whole school. Those who adopt Whole School Reform (WSR) must be prepared to reexamine and change all parts of school life, from attitudes and culture to leadership, parent and community involvement, curriculum, facilities, and, of course, financing. Interest in whole school reform models had grown when Congress appropriated \$150 million for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRDP). Almost 3,000 schools received awards of at least \$50,000 each to implement whole-school reform models or to develop their own research-based reforms. The implementation must be aimed at helping all children meet challenging state standards. Keltner (1998) found that “this ‘new approach’, takes an integrated view of the reform process. It is based on the concept that the way to successfully improve school performance is to simultaneously change all elements of a school’s operating environment so as to bring each element into alignment with a central, guiding vision”(p.1).

Although whole school reform models have differing emphases, New American Schools [NAS](1999) found they’ve shared several characteristics as shown below:

1. They aim to help all students reach high academic standards.
2. They are comprehensive in their approach; address all core academic subject areas, all types of school organizations, and all grade levels; and align all resources (human, financial, and technological).
3. They incorporate best-practices research and are the subjects of ongoing evaluation aimed at continuous improvement.
4. They provide faculty and community with a shared vision, focus, and organizing framework that shapes and directs reform efforts.
5. They provide high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators.
6. They offer innovative and effective ways to involve parents and community in schooling.

Schaffer, Nesselrodt, and Stringfield (1997) found there is an unfortunate reality that failure of whole school reform can be traced to several issues. The issues are these: (1) financing; (2) leadership; (3) commitment to the program; (4) perceptions of the general public, parents, and students; (5) staffing; (6) curriculum; (7) political pressures; (8) racial problems; (9) insufficient facilities; (10) problems of management and scheduling students; and (11) staff communication.

Success, however, depends on many factors. Wasley, Hampel, and Clark (1997) found that the school's staff must share a common image of a different, more rigorous kind of schooling. School staff must be able to deal directly with difficult and often controversial issues and be willing to receive and act on critical feedback from external sources. In addition, the faculty must have or develop self-analysis skills to monitor data on student achievement, as well as be able to deal simultaneously with multiple aspects of school curriculum, pedagogy,



assessment, and school culture. Involvement of parents is also crucial in whole school reform implementation.

Keltner (1998) wrote, whole-school reform (also known as comprehensive school reform) is a process that seeks to simultaneously change all elements of a school's operating environment so those elements align with a central, guiding vision. The ultimate goal, of course, is to improve students' performance.

According to American Institutes for Research [AIR](1999), this question has been asked: Does whole-school reform really work? So far, the results are modestly positive. In 1999 a study by the American Institutes for Research found only 3 out of 24 whole-school reform models presented strong evidence that they raised student achievement. NAS (1999) claims that every one of their designs, when fully implemented, has improved schools' attendance rates, parental involvement, and student performance. NAS (1999) adds, "Some schools have not achieved the results they expected, and a few have not experienced any improvement after adopting a design".

NAS (1999) found that in order to determine whether it's reform program is achieving the intended results, a school must be able to conduct an effective evaluation of the reform practices. Anderson (1999) found that "schools that lack the ability to analyze their own results will always be at a disadvantage" (p.30). To renew CSR program funding, schools are required to evaluate their whole-school reform model. Involvement of key stakeholders such as parents, community members, teachers, administrators, boards of education, and students is crucial in the evaluation process.

According to Stone (2001), dating back to the early 1900s, teaching practices used in public schools have fallen into one of two categories: traditional/teacher-centered, or progressive/student-centered. Classroom practice is usually a mixed blend of these two views.

Educators grasped the student-centered approach but parents and school boards want traditional outcomes. The fact is, student-centered instruction places student enjoyment of the learning experience ahead of everything, including knowledge and skill acquisition. What it ignores, however, is the loss of opportunity and the risk of educational failure that often come from immature decision-making. Teachers continue in their beliefs about student-centered instruction because they have been taught that it is “teaching” that produces the best outcomes. However, these are not the outcomes most valued by parents and taxpayers. A hundred years ago, student-centered teaching was a benefit in education. Today, it is an obstacle in the path of school reform.

In a May 1997 decision, the Supreme Court accepted New Jersey’s Core Content Curriculum Standards as the definition of what students need to learn as the result of the thorough and efficient education promised to them by the State constitution. The Core Content Curriculum Standards cover seven academic subjects. A year later, in 1998, the justices of the court strongly endorsed whole-school reform as an approach that enabled students of the 28 Abbott school districts to reach those academic goals. While arriving at its decision, the Supreme Court directed the Department of Education to study all of the various approaches to improve the academic performance of students from low-income families. As a result of an extensive review of programs and research across the nation, the department proposed “whole-school reform” as the best and most effective approach. At the time, the Supreme Court appointed a Superior Court judge, along with a nationally recognized expert, to hold hearings on the department’s findings. Throughout those extensive hearings, the department’s research was thoroughly scrutinized, and the opinions of other experts were solicited. Additionally, urban school improvement efforts throughout the nation were reviewed. Opponents of the State Department of Education’s proposals were given every opportunity to challenge them

with any contradictory evidence. Based on the hard evidence produced by that exhaustive process, the Supreme Court accepted the department's recommendations and ordered the implementation of whole-school reform in all Abbott district elementary schools (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDE], 2001).

Obviously, middle level education has been firmly established as an important link in the chain of young people's educational experiences. Unfortunately, there were many school board members and superintendents who have very little or no practical understanding of the purpose of middle schools. Also, they lack the supervision and support that is necessary for middle schools to operate effectively. It is no surprise, due to a leadership deficit, that many middle schools are ignored by their school systems while others are little more than middle schools in only name. Several families view middle schools as being unfocused, dangerous, unsafe, violent, disrespectful, and a risk-taking peer culture. The previous statement is one of the reasons there is a growing interest to abandon middle schools that include grades six through eight and replace them with schools that include kindergarten through the eighth grade. Unfortunately, families are afraid of losing their connections with their young adolescent children. They believe an elementary school environment will be more protective and nurturing to maintaining positive family relationships. Middle school reform is not about creating few relationships. It is about putting students first and the interests and conveniences of adults second (Hayes Mizell Reader, 2000).

Hess (1999) found that, "In education, simply implementing reform has been regarded as success, regardless of whether the reform works. Most reform is not a serious attempt to change teaching and learning in the classroom but is intended to bolster the status of the district policymakers. Although parents look to their elected school board members to decide on the

best education policies for the district's schools, it is in fact the superintendents who get their way 99 percent of the time"(p. 230).

Clowes (1999) indicated, following School Board elections, new members are eager to show progress but unsure of how to do it. Therefore, amateur board members leave it to the experienced administrators to take the lead on reform. Experienced administrators take the lead by producing what F. M. Hess calls "policy churn". According to Hess, this phrase is, "an endless stream of new initiatives, with the schools and teachers never having time to become comfortable with any given change." It is not unusual for a newly elected board to bring in a new superintendent to make drastic changes within two years. The new superintendent has declared the effort a success, and moves on to another job. He stated, "Reform—rather than being the remedy to what ails urban schools—has been a distraction and a hindrance," (Hess, 1999, p. 234). Reform efforts have absorbed significant resources of time, money, and energy in endeavors that had little to do with improving urban education. To stop the constant chaos, Hess recommended making urban leaders more accountable for academic performance and long-term district improvement. Among his suggestions for increasing accountability is to use school choice as a way to decentralize decision-making and reward or punish the performance of schools.

Irmsher (1997) found that there were two broad conditions that are typically present in schools that successfully serve at-risk students. First, these schools functioned as caring and cohesive communities. Second, they operated under standards similar to high-reliability organizations (HROs). In the schools visited by researchers, a strong sense of community provided the foundation for positive change at the building level. In the most successful schools, reform decisions were made, sustained, and supported at the building, district, and state levels that were characteristic of HROs. A non-educational example of an HRO is an air-

traffic-control tower. In order to meet the expectation of 100 percent failure-free operation, these organizations provide whatever level of support is necessary to achieve the goal. Obviously, the two concepts are interrelated. The schools that functioned as high-reliability organizations were also more successful at facilitating the development of enthusiastic learning communities.

Hanninen (2000) found that school reform initiatives have resulted in many changes in American education during the past decade and longer. Side-by-side against the reform climate are several other changes that have affected American classrooms. Those changes are: changing demographics, increasing diversity of student populations, and limited fiscal resources. There were several key elements that guided the reform process. Those elements were: creating belief statements, clarifying the issues, and designing strategies for implementation. Creating belief statements about all learners is guided by the following questions:

1. What do we believe (about all learners)?
2. What do we know?
3. What do we want?
4. What do we do?

The development of these questions has generated a set of district or school level belief statements, vision statements, and expected outcomes that will affect the entire community. While working individually, in small groups, or as a whole, each person generated belief statements.

According to (Muirhead, Tyler, and Hamilton, 2000) Whole School Reform (WSR) was a response to the State of New Jersey's Supreme Court ruling in the 1998 Abbott v. Burke case. The Region III Comprehensive Center studied the implementation of WSR in New

Jersey by using multiple research methods including several surveys, site visits, and telephone interviews. The Region III Comprehensive Center is one of 15 Comprehensive Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which provides technical assistance to educators in states, local school districts, schools, tribes, and other recipients. The Center services Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Furthermore, it is a project of the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education. The goal of the Region III Comprehensive Center is to improve student achievement and collaborate with state education agencies, intermediate units, and low performing and high poverty schools. Finally, the Center is to ensure that school reform initiatives are being met. From this report, R3CC demonstrated how, and in what ways, the success of WSR efforts are critically linked with organizational capacity. Additionally, the study found, without total cooperation at all school levels including building, district, and state, WSR cannot succeed.

The (Muirhead et al, 2000) report presented the findings of an evaluation commissioned by the New Jersey Department Of Education (NJ DOE) and conducted by the Region III Comprehensive Center at The George Washington University. The focus of the report centered on the implementation progress of WSR in 18 of the 30 districts which were designated as Abbott districts in the state of New Jersey during the 2000 school year. The purpose of the study was to inform the NJ DOE of the progress of implementation or WSR model programs and strategies in three school cohorts. It also included the technical assistance needs of district and school level stakeholders.

At the district level, (Muirhead et al, 2000) found that the importance of organizational capacity is critical and connected. It enables educators to raise achievement for all students, particularly in high poverty schools such as those discovered in the Abbott school districts. The

Center also discussed how the majority of the policies are not sufficient to transform schools into collective effective enterprises. In addition, the Region Three Center believes that technical assistance is a vital part of capacity building.

A survey focused on the primary components of WSR by (Muirhead et al, 2000) was administered to each of the three key educator groups. Components of the survey included:

- \*Planning,
- \*Governance,
- \*School-based budgeting,
- \*Personnel,
- \*Academic program,
- \*Training,
- \*Resource integration and alignment,
- \*School environment,
- \*Student and family services, and
- \*Family involvement.

There were three surveys that were developed for this study. They were the following:

(1) The NJ WSR School Staff Survey, (2) The NJ WSR District Staff Survey, and (3) a Process Evaluation of WSR administered to the NJ Department of Education. All three surveys, using Likert scales, addressed various aspects of WSR implementation. The results of the first survey measured the perceptions of the School Management Teams (SMTs) in their implementation progress of WSR. It also provided data on the level of support provided to the SMTs by the district and the state in the implementation of WSR. The second survey provided data on the perceptions of district administrators on their progress in implementing various aspects of WSR. In addition, the second survey provided information to the degree that NJ

DOE activities and products appropriately support WSR. The third survey provided data about the perceptions of NJ DOE staff regarding their support to schools in WSR, the extent to which NJ DOE activities and products were beneficial, and the level of progress schools realized in WSR implementation.

According to (Muirhead et al, 2000) a telephone interview of eight NJ DOE staff involved in managing the state's "roll-out" process was conducted in order to provide an expanded perspective on WSR implementation. Interview questions focused on the various steps involved in implementing WSR, the goals and mission of the state DOE in this effort, and the perceived impact of the reform on districts and schools.

Four (Muirhead et al, 2000) questions guided the study. Representative information for each question is summarized below:

Question 1: What perceptions do members of School Management Teams (SMTs) have of the progress of Whole School Reform implementation?

Overall, SMT members stated that they had made "significant progress" in all components of WSR implementation (i.e., planning, governance, school-based budgeting, personnel, academic program, training and professional development, integration and alignment of resources and functions, school environment, student and family services, and family involvement).

However, analysis of individual items within each component revealed that "significant progress" was not made in the following areas of WSR:

- \*A sufficient number of faculty/staff to implement fully and support the WSR program;
- \*Adoption of an academic program that meets the needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students;



\*Training/professional development in the following areas: needs identification of programs and services; alignment of curriculum and instruction to state standards; personnel selection appropriate to the school; and use of zero-based budgeting processes;

\*A school-based team that would train parents for volunteer roles (i.e., Student and Family Services); and

\*An ongoing effort to involve parents as partners in school-based decision making (i.e., membership on SMT).

Question 2: What perceptions does district staff have of the progress of Whole School Reform implementation?

The district staff, which assessed their own progress in implementing WSR observed that “some progress” was made in implementing all components of WSR. However, an analysis of individual items identified areas of WSR implementation in which “less progress” was made.

These areas included:

\*Training and technical support to SMTs;

\*Budgeting issues;

\*Professional development for school staff; and

\*Provision of data to schools for purposes of planning and decision-making.

Question 3: How do SMTs assess the quality of support provided by districts?

SMT members rated district support the highest in the area of curriculum alignment and weakest in the area of providing performance and demographic data for decision-making.

Question 4: How do SMTs and district administrators assess the quality of support supplied by the state?

District and school respondents agreed that there were three areas in which the state provided support for WSR implementation to “some extent” only. These areas were:

- \*SRI team support for schools,
- \*Start-up grants and incentives, and
- \*WSR model showcases.

Of these three areas, NJ Department of Education is urged to focus on the first only-SRI team support for schools. The reason for this is fairly straightforward: now that all Abbott schools have begun WSR implementation, the other two areas are pre-implementation strategies and are no longer needed.

The following, according to (Muirhead et al, 2000) are lessons regarding organizational capacity for school reform. As stated earlier, this study was predicated on the idea that schools cannot take responsibility for improving student achievement if the organizational capacity necessary to work effectively as a collaborative enterprise is not in place. In this report, Region III demonstrated how and in what ways WSR strategies are related to the elements of organizational capacity defined in the literature.

The Center (Muirhead et al, 2000) points out, that WSR policy, with its specific focus on building the organizational capacity of schools, has not addressed the needs of district administrators or NJ DOE staff in creating their roles so that they might provide the technical assistance that schools need to implement WSR successfully. According to the study, it is equally important to realize that NJ DOE and district administrators need to develop their own level of knowledge at the individual and institutional levels if they are to provide educational direction and leadership to advance WSR at the school level.

Some new methods (Muirhead et al, 2000) that district and Department of Education staff must change are institutional structures and individual roles to maximize efficiency, effectiveness and job performance. Specifically, they must change from:

\*Centralized bureaucracies to decentralized institutions that manage autonomous schools.

\*Categorical programs and budgets to consolidated programs and budgets.

\*A management perspective focused on monitoring program compliance to a technical assistance perspective focused on continuous improvement.

\*Organizations rich in data which are largely inaccessible to organizations able to help district and school staff organize, analyze and manipulate data in order to permit educators to make meaning about student learning.

Based on the (Muirhead et al, 2000) study findings, it is recommended that NJ DOE target two areas for assistance and support of the implementation of WSR in Abbott districts and schools: (1) provide ongoing technical assistance to district and school level administrators and to community organizations that can support WSR, and (2) conduct additional research on the implementation of WSR. In terms of presentation, each recommendation is paired with the particular stakeholder group it is designed to serve. The groups are: the district, the school and community members. Also, each recommendation is presented by technical assistance and research categories.

In the area of technical assistance for district level administrators, it is recommended that NJ DOE:

\*Work with districts to design training for SMT members on how to hire personnel appropriate for their schools.

\*Work with district administrators to design training for curricula alignment to the state content standards.

\*Work with district administrators to expand curricula alignment training to include instructional and classroom assessment alignment to the state content standards.

\*Continue training on how to collect, organize, and analyze comprehensive data at the district level to facilitate administrators' assistance and support of schools engaged in a continuous improvement process for managing student improvement.

\*Create a partnership with Abbott districts to develop a statewide warehouse for student achievement data. This centralized resource would enable educators at district and school levels to access and manipulate data in order to inform a continuous improvement process aimed at advancing and sustaining student achievement.

\*Create a partnership with Abbott districts to develop an accountability system that is primarily based on a philosophy of capacity building, enabling educators to become knowledgeable of assessment strategies.

It is recommended that the NJ Department of Education provide the following training at the school level:

\*Train SMT members on how to identify needs for additional programs and services.

\*Advance training in the area of zero-based budget development and budget adjustment to facilitate annual assessment of school needs.

At the community level, it is recommended that NJ DOE form partnerships as follows:

\*Collaborate with organizations that support parent involvement and assist them to implement the elements of WSR and train parents for volunteer roles and partnerships with the schools. Among suggested organizations are:

- a. New Jersey PTA
- b. ASPIRA of New Jersey, Inc.
- c. NJ Association of Parent Coordinators
- d. Parent Information Resource Centers

Due to the emphasis of WSR on school restructuring, (Muirhead et al, 2000) found the state has to this point focused on providing ongoing assistance to schools via PIRCS (Parent Information Resource Centers). However, based on the study findings, we recommend that the NJ DOE expand its technical assistance to incorporate the district level. The rationale for this is that district administrators must build their own capacity to provide the technical assistance schools need to implement WSR successfully. The Center strongly recommends that the state maintain its support for schools through its SRIs while increasing the level of support for districts.

We (Muirhead et al, 2000) recommend further that the NJ DOE consider developing a research plan in collaboration with NJ stakeholders. Among questions that merit consideration and additional research are:

\*What is the relationship between successful implementation of WSR and improved student achievement?

\*How and in what ways does the selection and fidelity of model implementation affect student achievement?

\*How might “lessons learned” from each successive cohort advance understanding and improve implementation for cohorts engaging in WSR?

\*Considering the large and growing number of limited English proficient (LEP) and language minority students, how and in what ways do existing WSR models address their needs?

In sum, the (Muirhead et al, 2000) data provided useful information to NJ DOE on how to improve the implementation of WSR. An important lesson of the study is that the state needs to increase its technical assistance to districts. The recommended context of this technical assistance emphasizes the need of NJ DOE staff and district administrators to work

together in order to build their individual and institutional capacity to support schools in the implementation of WSR. Finally, it is recommended that the state evaluate the WSR implementation process on an ongoing basis in order to ensure that educators have data on which to base future decisions.

NEA (1999) has co-sponsored a new report, *An Educators' Guide to School wide Reform*. The guide answers three questions NEA members are asking about the most widely available school wide reform approaches:

1. Which of the approaches has a track record for improving student achievement?
2. What kinds of support can schools and districts expect from the developers as they implement these programs?
3. What does it cost to adopt one of these school wide reform approaches?

The guide first provides a rating of 25 approaches in a single table that's similar to comparisons readers find in *Consumer Reports* magazine. One might wonder, "Which reform approach is the best"? Of course, that depends on what characteristics you're looking for. The following three WSR approaches were examined: *Direct Instruction*, *High Schools That Work*, and *Success for All*. Each provided strong evidence that they positively impact student achievement. For many of the approaches, there's little evidence one way or another on whether they help students achieve. Some approaches are new and haven't yet conducted studies to establish a track record whereas others haven't conducted studies even though schools have used them for years.

NEA (1999) found that seventeen of the 25 approaches are in the guide because they're mentioned by name in the federal law that created the *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program*. This federal program provides \$150 million per year, most of which is awarded to schools to help them with the start-up costs of adopting approaches similar to

those reviewed in the guide. The other eight reform approaches are included because they're used in many districts, they've been promoted as a way of improving student achievement in low-performing schools, they've obtained national visibility in the education and popular press, and there is at least some research evidence about their effects on students.

Furthermore, NEA (1999) asked a major question. Why focus on "school wide" reform? School wide reform is a relatively new and increasingly popular school improvement strategy, especially for low-performing, high-poverty schools. In 1994, Congress said schools with a student poverty rate of at least 50 percent could use Title I funds to improve the entire school. As a result, thousands of schools across the country are seriously considering school wide reform. Unfortunately, it is difficult for school employees to obtain accurate and objective information that can help them decide whether school wide reform is right for them.

All things considered, the adoption of whole school reform can either benefit a school or destroy a student's learning environment. As previously mentioned, effective whole school reform programs require the necessary implementation of various activities and strategies. However, following all the necessary guidelines does not guarantee total success throughout. All stakeholders must do their part in order to see positive results. Additionally, whole school reform is a year-to-year process. A school must learn from and continue to correct previous mistakes. It also must stay on the right path when they've received positive results.

The Cantrell Middle School adopted Co-nect as its Whole School Reform model. Co-nect is a comprehensive school reform for grades K-12, which uses project-based learning, instructional educational technology, and online curriculum. Co-nect's belief is in teachers and the support of great teaching. It offers professional development and resources, which are delivered online and onsite by a nationwide staff of educators that work directly with faculty. Co-nect schools and districts have learned to integrate technology into teaching and learning,

enhance the quality of student work, and integrate real-world projects into a standards-based curriculum. The results of the integration are students who exceed academic standards and prepare them for a lifetime of learning and accomplishment. Co-nect makes classrooms successful for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century by gathering the methods, tools, training, and colleagues to assist students for a lifetime of learning in the modern world (Co-nect Schools, 2001).



## Chapter 3

### Design of the Study

#### Introduction

A change in academic programs can bring effectiveness or disruption to the teaching and learning environment of students. Whole School Reform (WSR) has become a popular term in recent years. This term has forced teachers to change their teaching methods as well as the students ability to complete projects and/or assignments.

The focus of this study was to determine whether or not eighth grade students at the Cantrell Middle School, located on the East Coast, had acquired the basic skills in order to succeed in their core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This particular project was directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students and Middle School teachers. The intern wished to discover the effectiveness of the school's Whole School Reform program. The 2001-02 eighth grade class possessed the longest tenure at Cantrell, therefore spending the longest time within Whole School Reform.

#### General Description of the Research Design

The research instrument used in this study was a 15 statement anonymous survey. The instrument followed the educational measuring format of the Likert scale. The survey's purpose was to gather information to assess the effectiveness of Whole School Reform at the Cantrell Middle School. The Likert scale is the most popular measuring tool in educational research. It includes a positive or negative direction in which the surveyed participant indicates agreement or disagreement with a given statement. The professional staff that participated in the survey was requested to respond to statements ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Each statement was followed with the following responses: SA=Strongly Agree;

A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. The Likert scale was the simplest method for me to gather and code the data.

## Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The instrument used in this research design was one to gather knowledge from 39 randomly selected teachers employed at the Cantrell Middle School. Due to time constraints, the teachers were chosen based upon their availability during teacher preparatory and planning periods. A focus was placed upon teachers in all grades from the fifth through eighth grades. Each survey statement addressed the training, knowledge, and effectiveness that a teacher possessed when implementing the Whole School Reform model Co-Nect. It was important to have a wide range of survey statements in order to have a balance in the data that was gathered. Statements focused on areas such as teaching strategies, technology, grading rubrics, lesson plans, possible benefits/modifications, cooperative learning, skill implementation, parental support, and subject-area supervisory support.

## Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The sampling of data gathering was retrieved from 29 regular and 10 special education teachers at the Cantrell Middle School. There was a total of 39 survey participants. In addition, 37 randomly selected eighth grade students had their academic report cards reviewed in order to identify strengths or weakness since the inception of Whole School Reform. With administrative permission and support, the Intern was allowed to randomly select eighth grade cumulative folders for grade observation. Report card data was selected, copied, and returned to the individual student folders. Teachers ranging from the fifth through eighth grade submitted their feedback via the survey. It is important to gather the earliest program data from

fifth grade teachers in addition to data coming from eighth grade teachers. I chose this sample in order to assess the effectiveness of the entire program. The 2001-02 eighth grade class had the longest tenure (four years) at the Cantrell Middle School.

### Description of the Data Collection Approach

The data that was gathered for this study will start with a review of the 2001-02 eighth graders' second marking period fifth grade academic records. It is necessary to gather this data to make a determination of their academic performance prior to the full inception of Whole School Reform. The students were randomly selected for the academic review. Also, fifth through eighth grade teacher surveys were distributed and collected in order to gather the teachers' experiences and knowledge related to the adoption of whole school reform. At the completion of the teacher survey collection, all data will be analyzed in order to identify specific patterns of teacher response. An evaluation of the student's fifth grade second marking period report card was continued until the end of their second marking period report card in the eighth grade.

### Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The Intern will bring meaning to the data by gathering the teacher's knowledge, experiences, and practices as they related to their Whole School Reform model Co-Nect. In addition, the academic records of the current eighth grade students will be evaluated in order to reveal patterns of consistency or inconsistency. A marking period inventory was made so that the stakeholders could observe the data during the subjects' second marking period fifth grade year compared to what had happened from November to February of their eighth grade year. Actually, the Intern was making a comparison of the subjects' fifth grade academic record

(prior to whole school reform inception) with their 2001-02 eighth grade record (during whole school reform).

The data was organized and presented to the stakeholders in the form of a line graph, cumulative paper, and table. There are two areas to the table. One area will indicate academic performance prior to whole school reform and the other will display academic performance during whole school reform. Along with the cumulative paper, a line graph was created to present a statement-by-statement breakdown of each survey response. The breakdown was in a percentage format. The stakeholders included school administrators, teachers, and community members.

In order to gather information to assess the effectiveness of Co-Nect at the Middle School of Pleasantville, please circle your response to each statement as it relates to our school's Whole School Reform model. (Strongly Agree=SA; Agree=A; Neutral=N; Disagree=D; Strongly Disagree=SD) THIS IS AN ANONYMOUS SURVEY!!!

1. The Co-Nect model has improved my teaching strategies.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
2. Technology is essential to implement Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
3. It is very important to use Co-Nect rubrics instead of those implemented by the State of NJ.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
4. All Co-Nect project plans are easy to access.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
5. Co-Nect has benefited all students from special education to regular education.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
6. I have difficulty in managing Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
7. Co-Nect should have modifications/changes made in order to meet our students' needs.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
8. Cooperative learning is a key component with Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
9. My students understand the purpose of a "driving question".  
SA      A              N              D              SD
10. Various skills are taught prior to project implementation.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
11. Co-Nect focuses on student-centered instruction.  
SA      A              N              D              SD

12. Teaching through Co-Nect has benefited my educational career.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
13. My students understand the language in rubrics.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
14. Parental support is necessary for the Co-Nect model.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
15. All subject-area supervisors are well trained in the Co-Nect model.  
SA      A              N              D              SD

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Research Findings

#### Introduction

Change in academic programming can bring effectiveness or disruption to the teaching and learning environments of students. Whole school reform has become a popular term in recent years. This term has forced teachers to change their teaching methods as well as the students' ability to complete projects and/or assignments.

The focus of this study was to determine whether or not eighth grade students at the Cantrell Middle School on the East Coast have acquired the basic skills in order to succeed in their core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This particular project has been directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students and teachers. The intern wished to discover the effectiveness of the school's whole school reform program.

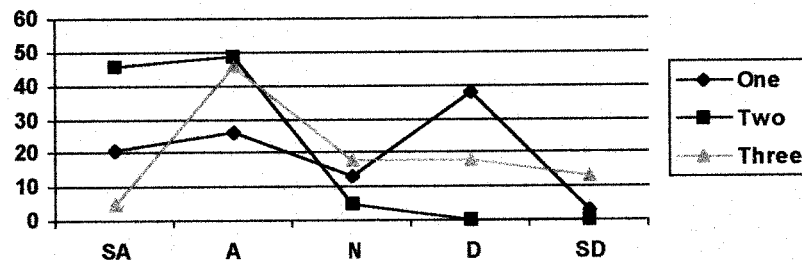
#### Grand Tour Question

What is the effectiveness of whole school reform on eighth grade student achievement at the Cantrell Middle School?

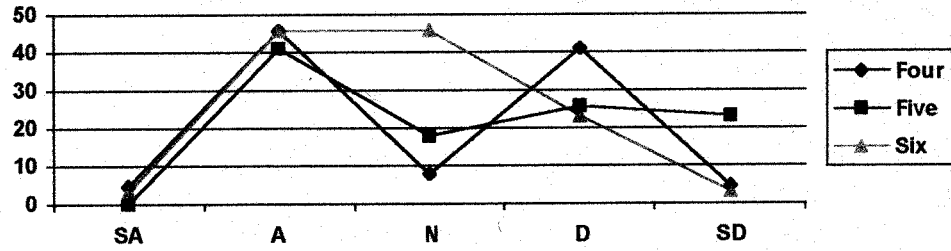
THE FOLLOWING CHART PRESENTS THE FINDINGS FROM EACH SURVEY

STATEMENT FROM ABOVE

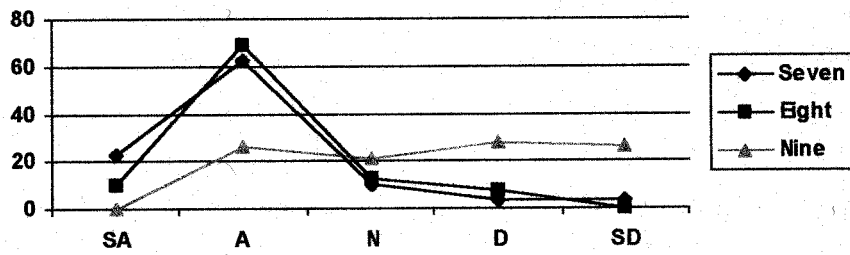
Statements 1-3



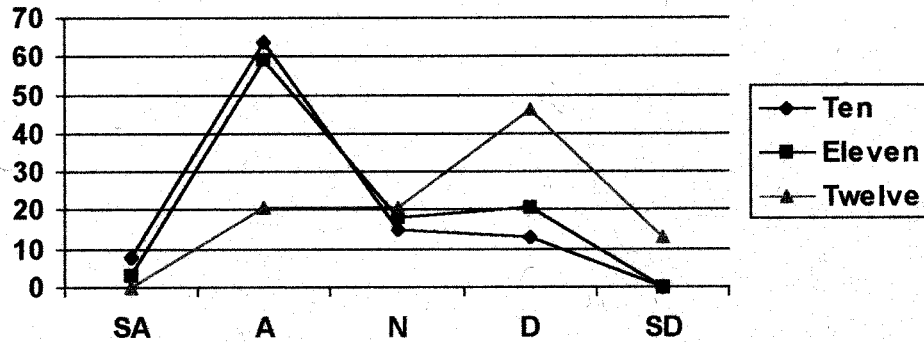
Statements 4-6



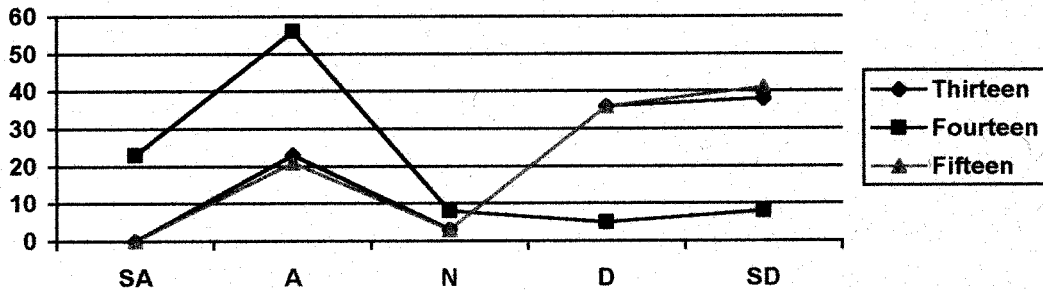
Statements 7-9



Statements 10-12



Statements 13-15



The previous data was based on the percentage of responses rather than the actual number of responses. For the first three statements, the presented data revealed that less than 30 percent of the surveyed staff felt that Cantrell Middle School's Whole School Reform model had improved their teaching strategies. On the other hand, nearly 50% believe that technology is essential to Whole School Reform implementation as well as using rubrics designed via the Whole School Reform model compared to those created by the New Jersey State Department of Education. Less than 20% of the participants were neutral for all three of the first three survey statements.



From statements four through six, nearly 45% of the participating teachers felt that their Whole School Reform project plans were easy to access via the appropriate website. In addition, exactly 40% agreed that WSR has benefited both special education and regular education students. On the positive side, less than 5% of those surveyed strongly agreed that the school's WSR model is difficult to manage.

Statements seven through nine were nearly synonymous regarding staff responses. Less than 24% of the staff strongly agreed to each of the three statements. Approximately 70% agreed that cooperative learning is a key component with the Co-Nect model. Twenty percent or less of those surveyed were neutral on all three of the statements, whereas the percentages ranged from five percent to 30% for those who disagreed on all three. Finally, approximately 25% strongly agreed that their students understood the purpose of a "driving question" and nearly zero participants strongly agreed with statements seven and eight.

A sub-10% response rate strongly agreed to statements ten through twelve. However, a higher percentage agreed that the school's Whole School Reform model focuses on student-centered instruction and various skills are taught prior to project implementation. Less than 50% percent disagreed or strongly disagreed to all three statements and 20% or less were neutral to each of them.

Zero participants felt as though their students understood the language in rubrics in addition to none of them believing that all subject-area supervisors are well-trained in the school's Whole School Reform model. Approximately 50% felt that parental support is necessary for the Whole School Reform model to be successful. A range between 5% and 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed on each statement from 13-15 whereas less than 10% were neutral on all three.

The following tables will present the academic data for thirty-six subjects who were fifth grade students during the 1998-99 and current eighth grade students during the 2001-02 academic school year. A comparison was made from their fifth grade second marking period year with their eighth grade second marking period year. The subjects will be identified by an alphabet in four groups of nine students.

Group I

Subject	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A1	C	D	B	D
B1	B	C	B	B
C1	A	B	A	A
D1	C	C	B	A
E1	D	C	A	C
F1	B	B	B	D
G1	B	C	B	D
H1	A	B	C	C
I1	B	B	D	B

Group II

Subject	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking
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	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A2	A	B	A	B
B2	B	B	C	A
C2	C	D	C	D
D2	B	B	C	C
E2	B	B	C	D
F2	C	D	C	F
G2	C	C	C	D
H2	C	C	C	B
I2	C	F	F	F

Group III

Subject	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A3	B	C	B	C
B3	B	B	B	C
C3	B	B	A	C
D3	C	B	C	C
E3	C	C	F	D

F3	F	D	F	D
G3	C	C	NA	D
H3	B	B	NA	NA
I3	B	B	B	D

Group IV

Subject	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking
	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A4	B	C	A	C
B4	B	C	C	F
C4	B	C	A	C
D4	B	A	A	A
E4	C	B	A	B
F4	C	B	C	B
G4	A	A	A	C
H4	C	C	B	B
I4	A	B	B	A

The first group of subjects displayed improvement, stagnation, and lack of improvement in their language arts literacy skills from their fifth grade to eighth grade second semester. Three subjects improved their grades, four remained the same, and two subject's

grades became worse. The math grades are similar with the exception of three subjects who dropped one or two grades from what they had during their fifth grade second semester year. Group two subjects displayed stagnation or a decrease in their language arts grades. The mathematics area was a mixture of academic performance due to stagnation, increase and decrease of grades. The first three subjects from group three remained the same or displayed improvement in language arts. Two out of the next three subjects displayed failure whereas one of them was stagnant. In regards to the final three language arts subjects, one was stagnant while no data was available for the other two during their eighth grade second semester. Mathematics appeared to be the most challenging for this group because 6 out of 9 subjects went from above average to average or below. Seven out of nine subjects in the fourth group displayed above average to excellent improvement in the area of language arts. The majority of the math grades ranged from average to excellent except for one subject who went from a "C" during their fifth grade second marking period to an "F" during their eighth grade second marking period.

As evidenced in the above tables, no exact pattern of academic performance was present. There were nine subjects in each of the four groups. There was a mixture of results in the Language Arts Literacy performances of the subjects in Group I. Some individuals remained the same, others improved their grades, and some decreased them. As for Group I Math subjects, one-third of the subjects improved their grade performance, one-third remained the same with their fifth grade performance, and one-third received lower grades than previously received. The majority (5 out of 8) of the Group II Language Arts Literacy subjects received the exact grade as eighth graders that they received as fifth graders. Four subjects displayed lower grades and none showed any improvement within the group. Four of the Group II Math subjects decreased their academic performance over the time period, two

showed improved grades, and three remained the same including one subject who failed at the end of both marking periods. Group III was the first group of subjects where grades were unavailable for two of the students. No second marking period eighth grade Language Arts Literacy grades were available due to transfers out of the school. Five subjects managed to receive the same grade in which they had in the fifth grade and only one showed improvement. The Math performances from this group were the worst from any of the others. Five out of eight individuals received lower grades. For one individual, no grades were available due to school transfer, and two subjects received the same grade as in the fifth grade. Finally, five out of nine Group IV Language Arts Literacy subjects displayed improvement, two made the same grade as fifth graders, and two subjects decreased their academic performance. In regards to Math, two subjects grades improved, five remained the same, and two subjects decreased their grades from their fifth grade performance. Overall, 16 of the 39 subjects displayed academic improvement since the inception of Whole School Reform. Nine of those 16 improved in Language Arts Literacy and 7 out of the 16 improved in Math.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Change in academic programming can bring effectiveness or disruption to the teaching and learning environment of students. Whole school reform has become a popular term in recent years. This term has forced teachers to change their teaching methods as well as the students ability to complete projects and/or assignments.

The focus of this study was to determine whether or not eighth grade students at the Middle School of Cantrell have acquired the basic skills in order to succeed in their core subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This particular project will be directed towards a small cluster of eighth grade students and teachers. The Intern wished to discover the effectiveness of the Cantrell Middle School's Whole School Reform program.

#### Conclusions & Implications

From the information the Intern gathered during this study, the Intern came to the conclusion that various problems existed within the Cantrell Middle School. From the start, the Intern saw there was a lack of teacher involvement in the development and implementation of the Cantrell Middle School's Whole School Reform (WSR) plan. Secondly, there was a lack of curriculum alignment to support the WSR model. Additionally and unfortunately, there was a lack of community involvement. Parents, business owners, city officials, retired teachers, and members of the community have failed to involve themselves in the "village" that is necessary in educating a child. Furthermore, there was a need to have professional development training to address student needs instead of having in-services for "show and tell" purposes. There was a tremendous lack of leadership with the implementation of WSR. No Whole School Reform model can be successful without the school administration's ability to lead people.

## Further Study

Based on what the Intern found, the Intern recognized a need to raise the expectations of the school as they've related to the five Benchmarks (i.e. standards) of the Co-Nect Model. The Cantrell Middle School should attempt to move from where they were currently rated within the benchmarks and strive to achieve the next highest benchmark. It was imperative to show improvement from one year to the next in the Whole School Reform model. The Co-Nect Comprehensive School Reform Benchmarks are the following: Benchmark 1=Community Accountability for all students; Benchmark 2=High-quality teaching and learning; Benchmark 3=Comprehensive assessment for continuous improvement; Benchmark 4=Team-based school organization; and Benchmark 5=Sensible use of Technology.

In relation to Benchmark 1, Cantrell rated at a 1.1 possessing a Culture of High Expectations. This means that the school sets forth clear and high expectations for student learning. These expectations are challenging yet reasonable, and address academics as well as behaviors and habits of the mind (e.g., reliability, civility, team orientation, creativity, critical thinking, and a willingness to work hard). The entire community works relentlessly to ensure that all students meet these expectations and succeed at the highest possible level. The community strives to see to it that no student falls through the cracks. The Intern recommends that the school work towards a 1.2 rating achieving a School Climate Conducive to Learning. The school must acquire effective strategies for removing barriers to learning, identifying and assisting students in need of special help, and promoting an atmosphere and culture that's conducive to excellence in teaching and learning.

In regards to Benchmark 2, the school ranked at a 2.2 rating (Thoughtful Discourse). For this benchmark, classroom visits reveal high levels of student engagement, thoughtful classroom discussion around open-ended questions, and a range of cognitively rich learning



experiences (e.g., cooperative learning, brainstorming, informal debates, and role-playing). Observed written work revealed evidence of critical thinking, which is thoughtful conversation between author and audience. Also present are, a range of perspectives, information, and ideas. The school's goal should be a 2.3 rating. Acquiring a Compelling, Coherent, and Conceptual Curriculum must be obtained. This means that the entire faculty works to develop and maintain a shared understanding of what is important to teach and learn and what is currently being taught and learned in different subjects at different grade levels. The faculty works to establish and refine a flexible, standards-based, "less is more" core curriculum organized around a set of topics and concepts that are inherently interesting and that really *matter* to teachers and students alike. Benchmark 2.3 is similar to the educational system developed in Japan.

The Third Benchmark places the school at a 3.2 grading, which is Multiple Measures of Progress. The school has an effective standards-based assessment system that measures each student's knowledge and skills in multiple ways. Teachers use data from standardized tests to inform instruction. However, care is taken to ensure that tests are not allowed to *drive* instruction. There is a consistent, reliable, and standards-based system for measuring the quality of authentic student work (e.g., exhibitions, portfolios). Teachers use this information along with test data to track progress toward high academic standards for individual students as well as progress of the school as a whole. The school needs to reach Benchmark 3.3, Diagnostic Use of School-Level Data. The principal, instructional leadership team, and entire faculty regularly review year-to-year data on student performance in reading, writing, mathematics, and other core subjects. The data are separated into useful categories in order to: (a) identify and address weaknesses; (b) identify and assist individual students or groups of students in need of special help or challenges; (c) identify and assist teachers or groups of

teachers who need additional support; and (d) track progress toward concrete challenging goals.

The fourth Benchmark places Cantrell Middle School at a 4.1 rating (Participatory Instructional Leadership). With active support from the principal, a strong and effective instructional leadership team works to ensure a positive school climate and excellence in instruction school-wide. The team communicates well with faculty members, families, and other key stakeholders and involves many of these people in its duties, for example, by inviting them to serve on action teams or study groups to deal with particular issues. The leadership team and its duties have become firmly embedded in the school culture and should survive the departure of the principal or other members. Effective mechanisms are in place for bringing new teachers into the process as quickly as possible. Cantrell needs to reach a 4.2 rating to become a Cohesive School Community. With this rating, a close-knit school community ensures that no student is invisible or anonymous. In a large school, teachers and students are organized in small collaborative learning communities (“clusters”), with teachers having collective responsibility for small groups of students for two years or longer. The purpose is to strengthen and extend relationships among teachers, students, and families and to help give teachers a better sense of students as individuals, including an understanding of their lives and culture both inside and outside of school. In a smaller school, such structures may not be necessary because teachers, students, and families are already close.

Benchmark 5 presents Cantrell with a 5.1 rating (Shared Technology Vision). Unfortunately, technology is present but is not available on a daily basis to the students. The entire school community shares a vision for the use of technology to support high quality teaching and learning throughout the school. This vision is documented in the form of a carefully thought out plan for curriculum support, maintenance, upgrade(s), and an expansion

of the technology infrastructure, including hardware as well as software. The plan: (a) is informed by an overall instructional vision for the entire school (i.e., it is an educational technology plan); (b) includes a training component; (c) includes both short-term and long-term goals; (d) takes into account the “total cost of ownership” of the technology; and (e) addresses social and ethical issues. Cantrell must gain Access to Modern Technology, which is Benchmark 5.2. The school has a fully functioning modern technology infrastructure. This combines both administrative and instructional functions, is fully integrated into the life of the school, and is freely open to everyone in the school. The infrastructure includes a school wide local area network with a shared file server (allowing students to store their work in folders in a central location), e-mail, desktop access to the Internet, a full set of integrated software tools, and a well-stocked educational software library with technology-based curriculum resources in all key content areas. Calculators, digital cameras, and other tools are widely available when and where they are needed, in classrooms as well as in labs. Where necessary, technology is adapted for learners with special needs.

The Intern, based on information received from its Co-nect facilitator, rated Cantrell Middle School. The school was rated based on the Co-nect Comprehensive School Reform Benchmarks. The Intern believes the ratings are accurate due to personal experiences, staff development training, teacher survey responses, and the analysis of the Co-nect Benchmarks. For example, the Intern rated Cantrell Middle at a 5.1 on the Technology Benchmark due to lack of resources, technological staffing, inconsistencies in Internet usage, daily access to computer and/or printer usage, and data which would permit the school to be rated at a 5.2. The goals of Co-nect are set by the school’s facilitator, school administration, and teaching staff. Every goal is communicated to the faculty via teacher in-services and staff development sessions. Also, a formative evaluation is conducted via the school facilitator surveying the

teaching staff to indicate where the staff is benchmarked at the conclusion of the year and where it needs to progress to for the next year.

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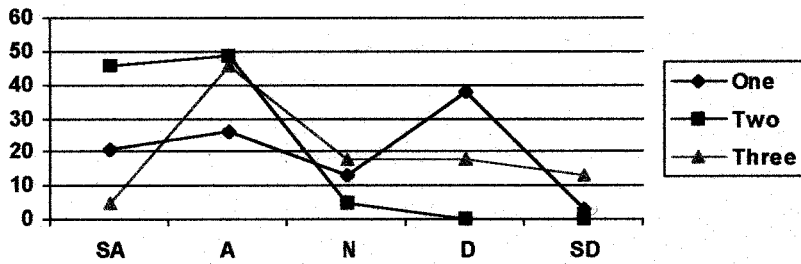
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Table 1

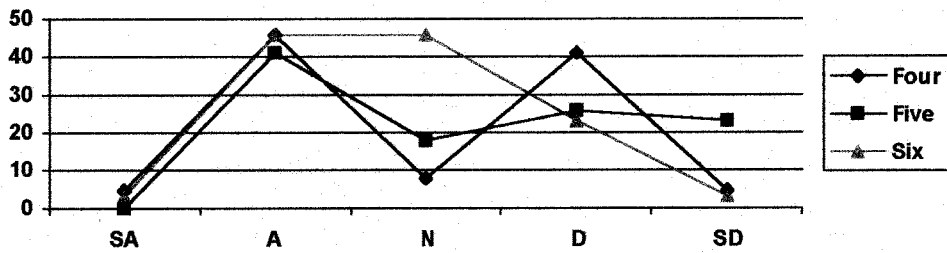
THE FOLLOWING CHART PRESENTS THE FINDINGS FROM EACH SURVEY

STATEMENT FROM ABOVE

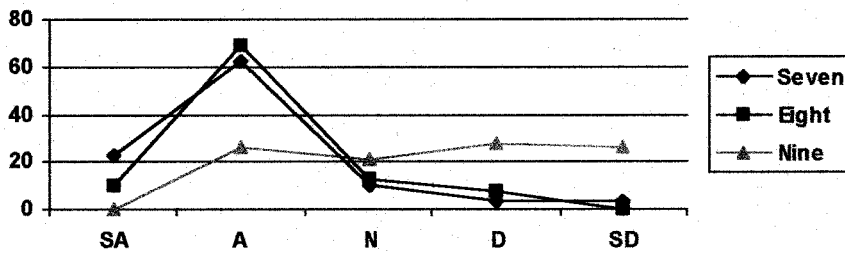
Statements 1-3



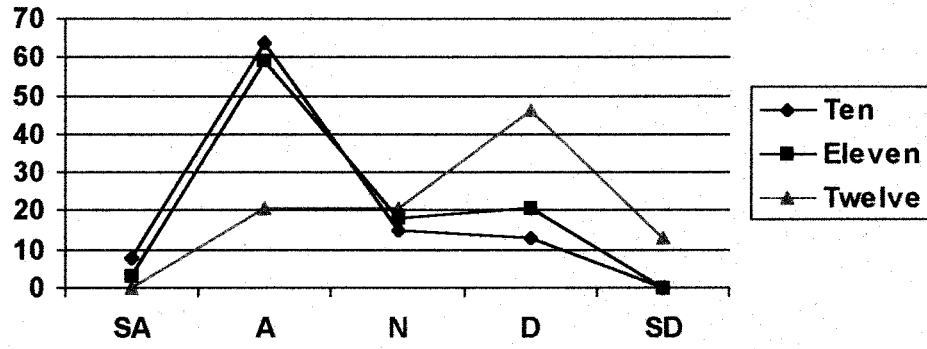
Statements 4-6



Statements 7-9



Statements 10-12



Statements 13-15

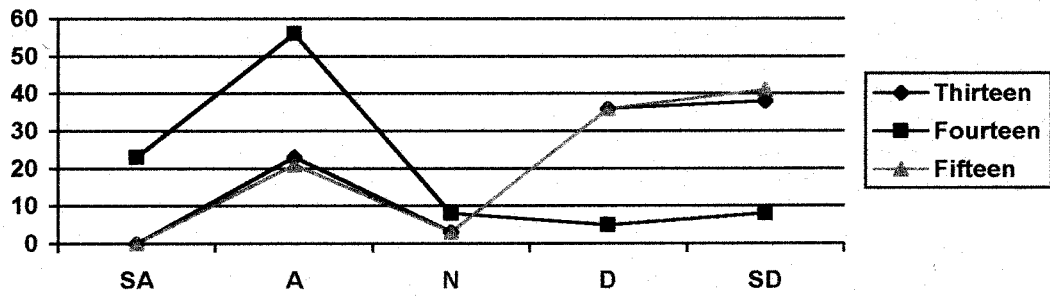




Table 2

Group I

Subject	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A1	C	D	B	D
B1	B	C	B	B
C1	A	B	A	A
D1	C	C	B	A
E1	D	C	A	C
F1	B	B	B	D
G1	B	C	B	D
H1	A	B	C	C
I1	B	B	D	B

Group II

Subject	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A2	A	B	A	B

B2	B	B	C	A
C2	C	D	C	D
D2	B	B	C	C
E2	B	B	C	D
F2	C	D	C	F
G2	C	C	C	D
H2	C	C	C	B
I2	C	F	F	F

Group III

Subject	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Second Marking Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A3	B	C	B	C
B3	B	B	B	C
C3	B	B	A	C
D3	C	B	C	C
E3	C	C	F	D
F3	F	D	F	D
G3	C	C	NA	D
H3	B	B	NA	NA
I3	B	B	B	D

Group IV

Subject	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking	Second Marking
	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Period 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Language Arts	Period 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade year Math
A4	B	C	A	C
B4	B	C	C	F
C4	B	C	A	C
D4	B	A	A	A
E4	C	B	A	B
F4	C	B	C	B
G4	A	A	A	C
H4	C	C	B	B
I4	A	B	B	A

## Appendix A

In order to gather information to assess the effectiveness of Co-Nect at the Middle School of Pleasantville, please circle your response to each statement as it relates to our school's Whole School Reform model. (Strongly Agree=SA; Agree=A; Neutral=N; Disagree=D; Strongly Disagree=SD) THIS IS AN ANONYMOUS SURVEY!!!

1. The Co-Nect model has improved my teaching strategies.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
2. Technology is essential to implement Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
3. It is very important to use Co-Nect rubrics instead of those implemented by the State of NJ.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
4. All Co-Nect project plans are easy to access.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
5. Co-Nect has benefited all students from special education to regular education.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
6. I have difficulty in managing Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
7. Co-Nect should have modifications/changes made in order to meet our students' needs.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
8. Cooperative learning is a key component with Co-Nect.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
9. My students understand the purpose of a "driving question".  
SA      A              N              D              SD
10. Various skills are taught prior to project implementation.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
11. Co-Nect focuses on student-centered instruction.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
12. Teaching through Co-Nect has benefited my educational career.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
13. My students understand the language in rubrics.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
14. Parental support is necessary for the Co-Nect model.  
SA      A              N              D              SD
15. All subject-area supervisors are well trained in the Co-Nect model.  
SA      A              N              D              SD

## Biographical Data

Name	Derrick Carrington
Middle School	Pleasantville Middle School Pleasantville, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Science Law and Justice Trenton State College Ewing, NJ
Graduate	Master of Arts School Administration Rowan University Glassboro, NJ
Present Occupation	Science Teacher Pleasantville Middle School Pleasantville, NJ