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REFORM
IN SEARCH OF A RATIONALE

by
Ada R. Barlatt

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May, 1999

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 1999

ABSTRACT

Ada R. Barlatt

Reform - in Search of a Rationale
1999
Dr. Ronald Capasso
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards at Pleasantville. The district, a special needs (Abbott district), receives 85% of its funding from the state, therefore, must provide all children with a "Thorough and Efficient" education.

Two separate groups of students were studied. One group represented the current students in grade 10 and the second group represented the current students in grade 9. Also included in the study were teachers, counselors, administrators and employers.

The overall approach in this study was to use several methods to investigate the effects on a local district on implementing the state-mandated standards. Interviews, surveys, and questionnaires were used to determine the effectiveness of the implementation process. Most importantly it tried to determine if everyone in the school understood the procedures. Employers were interviewed to determine if they thought the present courses would prepare students for the world of work.

Everyone agreed that change is a fact of life, but this change never provided the time for teachers who implement the program to discuss or prepare for the changes. This has created miscommunication and confusion.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Ada R. Barlatt

Reform - in Search of a Rationale
1999

Dr. Ronald Capasso
School Administration

The purpose of this study, was to learn how effective the Core Curriculum Content Standards as proposed and now being implemented in the district will help all students achieve their academic and career goals.

To succeed, this restructuring requires the support and participation of those who must implement it. The challenge will be to develop effective working relationships between people who will and can improve the school for everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The state of New Jersey has a new set of Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) which it is hoped will enable all children to get a thorough and efficient education. Initially, the effort to implement the reform in especially the Abbott (special needs) districts, was to be a joint process between the state and the local districts. Currently, with the mandates for graduation established, it is up to the district to totally reconfigure its academic structure and how the students will be educated. The state, though, has a court order to intervene if a district is not showing any kind of improvement.

Change is a fact of life, it could be educational, economic, technological, political, or cultural – all types of change constantly take place. Schools are constantly being faced with new pressures, new approaches and new value systems. Change often calls for dramatic modification in the ways that we instruct or make decisions. As educators we are expected to move forward with confidence and expertise; therefore, we are always under the microscope. As much as we may not like to alter what we have become comfortable with, we now must acknowledge that we live in technological age when change occurs rapidly.

This is an age of fear and anxiety, but it is also a time of hope and high expectations. Every district is trying to find ways for students to meet the state standards and also for them to have a meaningful high school educational experience. Districts vary enormously in their responses on how to implement the state initiated policy reforms.

It was up to the chief school administrator to introduce the reform method to the district. The way the standards were introduced to the faculty and staff at Pleasantville, has caused various emotions, anxiety, and ill will. The degree to which the tension in Pleasantville School District will be relieved and promises realized depends in part on the way in which further information is presented to administrators, teachers, and staff. Effort must be made to allow them to be an active part of any new process implemented to meet the challenges of developing new educational strategies.

Virtually all educators realize that we must educate all students if this country is to remain strong. We also know that people learn differently, have their own values, and view the world in ways that have been shaped by vastly different experiences. The traditional view is that knowledge exists in the interrelationship between the reader and the page, it is in this way that all of us approach the daily events of our lives. Therefore, to make education relevant, we must find ways to meet various learning styles with various instructional strategies.

Purpose of the Study

Since the district is introducing the CCCS in the 9th and 10th grades in the 1998/99 school year, the intern wants to learn about the organizational and instructional methods the teachers will use to deliver instruction to the students in order to meet the state mandate and improve students' performances. The intern also wants to learn how effective the CCCS, as proposed now in the district, will help all students achieve their academic and career goals.

In the process, the intern will attempt to find out how many teachers, students and employers really understand the charge of the superintendent to implement these standards in the district. Through our partnership and collaborative efforts, we will identify important goals and then work hand in hand in meeting these goals. Our efforts will include parents, students, teachers and employers in working towards meeting the academic expectations and the constantly changing need for information and new services in school and in the world of work. In this project, the intern will take a survey, do interviews, and evaluate the effectiveness of the new instructional plan in the high school.

Definitions

The following terms and definitions are important to the understanding of this study:

CCCS: Core Curriculum Content Standards – This is an attempt to define the meaning of “Through” in the context of the 1875 State Constitutional guarantee that students would be educated within a Through and Efficient system of free public schools. They describe what the students should know and be able to do upon completion of thirteen years of public education.

CCWR: Cross Content Workplace Readiness - Defines what skills students will possess upon completion of their formal education. Specifically:

All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.
All students will use technology, information and other tools.
All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.
All students will demonstrate self-management skills.
All students will apply safety principles.

Abbott District: Efforts to equalize educational opportunities among school districts within the state of New Jersey have been spurred by a series of court decisions. In the *Abbott v. Burke* case in 1990, after examining the poorest twenty-eight school district (mainly urban districts), the state court found the state's system of school finance unconstitutional and required that spending be equalized at the level of the highest-spending districts. The outcome of the decision moved more than \$100 million annually from the state to help address inequities in class size, full-day kindergartens, after-school study programs, guidance counseling and reading programs. Hence these twenty-eight districts became known as the Abbott Districts. (Hanely, 1990)

Limitation of the Study

The study will be conducted for 1998-99 academic year at Pleasantville

High School. The study's limitation will be:

- ☐ Who does the study involve?
- ☐ How will the data be collected?
- ☐ How will the data be used?

Since the program is new, it will only be limited to 9th and 10th graders at Pleasantville High School. They will be the first set of students to be tested in the new 11th grade test.

At this stage of the research, we will try to understand and find better transitional methods to meet the CCCS. We will look to see if it results in better student performance on the standardized tests, improvement in teacher

performance, if the morale of the school improves and if it prepares students to be productive citizens. In dealing with change, we should remember that every society has unique perceptions of what is true, right and important. The study will result in a feasibility report to inform the teachers, administrations, board members, and parents of its results and its ramifications.

As the intern tries to understand how the administrators want to implement the CCCS, she will identify problem areas, assume a role in school-based management to help teachers better understand their role in the process while stressing the need for developing human relations skills in interacting effectively with others. In the process, she will be able to communicate and consistently reinforce the teaching skills and concepts identified in the curriculum, promote multicultural, non-sexist programs, and incorporate state curriculum mandates and guidelines in our existing programs. She will use effective observation, conferences, and appraisal techniques to reach conclusions as to how the district can implement the mandated curricula smoothly and efficaciously.

Diversity, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the life opportunities of individuals. School organizations can initiate this reform by moderating the ethos that dominates the thinking and decision making that govern school policies and by accepting an external audit of existing formal and informal practices. Reviewing the literature suggests some indications that a democratic curriculum, an intercultural curriculum and/or curricular materials and interventions can modify racial attitudes.

(Vasquez), in 'Teaching to the Distinctive Traits of Minority Students', states, "recognize that students from different cultural backgrounds tend to learn in different ways, and therefore, teachers must be prepared to use strategies and methods for teaching students with varied learning styles". Failure of local governing agencies to eliminate discriminatory policies and practices should be considered a serious infraction against the rights of minorities and women.

Setting of the Study

The city of Pleasantville is located in the southern part of the state, six miles west of Atlantic City and about sixty miles to the east of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The last census of the city showed the total population to be 16,027, (5853 white, 8864 blacks, 1310 Asian and Other, 1604 Hispanic). Children Pre-school (0-4) 1306, school age (5-18) 3,668, working age (19-64), 9582 and seniors (65 and older), 2245. The median housing value is \$72,300 and median rent is \$625.00; 3,645 of the population lived in single family detached homes, 371 in single family attached, 978 in two to four units, 393 five to nine units, 1,118 lived in ten or more units and 254 lived in mobile homes and others. The median family income is \$34,380 with general tax rate of 3.151. The New Jersey Department of Labor reported in 1996 that 7903 residents were employed, 1159 were unemployed and the unemployment rate was 12.8%.

Pleasantville School District is considered a special needs (Abbott district), receiving 85% of its funding from the state. Most of the students are economically disadvantaged. The district received approximately 30 million

dollars in aid for the 1998/99 school year. Four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school, make up this district, with current total enrollment of 3,668 students, (75% black, 20% hispanic, 4% white and 1% other). The high school is a comprehensive school with grades 9 through 12 and total enrollment of about 979 students.

Significance of the Study

What is the effect of the CCCS on students in becoming productive citizens, including those who are economically disadvantage, those who do not plan to attend college and those for whom English is a second language?

Research shows that the Coalition of Essential School programs if applied correctly to fit the culture of a particular school produces successful results, such as improved attendance, decreased drop-out rate, increased test scores and an increase in the number of students who attend college.

The purpose of change is for teachers to improve instruction and in turn for the students to improve their performance and become productive citizens in our society. This will require collaboration among teachers, student and staff within the high school. In the curriculum, there should be respect for the integrity of the teachers, for the complexity of their task, and for the reality of the learning processes of the students.

Curriculum improvement will be treated as a problem-solving process. The problems will be seen as opportunities for improvement and not as obstructions.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature and a detailed discussion of the Core Curriculum Content Standards as required by the state. It will give information about the research context of the study and support rationale for the importance of the study.

Chapter 3 will address the five areas related to the research design used for the study. The first area is a general description of the research design. Second is a description of the development and design of the research instruments actually used in the study. Third is a description of the sample and sampling technique used in the study. The fourth is a description of the data collection of the study. The fifth is a description of the data analysis plan. This chapter will answer the question, "What type of evidence can be gathered to prove that the project is having an impact on the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards?"

Chapter 4 will be the presentation of the research findings. This section will answer the two major questions, "What information was found?" and "What did it mean?"

Chapter 5, will highlight the conclusions and corresponding implications of both the study and the interns leadership development. It will further address how the organization changed as a result of the study and the need for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This study will examine the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Pleasantville High School, as compared to that which New Jersey's education policy makers have determined its needs to be in order to make young people productive citizens. The intern will take survey, make recommendations and evaluate the effectiveness of the new instructional plan.

History of Reform

New Jersey was, as the rest of the nation, struggling with how to educate its citizens to be competitive in the international marketplace of the future. In the process, this state had to face yet the additional problem of the constitutional challenge of implementing the state system of "Thorough and Efficient" education in public schools. New Jersey not only had to deal with about 600 independent school districts that exercise considerable "local control" but also had a 120-year-old constitutional guarantee that stated that regardless of residency, all children will receive a thorough and efficient education. The core standards merged from studies of two different groups in 1992-93 and 1995. In an effort to have excellence, they are passing the envelope to the local school districts.

As a result of their efforts, the Department of Education recommended the following seven academic content areas:

Visual and Performing Arts	Mathematics
Comprehensive Health and Physical Education	Science
Language Arts/Literacy	Social Studies
	World Languages

The CCCS are an attempt to define how all students in the state will be educated within the Thorough and Efficient system of education. It describes what all students should know and be able to do upon the completion of 13 years of public education. The curricula must integrate school base and work base learning effectively so that application from knowledge in all content areas can be reinforced through experiences beyond the school walls, such as volunteer activities, job shadowing, and part-time jobs.

The following are the five cross-content workplace readiness standards that should be addressed through all content areas in an effort to prepare students for the world of work through the School-to-Careers Initiatives. If implemented according to state guidelines, all students will:

- (1) Develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.
- (2) Use technology, information, and other tools.
- (3) Use critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- (4) Demonstrate self-management skills.
- (5) Apply safety principles.

These standards do not limit districts strategies of how to ensure that the students achieve these expectations. A frame work was developed to assist local educators. The CCCS are concerned with the knowledge that students should acquire and the skills they should develop in the course of their K-12 experience.

It further described the cumulative progress indicators at specific benchmarks in grades 4, 8 and 12. These standards will directly influence the new grade 4 test and the current state assessments at grade 8 (Early Warning Test {EWT}) and the grade 11 (High School Proficiency Test {HSPT}). The standards also will define the state's high school graduation requirements in the future. It is believed that the larger community can be used to deliver an integrated curriculum (parents, community, employers, students etc).

What then, should the curriculum be if we are to educate all of the children, including those from the minority ethnic groups who constitute the large proportion of dropouts? Most Americans assume that the low achievement of poor and minority children is the fault of the children and their families. They claim, "the parents do not care, the children don't try, they have no place to study, their cultures do not value education." These and other excuses are regularly offered to explain the achievement gap that separates minority and poor students from other students their ages. What can urban communities and schools do to improve the formal education for the students?

The history of American education has been replete with many reform initiatives in the hope of curing society's ills. In the 1890's it was the Committee on Secondary School Studies that focused their attention on standardizing high school curriculum with concentration on pre-collegiate education. In the 1900's the Commission of Reorganization of Secondary Education pushed for broadened goals with emphasis on citizenship and ethical behavior. The post-Sputnik reforms

in the early 60's encouraged significant changes in science and mathematics curricula and also the reform in staff development and teacher training. (Atkin & House, 1981)

In the 80's, we had many attempts at reforms with particular attention paid to the high school curriculum. These reforms increased the requirements for high school graduation and strengthened the core curriculum within schools. In the 90's each state is taking an active role in designing new policies to reform its high schools.

There are plenty of speculations in the literature about what we might expect from the states in their efforts at reform. Some are asking whether we ought to have a national curriculum (Eisner). Still, others are advocating that we use the "market-base" approach to improve our education (Murane). In 1979, (Wise) states that the application of excessively rationalistic, bureaucratic procedures will add to the complex social phenomena like schooling. He labeled the process as "hyper-rationalization". He believed that the expectations were too ambitious and will never be achieved. (1980, Elmore; (1986, Rossman, Corbett, & Dawson) stated that historically, state initiated graduation reforms have simply little or no impact, because they are often blunted or diverted as they trickle down to the local school levels. (Cuban, 1990), believes that there is justified caution about the potential for rational, mandated reform to truly affect what happens in school and classrooms, but that cautionary note has not dampened the enthusiasm of the policy makers for promoting such reforms. Educational reform in the 1990s

is concerned about the perceived inequitable access to educational resources along with, serious concern for excellence and high standards. Tyack & Cuban (1994) stated that for decades the move to improve schools was using a single strategy at a time. The reform initiatives have the states playing an active role in designing new policies not only the high school but the “Entire Educational System K-12”. Reformers now call for parents, teachers, community members, and local administrators to be a part of the important decision making process.

This aspect of restructuring is now known as School-Based-Management. In school-based management, authority for decisions rests with a team at the local school level rather than with the district office or the state department.

Today’s concept of change focuses on the value and the talents of the individual team to modify, adapt, and individualize new ideas to better suit the diversity of the students present in the classroom, as well as other professional skills. Change is viewed as complex, multi-faceted, messy and systemic. We are reminded of the ideas of John Dewey, (1916), Jean Piaget, (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1979). Their philosophy stated that rather than the students be receivers of the information, the teacher now becomes the architect of an environment in which students can engage in meaningful learning experiences, which are carefully monitored and guided by the teacher. The teacher becomes the resource person, a co-learner along with the students and an active participant in the construction of knowledge and thereby all participants achieve

excellence. This new role is now emphasizing that teachers develop knowledge and skills they need to enact their new roles in educational governance.

Meanwhile some critics believe that the entire educational bureaucracy should be restructured to enhance greater investments in human capital. Darling-Hammond (1990), notes:

"Unless major reallocations of resources and authority are made from regulatory offices to schools and classrooms, we cannot expect school to find either the financial means or the organizational momentum needed to make significant changes. School restructuring not only needs to decentralize decision making, so that parents, students, teachers and administrators have a greater voice; it also needs to decentralize resources, so that investment can be made where they are needed". (294)

Individuals have had debates on the fact that we can have equity or we can have excellence but we cannot have both. Darling-Hammond, (1990) believes that there is strong evidence that schools systems do not serve the children of poverty, minority, or the children whose native language is not English. (Cohen, 1990, pa.256) states, that the large and persistent achievement gaps between whites and minorities, between the affluent and the poor, and between those whose native language is English and those whose primary language differs from English is great. The restructuring of schools and these new reforms are inclusive and caring rather than exclusionary and tracked, therefore, they have the potential to alter these patterns. In any democracy, the influence and wishes of society closely bind education.

Americans have traditionally regarded education as a means of improving ourselves, therefore, people are still dissatisfied with the education system and the degree of improvement in the country. They cite poor grades, indifference to learning among students, a high dropout rate, and lack of basic skills necessary to enter the world of work as some of the reasons to reassess current school programs.

Critics and observers of the educational scene have criticized the reform measures of the early and mid-1980s as excessively bureaucratic in approach and insufficiently far-reaching in potential effects, while being driven by a hyper-rationalistic view of reform (Wise). Other critics also note that the reform measures that are relatively easily installed in schools are viewed as ceremonial and do little to disturb the core of the reform. They are serving to pacify the public's disenchantment with educational outcomes and signal that something was being done. The current emphasis on systemic changes with its focus on integrating the efforts at multiple levels for the benefit of diverse learners represent nothing less than that a "new" philosophy (Barth, 1990; Elmore, 1990; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Jacobson & Conway, 1990; and Schlechty, 1990).

In the current reform proposals both the policy makers and the practitioners have their premise in the notion that significant changes are necessary to ensure that all students are successful learners. Society is demanding goods and services that can only be provided by highly skilled and educated people. It is imperative that everyone in the nation be productive and do their part to bring

about positive change. Public education does not exist in a vacuum. A democracy demands its education to be both of sufficient quantity and high quality. The challenge of quantity has largely been met. Most children are in school and most classrooms have teachers. The challenge of quality is more difficult. Attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers is a formidable problem for our schools. Students need lessons in ethics, which will help them distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, to help them develop character. The school, parents, community including public officials, civic leaders, should work together as a team to help the students realize that as citizens, their responsibilities include adhering to existing laws and understanding the legal system. Schools, students, subject matter, and society are not separate and apart.

New Beginning

According to Odden, (September 1998) New Jersey Education Reform Goal is to teach all students, including low-income minority students, so as to reach high achievement, at least the core subjects of math, science, writing, language arts, history/social science, visual and performing arts, health and physical education.

Core Elements of the Strategy allows: (1) The state or the districts to develop content and student performance standards, measure student achievement result, create and administer an accountability system, and have schools restructure program and finance around an effective school vision. (2) Schools must select/create a strategy that is effective in improving achievement.

Roles and Responsibilities of Districts

- Create awareness of need for change.
- Develop mission, standards and Assessments to focus site efforts.
- Create a new operating environment – allow schools to reallocate budgets, increases professional development, create a school-based information system including best practices.

Core Elements of an Effective Reform Strategy

- Focus on the curriculum and instruction by selecting an effective whole school design.
- Implement through a comprehensive, integrated, school wide strategy/design.
- Involve all teachers in making decisions.
- Create cohesive school staffs.
- Invest in professional development.
- Create a professional school culture.
- Administer an accountability system, focused on student achievement results.
- Select principals who can facilitate change.
- Allow school to reallocate their budget.

Research Strategy

As we know, the focus on the local response to a state-mandated reform requires an in-depth look at changes over a significant period of time. In this research, time will not permit the intern to do a year or longer study, but it is hoped that the district will continue the study. Changing the district's instructional programs to implement the visions of the state and its standards will be a continuous, ongoing process. This research will focus on the extent to which the new Core Curriculum Standards will improve opportunities for the students at Pleasantville High School to have a more meaningful high school experience and the extent to which this reform will prepare the students for the world of work. It will further try to see how the reform will alter the way the district goes about the

business of teaching and learning. In trying to find a rationale, ten questions listed below will be asked and answered by students and teachers.

- (1) Do you understand the district's variation in response to the states to the CCCS?
- (2) Will this CCCS prepare students to be productive citizens?
- (3) Does this require students to earn more credits for graduation?
- (4) Are students exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?
- (5) Are students struggling with their required courses?
- (6) Are these content standards the only blueprint requirements for our students success?
- (7) Which of these courses do you think will prepare students for the world of work?

Visual and Performing Arts
Comprehensive Health and
Physical Education
Language Arts/Literacy

Mathematics
Science
Social Studies
World Languages

- (8) Are grades 11 and 12 students in part-time employment prepared for the world of work?
- (9) Will this meet the requirements of employers, colleges, and vocational schools?
- (10) Has this new change altered your perception of future employees?

To answer these questions, the researcher will do personal interviews, and send out surveys. The research will concentrate in the high school, where the teachers, students and employers in our current partnership through the school-to-careers initiative will be surveyed and interviewed.

New Changes

The start of the 1998/99 school year welcomed two new schools, a middle and a high school. The new schools have enhanced the pride in the community and will provide a pleasant and healthy environment for the students, but will it improve the quality of education? The high school now has what is considered a new curriculum, and a new direction. Additional teachers were hired for the Core Content areas, but the teachers are faced with several questions including, when teachers' contracts will be settled? List of other questions included: Does having smaller classes help teachers prepare more for the subject areas? Has the district really reexamined the curriculum? Are all teachers ready to face the challenge? Do we really know what the students need and how we are going to achieve the needs? Do the students need extra-curricular activities? Do all 9th and 10 graders have to take Spanish?

The Superintendent believes that if the programs are enriched, the need for extracurricular activities would diminish or possibly disappear because what is now achieved only by the activities alone would be accomplished in the total, more flexible programs of Core Curriculum. With this in mind, all but the following are the extracurricular activities are listed in the Students Handbook (1998/99):

Yearbook – Breeze
Future Teachers of America
Junior Class
SADD
Sophomore Class

Freshman Class
Newspaper – Greyhound
National Honor Society
Senior Class
Student Council

We have a variety of pressure groups within the system, some operate to change and others prefer to maintain the status quo. Since most of the opposition to improving schools is based upon inadequate information about proposals, programs and evaluations, it is the intern's desire to help bridge the gap through the projects assigned. The intern's projects on Communication will help everyone to understand the reasons and procedures for making Pleasantville High School more relevant and adaptable to the needs of students, teachers and administrators. The goal here is for increased sharing of information. The challenge will be to develop effective working relationships between people who would and can improve school for everyone including members of the Board of Education.

Conclusion

The current demand for high standards and student achievement has created a highly competitive reform environment. A number of reform strategies have emerged as a response to those conditions. Some focus on various aspects of school's curriculum, some at the structural level to address governance and management practices, while others attempt to effect changes in teacher efficacy.

According to the News Release from the New Jersey State Department of Education (September, 1998) Whole school reform is a completed restructuring of an entire school, putting in place a series of programs and strategies that have been proven by research to be effective. To succeed, this restructuring requires the support and participation of those who must carry it out and are affected by it. Therefore, the decision to implement whole school reform and the selection of a

particular plan must be made voluntarily by the principal and faculty of the school.

Implementation of the plan is then overseen by a committee of the school's principal, teachers, parents and other community members.

The whole School Reform Implementation Plan must address the elements of Department of Education's definition of Whole School Reform pursuant to N.J.A.C. overseen by a 6:19A-3.1(e):

The major questions asked by educators here in Pleasantville is, what should the curriculum be if we are to educate all children, including our students who are from the minority, and ethnic groups and constitute a large proportion of the dropouts?

A complete understanding of why the change to CCCS from the past curriculum standards is not only an explication of its local effects but also an insight into why the initiative was proposed and being implemented in the first place. Some of us believe that all schools can do better and that teachers and students can perform better but we all need help.

The following chapter will explore some of the issues fundamental to change in education in the United States. It will offer a look at the notion of change and the consequences of changes that have occurred. Through a sampling of questions a sketch of the broad feeling for acceptance of the present reform will be examined.

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

General Description of the Design

The overall approach in this study was to use several methods to investigate the effects on a local district on implementing the state-mandated standards. The research listed the number of courses offered and the total number of students enrolled in each course before and after the implementation. The researcher examined students' schedules for 1997/98 and 1998/99. Finally, interviews with teachers, students and counselors were conducted. Teachers were allowed to freely give their opinions and suggestions about the implementation.

All New Jersey school districts are required to design curricula and to organize instruction so that all students achieve the academic objectives set forth in the new content standards. The state wide assessment program at grades 4, 8 and 11 will measure student achievement regardless of economic background to determine if all students are receiving a thorough and efficient education as defined by the standards set for achievement of students during their 13 years of public education. These assessments will measure how well students apply in real life what they have learned in the classroom.

A number of problems and misconceptions surfaced during the intern's informal discussions with teachers. Teachers mentioned that they the faculty and

staff were not properly in-serviced before integration of the CCCS. Some training is going on now but is not sufficient. It appears that students and parents were given information but no explanation and offered no opportunity for feedback on the information presented. Since schools need to produce excellent thinkers and excellent doers, teachers want to know what they can do to meet what the CCCS mandates.

The content standards are concerned with the knowledge students acquire and the application skills they should develop in the course of their K-12 experiences. Each standard is described in terms of cumulative progress indicators with specific benchmarks in grades 4, 8, and 12. These standards will directly influence the new grades four, eight and eleven tests. In its application, the CCCS will establish the foundation upon which students can build as they pursue further learning and careers. It will therefore define high school graduation requirements.

The standards are not meant to serve as the statewide curriculum guide, they merely define the results, but do not limit district strategies for how to ensure that students achieve these expectations. Without proper training, the teachers are merely following the directions as they see fit.

(Leithwood et. al. 1991) suggests:

That teachers' motivation for development is enhanced when they adopt a set of internalized goals for professional growth.

School leaders can further enhance teachers' development when they give them a role in solving non-routine problems of school improvement within a school culture that values continuous professional growth. Leaders can do their part by helping to ensure that such growth goals are clear, explicit, and ambitious enough to be challenging but not unrealistic.

To assist local school districts, especially Abbott districts, frameworks and deadlines are established. Local curriculum developers can use the framework as a resource to develop district curricula that best meet the needs of the students in each community. Abbot Rules dictate that the following be in place:

School Management Teams (SMT) must be in place by August 1998.

This team will act as the School Reform Team. It is comprised of a faculty member from each discipline, a parent, community member and a student. Their task is to determine:

1. What we want to achieve?
2. How will we know its been achieved?
3. How can we make the necessary corrections in order to achieve our goals?

The Team will:

- Develop curriculum and instruction.
- Develop professional development programs.
- Prepare school budgets.
- Recommend staff appointments and Removals, transfers, etc.
- Recommend candidates for new principalships.
- Develop an educational technology plan.
- Provide School-To-Work/School-To-Career programs at the secondary level.
- Develop a plan for accountability.

Four questions are the focus of this chapter: (1) Are the expectation of students high? (2) Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum? (3) Are students struggling more with their course work? (4) Are the students following a career path?

Description of the Development and Design

This research will try to understand the part that the teachers, students, community played in the implementation of the CCCS. The intern will also find out if people understand the Abbott Rules through survey questions and interview.

In the interview section, it will be essential to know:

- ☐ Are opportunities created for teachers to meet regularly to understand the procedure?
- ☐ Are teachers engaged in the exploration in their discipline to implement CCCS?
- ☐ Are there professional development plans for the teachers?
- ☐ What learning activities are provided by corporations or individuals in the community?
- ☐ How will the faculty be able to review and explore together the content and expectations of the standards?
- ☐ Does every teacher know what the standards and indicator mean?
- ☐ Do teachers know what steps they can take to close the gaps between current students performance and the desired levels of achievement?
- ☐ What new teaching strategies have the faculty explored in their own classrooms that will result in high achievement by all students?
- ☐ How will the teachers ensure that the contents taught will proceed to suitable levels of difficulty and abstraction?
- ☐ Do the teachers have recommendation for how the school or district can begin to move toward the vision conveyed by the CCCS?

Teachers will be allowed to freely give their opinions and suggestions for implementation.

Description of the Sample and Techniques

In compliance with the Abbott Rules, the district formed School Management Teams. Questions will be asked of the members of the SMT if they really understand their function in the school?

Due to the limited amount of time available to complete the survey and interviews, the population will be limited to all students and teachers in the seven Core Curriculum Content Areas in grades 9 and 10.

The study is naturalistic. There will be no manipulation of variables, and the occasions being studied have all occurred in a natural school setting. Contextualization will result in external validity and reliability being limited, while internal validity and reliability can still be achieved. The interpretations of the intern's findings will be limited to the context in which it occurred, specifically the opinions of the high school teachers in Pleasantville.

In informal conversation with some of intern's colleagues, the colleagues were asked to identify any discrepancies or areas of poor item construction to help in understanding the implementation of this new reform. Variables will include, teachers of the seven core content areas, materials used, training each teacher has received, individual interpretation of CCCS and their teaching style, along with administration influence on the implementation of this program, faculty social interaction and the interaction of students.

Description of the Data Collection

The survey was constructed to encourage subject participation. The items were simple and unambiguous. The survey was attractive and easily completed. The amount of time necessary to respond to the survey was short, and there was no fear of personal accountability due to the anonymity built into the survey. A

cover letter explained the purpose of the survey and how the results will be utilized. Everyone was encouraged to participate. (see appendix).

A stack of surveys was delivered to each homeroom to be distributed to the students, and the teachers also received theirs at the same time. Everyone was given a week to respond. Two days after the specified deadline, the intern sent a reminder to the homerooms that have not responded. With the reminder, another set of surveys was attached in the event that the first were lost or misplaced.

Description of the Data Analysis

The intern collected all surveys and interview responses then tallied the responses to come up with a conclusion. The findings and interpretation will be shared with the faculty involved in the research first, then, from the data collected the researcher will use the information to report to the principal and the school-base management team to affect adjustments in the implementation of the CCCS.

Conclusion

The research on effective schools points to a school's organization and leadership as major contributors to positive school outcomes. Schools with lower delinquency rates also had higher attendance, higher achievement, and lower rates of violence and vandalism. Such evidence leads to the conclusion that schools, as organizations, have a significant effect on students' academic and social lives.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

An assumption that is often made by policymakers during any policy reform is that everyone concerned will be reasonably knowledgeable about the changes. This research has essentially been a story of the difficulties in initiating and sustaining systemic academic and curricular change. The purpose of this section is to assess the information collected and interpret its meaning in the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards at Pleasantville High School.

Data Collection

This research involved several data collection methods, including interviews, questionnaires and observations.

Interviews were with students, counselors, and teachers to assess the degree to which the new requirements produced significant changes (both positive and negative). Interviews were also with members of the School Management Team to document their understanding of the purpose of such a team.

During the collection of data, regular communication took place between the researcher, teachers, and students. Several informal meetings were held with some of the teachers to keep them apprised of progress and to seek their assistance in facilitating data collection.

Courses and Schedules

Through the guidance department, the master schedule and course catalog analyses gave a detailed accounting of the courses the students in grades 9 and 10 were taking. It showed the effects of the new policy. The school's schedule operates under the *zero-sum* principle, which means that if additional courses are added in one area, it necessitates deletions in other areas. In this case, all elective courses were eliminated from the schedules of these students. The CCCS requirements made elective classes impossible, therefore, eliminating three programs.

Method

The research began by posing four key questions designed to address whether the new policy is affecting the students in grades 9 and 10.

- ☐ Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?
- ☐ Is the balance of credits shifting across different content areas?
- ☐ Are students earning more credits?
- ☐ Are students are having problems with their course work?

Interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with teachers, students, and counselors in the building. Three rounds of interviews were conducted over the duration of the project. The first was held just after moving into the new school, with the new requirements already in place but before teachers and students had much opportunity to become accommodated to the changes. Consequently, responses were very speculative at this time. The second interview was completed

several weeks later. By this time many changes were already in place (e.g. one of the new Spanish teacher resigned, changes were still being made in the students schedules, and teachers' assignments). The individuals interviewed offered more direct anecdotal insights into how the requirement had impacted them and the school. The third round of interview was completed after the second marking period in February. Those interviewed gave their impressions of the implementation after the first semester including any adjustments they have made to accommodate students who really do not want to take the particular course/s offered.

These three rounds of interviews provided an important longitudinal perspective on the implementation of the policy. Whenever possible, the intern interviewed the same people so as to document their perceptions over time. The overall intent of the interviews was to get reactions to the implementation process and to solicit the interviewees' perceptions of the effects of the state-mandated policy change. Although the purpose was the same for all groups, there were important differences in the types of questions asked each group.

Students Interview

The interview started with questions that elicited descriptive information about the students e.g., courses taken, activities, and post-high school plans. Specific questions were asked about their knowledge of the requirements and the importance that is placed on the additional required courses such as Visual and Performing Arts, and Spanish. The interviews concluded with students' views

about the education they had received in the first semester and the impact of the new requirements, especially the students in grade 10 who started high school with the previous requirement standards.

The researcher looked at students' views of the overall influence of the new graduation requirement policy. The data used to assess this project included a mix of qualitative and quantitative results. The quantitative portion involved analysis of a sample of records of the 9th graders in 1997/98 the last of the students who were not mandated to take only the seven core content standards their first year in high school and the current 9th graders 1998/99 who are the first class expected to meet all the requirement. Records for about 300 students were analyzed. The qualitative data was derived from interviews conducted with students, teachers, and counselors.

The sample consisted of approximately equal number of boys and girls and included a representative proportions of Blacks, Hispanics and Anglo-Saxon students.

Teachers Interview

Teachers were asked the same questions. Further questions focused on changes in the curriculum in the subject area, staff adjustments, and other organizational adjustments. The interviewer also probed for the differential effects of the policy on different student groups e.g. dropouts, alternate school students, and vocational students. Several questions addressed the reason for only the seven content areas, focusing on what interviewees thought the purpose was, what

courses their department offered, and what the effects of this option were on students. Another topic was how tracking has changed. The interview concluded with a set of questions about whether teachers thought students were better off as a result of the new requirement. Most teachers stated that they had very little input and that all the special areas are in danger of being eliminated or have been eliminated (e.g. home economics, industrial arts and business) because they are elective courses and not considered part of the CCCS.

Counselors Interview

The bulk of the responsibility of monitoring the requirements fell to high school guidance counselors. Interviews with them were designed to learn more about the role that counselors played in students course selection and about the counselors' responsibilities in implementing the new requirements (e.g. information providers and as record keepers). As in the teacher interviews, counselors' opinions were also sought on the differential effect of the policy on various student groups, tracking in the school, and whether the students and school were better off having implemented the new requirements.

School Management Team Interview

All members are aware of what they are supposed to do as stated by the Abbott Rules, but they are still confused as to exactly how they can implement changes in the high school.

Analysis Plan

There were basically three kinds of data: (1) quantitative data represented by the students course schedules, (2) qualitative data collected through interviews with various groups and (3) teachers and students surveys.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Students in grades 9 and 10 transcript records provided a portrait of courses taking for the sample of students. By using the computer to scan characteristics of individual courses, the intern was able to create a composite picture. A series of broad questions helped guided these analyses.

Are students enrolling in more courses?

Are students enrolling in more rigorous courses? That is, are they earning more advanced credits?

Are students having problems with their courses? Are students failing the Courses?

Have the number of credits earned been affected in areas influenced by the requirements (math, science, world languages, social students, visual and performing arts, language arts, and comprehensive health and physical education)?

Has the distribution of courses across subject areas change as a result of the requirements? How has this affected students in grades 11 and 12?

- ☐ In 1997/98, 9th grade students were enrolled in elective courses. 9th grade students are not enrolled in any elective courses for the 1998/99 school year.
- ☐ All 9th and 10th grade students are enrolled in all of the Core Courses.
- ☐ Spanish is a mandatory course for the district, therefore, the enrollment showed an increase in the number of students; it also showed a decline of student enrollment in French (I & II).

☐ The number of credits earned has not changed, - for each course a student earns 5 credits.

☐ Students in grades 11 and 12 are not affected by the new requirements.

Tables 1 (a) and (b) show the number of students enrolled in the core courses and the elective courses for two years.

Table 1 (a)
Number of Students Enrolled
In Core Classes

	9 th Grade 1997/98	10 th Grade 1998/99	9 th Grade 1998/99
Language Arts	176	124	232
Language Arts Adv.	20	48	64
Algebra I	188	---	190
Algebra II	---	69	---
Geometry	8	---	---
Physical Education	196	218	312
General Science	196	---	300
Biology W/Lab	---	72	72
Chemistry W/Lab	---	---	62
World Cultures	196	32	289
US History Advance	---	3	35
French	17 (I)	14 (II)	---
Spanish	66 (I)	56 (II)	312
Chorus	20	21	96
Band	30	30	64
Music Appreciation	30	30	65
Art	81 (I)	47 (II)	231 (I)

Table 1 (b)
Number of Students Enrolled
In Elective Classes

	9 th Grade 1997/98	10 th Grade 1998/99	9 th Grade 1998/99
Business Education	35	36	---
Industrial Technology	83	56	---
Home Economics	47	24	---

Subjects

The subjects were about 300 students in grades 9 and 10 all assigned to take the seven subject areas listed in the CCCS, 75 high school teachers and 4 counselors. The following are the responses to the four initial questions.

The policy initiative did not require an increase in the total number of credits earned. However, with the reduction in elective credits, students opportunities to take all seven CCCS courses, as well as the absolute number of courses they did take, were altered. Another reason for considering the number of credits is that it is an easily understood variable when making comparisons between the grades.

To address the first question about credits earned, an individual student's total was computed by scanning across the two years of courses to be taken. The pre-policy data showed that the freshman students of 1997 took a total of 35 credits their freshman year. The total number of credits to be earned by the class of 1998/99 is also 35. All students in grade 9 are taking the same courses but at different periods. Many people interviewed argued that the new policy was one of the major forces behind the move to have more periods in the school day. Students are in school a total of 6 hours and 32 minutes. The requirements added an incentive for the school day to be extended.

To answer the question about rigorous academic courses, the intern looked at the course offerings for both years, two advanced courses were listed for 1998.

The researcher during the interview with students, found that students' knowledge of the course offerings they are required to take, varied widely. The clear message throughout the student interviews was the different ways in which they responded to the added classes in their schedules.

One of the arguments against increasing course requirements is that the extra pressure will make it more difficult for some students (especially special education students) to complete their work. This will also affect students who are borderline-that is, students who are just barely able to get by. To examine the question of students having problems with their course work quantitatively, the intern looked at the grades of students to see whether students are failing more courses after the policy change. The assumption derived here, was that three-fourths of the teachers are veterans; the grading policies are relatively stable, and the grading policy is understood by all teachers. As far as the intern knows, no other major reform influenced the grading practices.

Teachers noted that some of the students failed because of either low performance or poor attendance. It appeared that the majority of failures were in the Language Arts, Algebra and General Science classes and the least failure in the Visual and Performing Arts classes. When we compared the students who were enrolled before and after the new requirements took effect, it was very clear that the change did not have a detrimental effect on the course failure rate. The following tables, show the number of students who failed each class.

Table 2 (a)

Students Failure in Core Classes

	9 th Grade 1997/98	10 th Grade 1998/99	9 th Grade 1998/99
Language Arts	71	56	43
Language Arts Adv.	4	12	7
Algebra I	52	---	22
Algebra II	---	2	---
Geometry	---	12	---
Physical Education	36	57	53
General Science	90	26	85
Biology W/Lab	---	54	---
Chemistry W/Lab	---	---	---
World Cultures	51	22	61
US History Advance	---	---	---
French	---	1	---
Spanish	16	---	24
Chorus	---	---	---
Band	---	---	---
Music Appreciation	---	10	9
Art	3	4	28

Table 2 (b)

Students Failure in Elective Classes

	9 th Grade 1997/98	10 th Grade 1998/99	9 th Grade 1998/99
Business Education	---	---	---
Industrial Technology	2	---	---
Home Economics	1	---	---

Changes in Subject Areas

This section, focused on specific subject areas in which the requirements may have had an effect. Credit distribution was reviewed in all the subject areas of the CCCS.

In 1997/98 one hundred and ninety six students enrolled in the math, science, social studies, language arts, health and physical education classes, and in 1998/99, it appears that the same number of students are enrolled in math classes. Students were generally muted in their feelings about taking the following classes: visual and performing arts, world language class - Spanish. These two classes were added by the policy change. A total of five new teachers were hired to accommodate this change.

During the interview, the students were asked to explain their views about the visual and performing arts course and the world language, Spanish. Several students explained that they were infrequently consulted on course selections and had only minimal involvement in their own program planning. Students stated that they were simply assigned to courses. Here are some examples of what the students said:

Some positive comments:

They forced me to take classes I needed for graduation. Now, I learned that science can be fun.

The requirements made me take classes I didn't want to take but knew it was best for me because there are no electives.

This I think will make me a well rounded student because I have to take all of the seven courses.

*My counselor just gave these classes to me.
My counselor told me that all of us have to take it.
I wanted to take home economics, they told me the school does not offer it any more.
I was pregnant last year, when I came back to school they just gave me these classes.
I lost credit last year, I am taking all 9th grade classes again.
I already know Spanish, I don't want to take it.
I will never speak Spanish? I don't like it.*

Some students spoke of how the requirements demanded more of them.

*I cannot fight it, I guess they are moving me in the right direction.
It has forced me to take a foreign language. I would never have selected it.
I guess this will help me set my goals.*

Students spoke, eloquently at times about their desires and aspirations, and how the particular courses will help them set the goals and criteria they needed. Some students had no clue why they were in school nor why they had to take the courses they were assigned. It was clear from the transcripts and the interviews that we are still dealing with a majority of students who need help understanding the new policy.

Teachers' Views on Curriculum Change

The intern was particularly interested in teachers' perceptions of the curriculum changes, because teachers were significantly affected by the changes. The interest was how teachers' views might or might not change over time, particularly as structures and processes to support the new requirement become institutionalized in the school.

The intern interviewed teachers to capture their perceptions of the policy and its effects on the curriculum in fairly open-ended ways, probing for more detail

and clarification when appropriate. In the final analysis, some teachers were not affected at all, while others were greatly affected especially teachers of the elective courses. Wood shop, home economics classes were eliminated completely and the business classes were reduced to only a single class. The interview supported this interpretation, for example, when asked about the changes in the curriculum as a result of the new requirement, a business education teacher responded before she turned in her resignation, “We have lost students in these classes and will lose teachers.” Other teachers are concerned about solving the social and family problems of our students before they can respond to the state mandated requirements. It is also likely that the changes here in this school were not the intended changes by the state in implementing the new requirement.

Further Experimental Design and Data Analysis

The research completed was an ethnographic study of the curriculum integration in the high school. All teachers in the High School and students in grades 9 and 10 were surveyed to determine their perception regarding the effectiveness of implementing the CCCS in the school. Specific obstacles in the implementation were addressed.

The Likert Scale and interview techniques were used to find out if the teachers and students understood why the courses in the 1998/99 school year were different. It also tried to determine how effective the implementations were. There were questions on both the students’ and teachers’ surveys with the teachers having to answer questions assessing school and classroom effectiveness. The

sample was chosen through purposeful, typical case sampling. Systematic selection was applied to designate the specific subjects areas listed in the CCCS. The respondents were handed a confidential questionnaire with Likert scale choices.

Separately returned questionnaires indicated completion of the survey instrument. Two concurrent emphasis guided the research: (1) a general interest in policy implementation and (2) a focused inquiry into the effects of the new high school policy on students' opportunity structure. The design invests heavily in looking at individual teachers' and students responses to the new policy, with particular attention paid to perspectives of classroom teachers.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Case analysis was adopted because the interviews were done with teachers, counselors and students. The intern was able to categorize the answers in five groups, information about the new requirements as understood by each group; the effects on staffing, recruiting, and working conditions; organizational effects, on scheduling, record keeping, changes in the tracking system; effects on special education, non-English speaking students, potential dropouts; changes in content, and addition/deletion of courses.

The research on currently implemented Core Curriculum Content Standards at Pleasantville High School will concentrate on the views of students, teachers and employers.

Table 3 was designed to see if students understood the Core Curriculum Content Standards as implemented in the school.

Table 3

Students Response on Course Selection

{SA = Strongly Agree} {A =Agree} {N = Neutral} {D =Disagree}
{SD =Strongly Disagree}.

Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I selected all the courses I am taking in high school.	50	75	50	50	75
2. I am motivated to learn every course in the 9 th and 10 th grade curriculum.	25	50	75	60	90
3. I understand why I am taking all these courses.	10	50	75	75	90
4. My teachers have explained the CCCS requirements to me.	10	50	75	80	85
5. My Guidance Counselor explained the courses to my parents and I.	100	85	50	40	15
6. These classes will help me when I graduate from high school and attend college or go to work.	125	75	70	20	10
7. My teachers always explain to us in class how these classes will help us select a career path.	25	75	50	60	90
8. I cannot wait to come to school every morning	10	50	90	55	90

Tables 4 (a) and (b) were designed to address whether the new policy was affecting the expectations of the three groups in an attempt to make students productive citizens.

Table 4 (a)

Students Response on Implementation of the
Core Curriculum Content Standards

Questions	Yes	No	I don't know
1. Do you understand the district's variation in response to the CCCS?	25	168	75
2. Will the CCCS prepare students to be productive citizens?	50	50	170
3. Does this require that students earn more credits for graduation?	75	75	150
4. Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?	120	80	95
5. Are these students having problems with the required courses?	160	100	40
6. Are these content standards the only blueprint requirement for students' success?	10	50	200
7. Do you believe the new courses will prepare students for the world of work?	85	25	155
8. Will this meet the requirement of employees, colleges and vocational schools?	75	85	120
9. Are grades 11 and 12 students presently in part-time employment prepared for the world of work?	75	75	150
10. Has this new change altered your perception of the future employees?	110	25	90

Table 4 (b)
Teachers and Employers Response on implementation of the
Core Curriculum Content Standards

Questions	Yes	No	I don't know
1. Do you understand the district's variation in response to the CCCS?	35	25	10
2. Will the CCCS prepare students to be productive citizens?	60	10	5
3. Does this require that students earn more credits for graduation?	25	10	40
4. Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?	50	15	5
5. Are these students having problems with the required courses?	50	15	5
6. Are these content standards the only blueprint requirement for students' success?	10	60	5
7. Do you believe the new courses will prepare students for the world of work?	35	35	5
8. Will this meet the requirement of employees, colleges and vocational schools?	20	50	5
9. Are grades 11 and 12 students presently in part-time employment prepared for the world of work?	35	35	5
10. Has this new change altered your perception of the future employees?	50	20	5

200 of the 300 subjects promptly returned their surveys. The other surveys were completed after a follow-up connection was made to further explain the research and request their involvement.

The results have several implications for educating at-risk students. First, these results go beyond describing demographic differences in achievement and it shows that the district is trying to improve the achievement of all students. It shows for example that the completion of academic course work regardless of student motivation or ability is a strong predictor of academic achievement.

Nevertheless, the results of this study support the importance of student motivation, school quality, and academic coursework for the academic success of all students. The findings, in turn, suggests that school reform that increases school quality, student motivation, and enrollment in academic coursework may improve the change of academic success of all students. Everyone in the school has to find ways to improve students performance and reduce the failure rate.

Conclusion

An important part of the research involved understanding the intent of the reform as seen by the original framers of the policy. Internal pressures included- individual hopes and aspirations, fears and doubts, and expectations and beliefs about what the students ought to be doing.

Teacher turnover is one of the many trials of keeping a longitudinal research effort on track. This was particularly true for this research because we depended on the cooperation of the new teachers especially the Spanish classes for

their input. The turnover had the potential to create new obstacles in the data collection efforts. The researcher appreciates the willingness of other teachers who took the time to respond to the interview and questions in the questionnaires. Everyone's cooperation was invaluable to the project.

The key reason for the difficulties here also, has been the inability to frame the problem in a comprehensive way. These challenges cannot be addressed piecemeal. The conclusion here calls for conceptualize systemic change through four frames: the technical, political, cultural and moral. Only by combining all of them can we meet the challenges that our students will face in the 21st century.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

All New Jersey school districts are required to design curricula and to organize instruction so that all students achieve the academic objectives set forth in the new Core Curriculum Content Standards. A state wide assessment program will measure student achievement regardless of economic background to determine if all students are receiving a thorough and efficient education as defined by the standards set forth during the 13 years of each child's public education.

Research indicates that school can be effective in producing high student achievement, a safe environment, low delinquency, and high attendance regardless of students' socioeconomic status. Ogle & Alsalam, 1990, stated that despite recent gains in achievement test scores, African-American, Hispanic and low-income students continue to achieve well below Caucasian, Asian and high-income students. In addition, African-American and Hispanic high school students historically drop out of school at higher rates than their Caucasian peers and are less likely to return to complete graduation requirements at a later time. Since high school proficiency examinations and classroom performance are the determining factors as to whether a student graduates from high school or not, the purpose here is to ask questions that must be answered in order to determine the effectiveness of the program here at Pleasantville High School.

During the interviews with the teachers, many commented that the most obvious losers in this new reform are going to be the students who will never graduate. One of their strongest arguments against this new reform is that it will only increase the number of students who drop out. Further discussion about the problems facing such students led to the following reasons for drop-out tendencies: (1) Domestic problems - child abuse, drug addiction, (2) Lack of interest in school, (3) Life style and other social problems. The drop-out students are very far from meeting the basic requirements, so they opt to leave school to earn money to support themselves or their families rather than stay in school and graduate. Teachers are also concerned about the number of transient students- students who drop in and drop out of their classroom. All these factors make it difficult to meet the recommended standards with these students. Therefore, teachers' concern was, how can the measurement of the school and classroom effectiveness based on attendance, safety, student achievement and behavior be fair indicator of a district's success? The interns answer was that we cannot afford to ignore research findings, we must continue to find ways to integrate the systemic change that is inclusive and caring regardless of the circumstances of our students.

Research also indicates that ability, quality of schooling, student motivation, and academic coursework are important predictors of academic achievement. Literature on at-risk students describes what these students lack personally or by way of their families, and communities. (Cool & Keith, 1991) stated that to optimize learning environments and maximize the potential of at-risk

students for success, educators must also understand what factors exert positive influences. Student motivation historically has been viewed as perhaps the most significant area of difference between the academic performance of students from low income families and those from middle and higher income families.

As a society, we cannot “continue to write off this segment of the population; the future well-being of this country depend fundamentally upon their educational success” (Cohen, 1990, p. 257).

Our superintendent espoused a strong desire to bring about change in the district. She also stated that teachers will be empowered within the school and the classroom, but never provided the time for teachers to discuss or prepare for the changes. This has created miscommunication and confusion.

Good ideas about curricula, textbooks, financing, and reforms, will founder if the parties who must implement them do not clearly understand the method of implementation. Clearly the misunderstanding identified in this study will not disappear overnight, nor can they be ignored in the hope that everything will work itself out. The current situation requires sustained attention, candid communication, and a genuine willingness to listen and learn. The fears are real, the pattern of suspicion and skepticism are well established and deeply entrenched.

Disagreement is natural and healthy, but when it affects the desired outcome, then it becomes unhealthy. The intern was struck by the level of suspicion and distrust of administration among the staff. At the very least, these attitudes are a major distraction to the task of building consensus around this

school reform. There must be candid and continuing conversation among educators and administrators at all levels.

Organizational Change

Schools carry enormous responsibility to effect change. We are the sites for the delivery of educational services and the place where the state requires students to come for a minimum of 13 years. It is a fact now that the school must implement the CCCS, therefore training, support, and revitalizing of educators must also be among the school's priorities.

Effect on Administrators

Despite their often proactive response to the new policy initiative, school administrators had their share of frustration and concern in trying to implement the requirements. They talked about the problems of trying to fit everything into an already crowded school day. Organizational constraints limited their responses. Lack of communication was a common complaint with them also. Although they said that they didn't know what was happening, central office claims it works hard to effectively communicate with the building level administrators.

The primary benefits of the new policy, according to the teachers, counselors and administrators, are higher standards and higher expectations for the teachers and students. The down side is how to raise the expectation of the students and motivate them, and help them realize that education is serious business. Teachers in the high school believe that the same high standards must be

set for students in the lower grades so that by the time they are teenagers they will realize the importance of education.

Part of the duties of the intern as the School-To-Careers Coordinator is to place students in grades 11 and 12 in part-time employment. It became apparent that the employers too must be interviewed to find out three things: (1) What are your expectations from high school students? (2) How closely do you examine the student's high school transcript? (3) What is your knowledge of the CCCS?

The employers interviewed were those in the immediate proximity to the school, and those who hire students on a part-time basis. The interviews were open-ended and they were allowed to add any information they thought might help smooth the transition between school and work.

None of those interviewed had a clear idea of what the CCCS requirements are. They mentioned work experience as the primary criterion they use for making their hiring decisions. Some mentioned that the students must be appropriately dressed, that they must be proficient in written and verbal communication. All interviewed mentioned that social skills, punctuality, respect for self, others, and property were their main concern. They believe that most students do well on the job after the initial orientation.

When asked directly if the type of courses that students are taking in school mattered, some said that as long as they can communicate and have a basic education, they can teach them what is required on the job, nothing else mattered. Those who judged the students course work to be important were those who are

hiring for positions that require technical expertise, such as computer operators and secretaries. Overall the employers were interested in the relevance of the course work to the positions for which they were hiring. None of them had ever heard of the CCCS. When it was explained to them, they responded favorably to the new standards, but stated that so far it was not a particularly powerful concept outside the school setting.

Implications and Further Study

We cannot rely only on traditional measures, for example test scores, to balance the demands for restructuring and increased accountability. If we do we will fail to capture the complexity of the structural changes that need to take place.

Through this experience, the intern notices six major restructuring challenges that emanated from this research.

1. Create a vision of inclusive, and caring school.
2. Reorganize how students are taught.
3. Build flexible time schedules.
4. Infuse the curriculum, especially remedial courses, with challenges to higher- order thinking and problem-solving skills.
5. Increase the effectiveness of the SMT.
6. Enhance communication structures within the school and the district.

Although these six challenges do not encompass all of the challenges facing our school, they do represent the conclusion reached in the intern's interviews with the staff. One of the most pressing problems that the school faces is the barrage of competing and often conflicting demands in attempting to be all thing for all

people. We are expected to be the parents, counselors, social workers, coaches and tutors etc. Schools are not only blamed for many of society's ills, they are also viewed as the primary solution for those ills. All these different expectations make it difficult for schools to be truly successful at anything. What is missing from this complex mix is a clear and coherent vision that everyone understands. There is a district mission statement in every classroom, but there is no way of monitoring compliance. The challenge then, is to structure a coherent vision around students and what it means for them to become successful learners and a way of monitoring its success. The teachers and students must be actively involved in this process because they are the two groups of people directly involved in the teaching and learning process. The vision here is to have an organizational direction and a clear picture of where we are going and how best to get there.

Another challenge for the school is to infuse the curriculum with rigorous thought-provoking inquiry using all available technology at hand. Although enriching curricula and instruction for a few students at the top may have sufficed in the past, today's technologically based information society requires everyone in the labor market to have complex skills (Darling-Hammond). This is especially true in the remedial courses. Altering strategies, ensuring a challenging curriculum, will create opportunities for all students to become meaningfully engaged in reasonably complex and demanding learning tasks and gain practice working cooperatively with others. Create a climate where teachers can function to the optimum and students will learn to their full potential.

The communication process is yet another challenge facing our school. If the goals of restructuring and devolution of authority to the school building are to be fully realized, the school must become its own best source of information. As a school, we will need to monitor practices that are effective, spot trends that are divergent from our goals, and clarify the impact of initiatives. To build this complex source of information, will be our biggest challenge. Once it is created, everyone in the school will assume responsibility and accountability for their own operations.

Education is a complex organizational enterprise that requires the integration of many different components. An optimal communication system will provide the organizational members with the tools necessary to do their job well. We must create formal and informal channels that will encourage a timely, full, and open flow of information.

The final challenge is to utilize the School Management Team (SMT) to its fullest potential. The administrators must make full use of all available human resources in a collaborative effort. This team must be very active as leaders keeping up with innovations and trends in education. The School Based Management Team is the most significant reform of the decade – a potential force for empowering educators and communities but the members must realize that every project related to the curriculum is a requirement for deep involvement by all faculty if the project is to be implemented and supported by all faculty. Since the principal cannot and is not expected to do it all alone, this will demonstrate to the

young people a sense of unity and commitment by faculty and administration. The entire organization will be able to meet the set goals and objectives. The team members have the necessary skills and reflect diversity within the group. With this group, individual and team performance will be assessed.

This research clearly took the intern beyond narrow views of implementing the CCCS to more complex issues of equity, curriculum and pedagogical practices and relations of authority within the school and the district. It also touched on the complex processes or reconceptualizing school reform and on the state's role of framing and encouraging experimentation and innovation at the local level.

The study started with ten questions, but focused on six of the questions about the implementation of the CCCS at Pleasantville High School.

- (1) Do you understand the district's variation in response to the states to the CCCS?
- (2) Will this CCCS prepare students to be productive citizens?
- (3) Does this require students to earn more credits for graduation?
- (4) Are students exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?
- (5) Are students struggling with their required courses?
- (6) Are these content standards the only blueprint requirements for our students' success?

The answers to these questions are complex and multifaceted. Conclusion drawn as far as the state's role is concerned is that it should review the reform policy in terms of the technical, political, cultural and moral framework before any future implementation. From the conversations and literature, the state appears to know the outcomes expected, but has not provided the training necessary nor offered technical assistance to encourage and facilitate innovation at the local

level. The state expects the local school district to implement the CCCS requirements with very little guidance from its level.

This is just a sample of the research on the effects of the CCCS at Pleasantville High. Many students are still having trouble focusing their attention on their studies. They are still having trouble passing the state mandated tests. For the school to achieve success, new methods of teaching and learning must be investigated and implemented. This must become an ongoing process. It is evident that to make this process work, we must get the staff to make a commitment to future improvement efforts and to never lose sight of the underlying common purpose of our efforts: that which we must do to help students learn, and how we must work together to do it.

Increasing high school requirements did increase students' access to more academic content, for some contents. Students who are not college bound can now take more mathematics, science, and a few other subjects, but it is at the expense of some vocational courses. The employers interviewed hardly noticed the shifts in the requirements even when the new requirements were explained to them.

This study provides a glimpse of what students, teachers, and administration interpret the implementation of the CCCS to be. The plea of the intern is for the administrators to set clear vision to empower and support those close to the students- the teachers. They must also encourage experimentation, risk taking, and innovation around the vision and goals.

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Appendix A.
Research Instruments

November 1, 1998

Dear Colleagues:

I am requesting a few minutes of your valuable time and that of your students to assist me in studying a contemporary educational issue. Implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Pleasantville High School.

I am completing my graduate program in School Administration at Rowan University. As a requirement of my course, I must write a thesis using various methods of research methods and instruments. Your participation is very important to me.

Enclosed are the surveys that should take you and your students no more than ten minutes to complete. Will you please complete and return them to me as soon as possible. My mailbox number is B33 located on the first floor.

I will be combining your responses with those of your students to draw conclusions about the implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and Cross-Content Work Readiness skills at Pleasantville High School. The results will be shared with you at a later date.

I greatly appreciate your cooperation. Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Ada R. Barlatt

Number of students in each class.

Required Courses	9th grade 1997/98 Number of students	10th grade 1998/99 Number of students	9th grade 1998/99 Number of students
Language Arts I			
Language Arts I Adv.			
Mathematics I Algebra			
Algebra II			
Geometry			
Physical Education			
Science – General Science			
Biology/W/Lab			
Chemistry W/Lab			
Social Studies World Cultures			
US History Honors			
US History Adv.			
World Languages French			
Spanish			
Visual & Performing Arts Chorus			
Marching Band			
Music Appreciation			
Art I, II			
Electives, included Courses in: Business Ed. Courses Industrial Technology Home Economics			

Figure will show numbers of failures for the same courses the year before the policy change and the year of the change.

Required Courses Number of Failures 1 st Semester	9 th grade 1997/98 Number of students	10 th grade 1998/99 Number of students	9 th grade 1998/99 Number of students
Language Arts I			
Language Arts I Adv.			
Mathematics I Algebra			
Algebra II			
Geometry			
Physical Education			
Science – General			
Biology/W/Lab			
Chemistry W/Lab			
Social Studies World Cultures			
US History I Honors			
US History Adv.			
World Languages French			
Spanish			
Visual & Performing Arts Chorus			
Marching Band			
Music Appreciation			
Art I, II			
Electives, included Courses in: Business Ed. Industrial Technology Home Economics			

Teachers, employers and students asked the same questions

Questions	Yes	No	I don't know
1. Do you understand the district's variation in response to the CCCS?			
2. Will the CCCS prepare students to be productive citizens?			
3. Does this require that students earn more credits for graduation?			
4. Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?			
5. Are these students having problems with the required courses?			
6. Are these content standards the only blueprint requirement for students' success?			
7. Do you believe the new courses will prepare students for the world of work?			
8. Will this meet the requirement of employees, colleges and vocational schools?			
9. Are grades 11 and 12 students presently in part-time employment prepared for the world of work?			
10. Has this new change altered your perception of the future employees?			

The research on currently implemented Core Curriculum Content Standards at Pleasantville High School will concentrate on the views of students, teachers and employers. The following questions are designed to address whether the new policy is affecting the expectations of the three groups in an attempt to make students productive citizens. (You may write your answers in additional sheets)

1. Do you understand the district's variation in response to the Core Curriculum Content Standard?

Yes

No

I don't know

2. Will this Core Curriculum Content Standard prepare student to be productive citizens?

Yes

No

I don't know

3. Does this require that students earn more credits for graduation?

Yes

No

I don't know

4. Are students being exposed to a more rigorous curriculum?

Yes

No

I don't know

5. Are students struggling with their required courses?

Yes

No

I don't know

6. Are these content standards the only blueprint requirement for students' success?

Yes

No

I don't know

7. Which of these courses do you think will prepare students for the world of work?

Visual and Performing Arts

Mathematics

Comprehensive Health and Physical Education

Science

Language Arts/Literacy

Social Studies

World Languages (Spanish selected by Pleasantville)

8. Will this meet the requirements of employers, colleges and vocational schools?

Yes

No

I don't know

9. Are grades 11 and 12 students in part-time employment prepared for the world of work?

Yes

No

I don't know

If your answer is No, what will prepare them for productive citizenship?

10. Has this new change altered your perception of future employees?

Yes

No

I don't know

Any other comments:

Students questions: To help you understand the Core Curriculum Content Standards as implemented in our school, answer the following questions:

Instruction: From each statement, express the extent of your agreement, from strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, by circling the corresponding response. A neutral response indicates that the statement does not apply to your experience, or that you have a neutral opinion. Please respond to all items. Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation. {SA = Strongly Agree} {A = Agree} {N = Neutral} {D = Disagree} {SD = Strongly Disagree}.

1. I selected all the courses I am taking in high school.
Circle one SA A N D SD
2. I am motivated to learn every course in the 9th and 10th grade curriculum.
Circle one SA A N D SD
3. I understand why I am taking all these courses.
Circle one SA A N D SD
4. My teachers have explained the Core Curriculum Content Standard requirement to us.
Circle one SA A N D SD
5. My Guidance Counselor explained the courses to my parents and I.
Circle one SA A N D SD
6. These classes will help me gain college admission and or seek employment.
Circle one SA A N D SD
7. My teachers always explain to us how these classes will help us select a career path.
Circle one SA A N D SD
8. I cannot wait to come to school every morning.
Circle one SA A N D SD
9. On a separate sheet of paper list the courses:
 1. You like best and the reasons you like them.
 2. The courses you dislike and the reasons.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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High School	Freetown Secondary School for Girls Freetown, Sierra Leone West Africa
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Science Business Education Indiana Central College Indianapolis, Indiana
Graduate	Master of Education Secondary Education University of Hartford Hartford, Connecticut Master of Arts School Administration Rowan University Glassboro, New Jersey
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