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The effectiveness of prereferral interventions through pupil assistance committees on academic and behavioral needs of students

Barbara G. Fletcher
Rowan College of New Jersey

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREREFERRAL INTERVENTIONS
THROUGH PUPIL ASSISTANCE COMMITTEES
ON ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL
NEEDS OF STUDENTS

by
Barbara G. Fletcher

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate
Division of Rowan College
1995

Approved by ________________________

Date Approved May 6, 1995
ABSTRACT

Barbara G. Fletcher

The Effectiveness of Prereferral Interventions Through Pupil Assistance Committees on Academic and Behavioral Needs of Students
1995
Thesis Advisor - Stanley Urban, Ph.D.
Graduate Program - Learning Disabilities

The general purpose of the study was to determine if prereferral interventions, through a PAC team, were effective in adding to the ability of a school to respond to a broad range of students' academic and behavioral needs. The population of this study consisted of 31 students. These fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students were referred to their elementary school's PAC team for behavioral and academic needs. PAC records were analyzed for information including the problems and reasons for referral, the goals of the teachers, suggested interventions, the results of each meeting, and the success of the interventions. Both a teacher and a student questionnaire were developed to ascertain the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the PAC's interventions and success. The average child study team referral rates from the state and the district were compared to the rates at Haines School. Results indicated that the referral rates and newly classified rates at the elementary school for the year, as of April 1995, were lower than last year's state and district averages. Results also indicated that teachers and students using the
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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

Need

Prereferral interventions are used by school districts to assist educators in dealing with at-risk students. Prereferral interventions are implemented when it is determined by the classroom teacher that the child is experiencing either academic or social problems in a regular education classroom. Such interventions are suggested by a committee of school personnel that work collaboratively in the best interest of the child. To see whether the prereferral interventions are working, studies need to be done that evaluate their success. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., Bahr, Fernstrom, and Stecker (1990) found that a recent computer search of the ERIC database produced only three empirical investigations into the effectiveness of prereferral intervention. Also, Fuchs et al. (1990) found only eight additional pertinent and published studies.

There are a variety of constituencies who must have data on the effectiveness of prereferral interventions. For example, school administrators and school boards need evidence showing that the prereferral interventions are worth the time and money spent. They need to make educated decisions about the continuation or the forming of such intervention teams. Similarly, regular education classroom teachers need to be aware of
the results of prereferral intervention studies. Special Education Departments and Child Study Teams also need the latest results on the success of these prereferral intervention teams.

Value of the Study

Information gathered in this study can be utilized by the Pemberton Township School District. The findings from this paper can provide pertinent information regarding the success of the only operating Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) in Pemberton Township. The results can be used to support policymaking decisions regarding Pupil Assistance Committees in the other Pemberton schools. The Isaiah Haines Elementary School's Pupil Assistance Committee has operated since the Spring of 1993. The committee, formed when the State Board of Education mandated that New Jersey school districts establish Pupil Assistance Committees in each school by the beginning of the 1994-1995 school year, can benefit from feedback on its success. The results of this study can be used to evaluate if it is doing what it set out to do. The results found in this study can ease the anxieties of parents and students involved in the prereferral interventions. A report of the success of the PAC team at Haines Elementary School can improve the relations between the teachers and the parents and thus enhance the community's perception of its educators. Finally, the regular education teachers need to examine the results of this study since they are the ones who directly implement the prereferral interventions and monitor their success. They need to know whether or not
the PAC's solutions are really helping them with their students and what proportion of students are actually responding to the interventions.

Purpose of the Study

This study closely examines the PAC at the Isaiah Haines Elementary School and its success in the past two years. The purpose of this study is fourfold; first, to determine if prereferral interventions are effective in preventing the classification of students into special education; second, to compare the rates of referrals and classifications with the district's and state's rates; third, to determine if prereferral interventions are effective in improving the abilities of general education teachers to educate students experiencing difficulties; and fourth, to measure the effectiveness of PAC on student achievement and attitudes.

Research Questions

Are prereferral interventions, through a Pupil Assistance Committee, effective in adding to the ability of schools to respond to a broad range of academic and behavioral needs of students?

a) Do the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee succeed in keeping a child from being referred for special education services?

b) Do the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee succeed in reducing the rate of referrals and classifications compared to the district's and the state's rates?
c) Through the interventions proposed by the PAC, are teachers better able to understand and educate students with difficulties?

d) Are the students serviced by the PAC showing improvement in behavior, academics, and attitudes?

Significance of the Study

There is a large body of data related to the problems of identifying children for special education. The research that follows shows how the formation of prereferral interventions, leading to the Pupil Assistance Committees, began. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L., Bahr, Fernstrom, and Stecker (1990) found that since the U. S. Department of Education's first child count in 1976-1977, the number of students served under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) and Chapter 1 has grown each year, with a total increase of 712,688 children, or 16%, from 1976-1977 to 1986-1987. This increase raises the concerns of educators in special education.

Although meant to give children with disabilities an appropriate education, these good intentions by teachers may have resulted in too many children being identified. Fuchs et al. (1990) reported that incorrect identification is undesirable for many reasons, including the unnecessary separation and stigmatization of children (e.g., Reynolds & Balow, 1972), disruption of school programs (e.g., Will, 1986), and excessive costs (e.g., Singer, 1988). Funding for special education programs is always a problem. Graden, Casey, and Christenson (1985) found that current funding patterns will not allow special education to continue serving greater numbers of students each year. The authors also reported many
school districts are now faced with the problem of trying to serve more special education
students under constraints of limited resource allocation.

In addition, contributing to the large numbers of overidentified children with
disabilities, are the number of teacher referrals. According to Fuchs et al. (1990), on
average, 54.5% of students referred were certified 'handicapped' as reported by 28 large
urban districts in the year 1984-1985. The authors continue stating the importance of
teacher referral to eventual special education placement. This theory is restated by
Graden et al. (1985). They report their findings from Ysseldyke and his colleagues
(Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, & Deno, 1983), describing the current
situation as one in which students are referred in increasing numbers and once referred,
tested almost automatically and placed in special education (often based on LD-
definitional criteria that are inconsistent and inherently problematic). Graden et al.
(1985) also found in examining the work of Algozzine, Christenson, & Ysseldyke, 1982,
that once referred, there was a high probability that the student would be tested (92%
nationally) and subsequently placed in special education (73% nationally). Because of all
of these concerns about the massive referral to placement process, there are now
regulations recommending that teachers conduct interventions in regular classroom
settings before referring students for evaluation.

Besides the increased number of referrals and the almost automatic placement of these
referrals into special education, other problems with the entire referral, assessment, and
decision-making process exist. A major criticism of traditional testing practices is that when a student is tested for special education, the test results often are not instructionally relevant and generally not helpful to teachers (Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1982). This leaves teachers without any useful suggestions to work with if the child is not placed in special education. Another major criticism of the testing is reported by Graden et al. (1985). The authors reported that currently used definitional criteria for determining LD eligibility are inadequate in discriminating learning disabled from low achieving students (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982), and are inconsistent in identifying LD and even "normal" students as handicapped (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1981; Epps, Ysseldyke, & Algozzine, 1983; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Epps, 1983). In addition, Ysseldyke, Pianta, Christenson, Wang, and Algozzine (1983) found that teachers usually contend that they decide to refer students for consideration for special education placement only after they have tried a number of alternative interventions in the regular classroom. Yet, the authors continue, from the extensive study by Goodlad and Klein (1974), little overall evidence was found that specific interventions by classroom teachers were being implemented.

Graden et al. (1985) reported that the prereferral intervention model is based on an indirect, consultative model of service delivery in which resources are directed at providing intervention assistance at the point of initial referral. By doing this, teachers are given possible interventions that might help to deal with the child in the classroom. By presenting a child to a PAC meeting, the teacher receives assistance immediately.
the normal child study referral process, teachers can go months without any assistance. There are many advantages to using this informal approach to problem children:

- It reduces the need for special education services by providing assistance to students in the general education classroom (Graden et al. 1985),
- It reduces future student problems by strengthening the teacher’s capacity to intervene effectively with a greater diversity of children (Fuchs et al. 1990),
- It eliminates inappropriate referrals while increasing the legitimacy of those that are initiated (Fuchs et al. 1990),
- It is faster than the traditional full evaluation in its implementation of interventions (Pugach and Johnson, 1989), and
- It keeps the regular education teacher involved in the problem rather than absolving themselves from responsibility (Pugach and Johnson, 1989).

Due to all of these advantages, prereferral interventions, completed through the use of PAC meetings are very useful to school systems, which remain in compliance with PL 94-142 by providing services to children with special needs in the least restrictive environment.

Theory

The rationale for the prereferral intervention model is based on an ecological model of viewing student learning and behavior problems within the context of the classroom.
Also, the model is aimed at correcting some of the problems with current referral, testing, and placing practices (Graden, Casey, and Bonstrom, 1985).

The theory behind the PAC is extensive. Results from a 1982 New Jersey Special Education Study Commission, created to conduct an extensive review of the State’s system for providing special education programs and services, show that many concerns exist regarding the delivery of services to pupils with learning disabilities. The concerns include:

- A limited capacity in regular education to serve pupils with mild learning and behavior problems, which result in an overreliance on special education;

- Inadequate coordination and/or communication between special and regular education;

- A reliance on a system of special education that labels handicapped pupils by their disability rather than focusing on their educational needs; and

- Limited flexibility in the organization and provisions of special education programs at the school building level.

In response to these concerns, New Jersey’s Special Education Department listed as a goal that the capacity of regular education, serving pupils with learning behavior problems, would increase. The action taken, forming the Department’s School Resource Committee (SRC), shows the great initiative taken by New Jersey. The SRC (a forerunner of PAC), and the PAC of today are very similar. Their first goal, to design
and recommend interventions for nonhandicapped pupils experiencing difficulties in the regular class, is the same. Their second goal, differs only slightly in wording. The SRC’s second goal, to develop annual recommendations for a building improvement plan, and the PAC’s second goal, to develop an annual Pupil Assistance Committee Report, both attempt to make sure that the committees evaluate their pupils’ needs and offer recommendations that will service those needs. The regulations for the PACs are modeled after the successful SRC pilot programs initiated in the late 1980’s.

Overview

In chapter two, current research that pertains to operating Pupil Assistance Committees and their successes will be reviewed. Literature containing different prereferral interventions, the success rates of the interventions in keeping students out of special education, and the achievement of the students receiving assistance will be compared and analyzed. Literature on teacher attitudes and training will also be analyzed. In chapter three, the design of the study on the effectiveness of Pupil Assistance Committees will be reviewed. This includes the sample used for this study, operational measures, an explicit plan of design, testable hypotheses, and an analysis of the models used to test the hypotheses. In chapter four, an analysis of the results from the data gathered from the study will be reviewed. It is predicted that the results of the study completed for this thesis will be similar to the information found in the review of current literature. Chapter five will summarize the major findings and results of the study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, a variety of studies related to Pupil Assistance Committees will be reviewed. Sources include original studies, reviews of original studies, and ERIC documents that provide overviews of research.

Implementing a Prereferral Intervention System: Part 1 and Part 2

A three year study by Graden et al. (1985) evaluated the success of prereferral interventions. The investigation used a consultative model of service delivery in which resources were directed at providing intervention assistance at the point of initial referral. It was focused on preventing inappropriate placements in special education and also on preventing future student problems by increasing the skill and knowledge of regular classroom teachers to intervene effectively with diverse groups of students.

The study involved a total of six schools. Schools 1, 2, and 3 were put into group 1. Schools 4, 5, and 6 were put into group 2. The first group of schools used consulting teachers who were special education resource teachers. These teachers were trained by the authors and received supervision throughout the implementation of the project. However, because of some resistance to the prereferral consultation model, Schools 1
However, because of some resistance to the prereferral consultation model, Schools 1 and 2 preferred sending referred students directly to the Child Study Team before intervention strategies were tried. School 3 used a consulting teacher who implemented interventions and then reported the status of the interventions to the child study team. After the study was over, it is interesting that Schools 1 and 2 did not continue with a prereferral intervention model. School 3 continued implementation of the prereferral intervention model.

Schools 4, 5, and 6, (group 2) used a prereferral intervention model initiated by the senior author of the study, who acted as the school psychologist for these schools. Implementation of the model varied in each building. In School 4, the school psychologist served as the primary consultant. In School 5, the building facilitator served as the primary consultant and prereferral interventions were required before a formal referral for special education could be made. In School 6, the school psychologist served as a consultant for prereferral interventions and all six special education teachers served as consulting teachers. The child study process still was primarily used in all referrals except that the first step in the process was to assign a case to a child study team member for consultation.

The results of this study of the three schools in group 1 vary. Results indicated that in School 1, the numbers of students referred for child study and the numbers of students tested and placed remained somewhat constant from the base year (before
implementation) and the implementation year. The number of students tested and placed in this school increased in the postimplementation year when they did not use a consultation model. In School 2, the numbers of students tested decreased somewhat and of the total referred, only about half were tested compared to 100% the previous year. However, the number of students placed in special education continued to increase across the three years. In School 3, which continued implementation after the study, large numbers of students referred for prereferral consultation were reported. Also reported were fewer students being tested, and fewer students being placed in special education.

Overall, trends were difficult to establish in the first group of schools because of the differences in implementation of prereferral intervention models. But, there was an overall initial decrease in the numbers of students tested, and there was a slight decrease in the numbers of students placed in the implementation year. Because of Schools 1 and 2 not implementing a prereferral intervention model in the postimplementation year, these numbers rose again to the base year levels. School 3, however, continued to show declines in numbers.

The results of the study of the schools in group 2 are more positive. In School 4, there was increased use of consultation, a 68% decline in testing, and a 79% decline in students placed. In School 5, which was comparatively low in testing and placement rates in the preimplementation year, there was a 60% decline in testing and a decline from
5 to 4 new students placed in special education. In School 6, results showed a 67% decline in testing and a 77% decline in the number of students placed in special education.

Across all six schools, overall positive results were seen in Schools 3, 4, 5, and 6. The variables were a significant factor in the results. The 4 schools with positive results from the study had administrative support, allocation of adequate personnel, time for consultation, support for changes in the process, and energetic, willing teachers and consultants. Also, the teachers in those schools reported that the students were benefiting and that classroom interventions were effective.

The six schools in this study were divided into two groups. Each school, within its group, was to initiate the same type of prereferral intervention process. However, there were differences in the implementation of the study. In the first group, Schools 1 and 2 were not totally supportive of the assigned prereferral intervention model. If they had been, the results could have been better because School 3 did show positive results when they followed the assigned model. Schools 4, 5, and 6, in the second group, although slightly different in their implementation, all showed positive results. The time period of implementation and the numbers of samples seems adequate for this study. But, a longer period and larger sample would validate the results. The decline in testing, decline in placement, and positive teacher attitudes are the results I anticipate in my study of the prereferral intervention process at the Isaiah Haines School.
A study using Behavioral Consultation with Mainstream Assistance Teams, (Fuchs, et al 1990) assessed the effects of three increasingly inclusive versions of intervention on the problem behavior of students. The investigation used a teacher consultation model known as Behavioral Consultation. This model required a consultant to intervene indirectly with a difficult to teach student through consultation with the student's teacher. The consultant guides the teacher through problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation. The Behavioral Consultation's interventions are prescriptive in that they require teacher-student contracts and specific monitoring procedures. They are student directed in that the student plays an active role in monitoring, recording, and evaluating their behavior. In the first version, the teacher and the consultant worked collaboratively to identify and analyze the problem. However, the consultant did not assist the teacher in implementation of the intervention and they did not evaluate the intervention effects. The second version of Behavioral Consultation included all of version 1, but also required the consultant to make a minimum of two classroom visits, during which the consultant observed the teacher implement the intervention. There is no formal evaluation of the intervention. In the third version, everything is required up to and including the formal evaluation of the intervention.

Thirty teachers from the fifth and sixth grade and one seventh grade teacher were picked for the experimental group. Twelve fifth and sixth grade teachers were picked for the control group. All project teachers identified their most difficult to teach
nonhandicapped student. A majority of these 43 students was male and their behavior problems fell into many categories.

Written scripts were developed for each version of the Behavioral Consultation model to be used. Teachers were randomly selected for the different versions. Consultants were trained extensively in observation skills, the fidelity of treatment, and data collection procedures.

The fidelity of classroom interventions was monitored. Results showed no significant difference between the data gathered when the teacher did the monitoring and when the student monitored themselves. The frequency and accuracy of the monitoring in the experimental groups complied with the requirements of the contracts. The frequency with which contractual goals were met varied only slightly for the three versions of Behavioral Consultation. 66% of the pupils in version 1, 62% of the pupils in version 2, and 72% of the pupils in version 3 achieved their daily contract-related goals during a majority of the monitoring sessions.

Across the Behavioral Consultation versions, teachers’ ratings of project effectiveness ranged from 3.00 to 3.82 on a 5 point scale. Consultant ratings of project effectiveness ranged from 3.20 to 3.82. Their ratings of project components like student-teacher contracts (4.10 to 4.20) and monitoring procedures (4.50 to 4.60) also were positive. Also, students were given a questionnaire. They (a) believed their behavior improved
during the contracts (3.80 to 4.50), and (b) stated they would recommend that more teachers use them (3.80 to 4.50) (Fuchs et al., 1990).

Regardless of the version used, teachers tended to believe the project was worth doing, with mean ratings ranging from 3.90 to 4.36 (Fuchs et al., 1990). Consultants, too, seemed to believe the project was worthwhile, with ratings between 4.10 and 4.20. In addition, teachers felt that the consultants were very collaborative (4.00 to 5.00) and very helpful (4.20 to 5.00). Each consultant responded with a 5.00 in their evaluation of the technical assistance they received.

Results from this study suggest the more inclusive versions of Behavioral Consultation (2 and 3) promoted more positive student change than the least inclusive variant, (1). Students in the Behavioral Consultation versions 2 and 3, in comparison to the students in the control groups and version 1, reported significantly reduced initial discrepancies between themselves and their peers regarding percentage of problem behavior (Fuchs et al., 1990). However, the ratings from the teachers from the version 1 group were also significantly and dramatically more improved than the controls. So, perhaps a version 1 of Behavioral Consultation is better than nothing at all.

This study was completed with the help of graduate assistants who provided technical assistance and served as gophers and calendar watchers, responsible for facilitating correct and timely implementation of project activity (Fuchs et al., 1990). This factor
was considered to be instrumental in the success of the Mainstream Assistance Team approach using Behavior Consultation. So the results of the study may not be indicative of the results to come from a school that's implementing the intervention without assistance. Also, the teachers of this study volunteered and got paid for their participation. The students that they picked from their class to be the subjects may not be typical of those who normally participate in consultation activity. The variables encountered when administering the prereferral interventions in each school also affect the results. Teacher subjectivity in rating success also is a factor. The study suggests that students improved but it doesn't report the percentages of the students referred by their teachers for formal evaluation. Finally, the study reports that the students kept up their good behavior but the follow up period is only three weeks. Three weeks is not a long period.

This study used similar subjects to the ones that I will be using in my study. Most of the students referred to the PAC team at Isaiah Haines School are referred because of behavior problems.

Prereferral Intervention through Teacher Consultation: Mainstream Assistance Teams

The following three year study evaluated a prereferral intervention model called Mainstream Assistance Teams. This study, by Fuchs, Douglas, and others (1989) completed at the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee, was implemented using an educational grant. This authors of this study researched the most
effective intervention strategies for difficult to teach students (mostly behavior problems).

After doing so, they came up with exact plans to follow for each strategy. The sample of
103 students was taken from a large urban school district. The investigation also used the
teacher consultation model known as Behavioral Consultation, previously discussed in the
last study.

After being identified in the first meeting with the teacher, a student is observed by
the consultant on two days. The consultant uses interval recording to establish the
frequency of the problem behavior. In meeting 2, the consultant reports the observation
data to the classroom teacher and an intervention strategy is developed. A written
contract is established by the teacher and the student, outlining the particular class time
and activity during which the behavior will be monitored. Rewards, starting and ending
dates, and the daily goal also are built into the contract.

Phase 1 starts with the student self-monitoring himself with +’s and -’s on a grid.
Then the student records the results on a chart. The student and teacher have to agree on
and review the records to see if the student is improving. The student also has to write a
self-talk question and answer monitoring sheet which will make the student reflect on the
nature of the desired behavior. The teacher must give two types of reinforcement when a
goal is met. First, a verbal reinforcement must be given and second, a reward for the
student must be given. The consultant observes the intervention in action and sets up
phases 2 and 3. The procedures for these phases are less time consuming. Gradually, the
paperwork is gone and the goal changes. The interventions were not only designed to induce behavior change in an initial classroom, but also to facilitate its transfer to other classrooms. The goal now is to get the student to perform the desired behavior in another classroom (transfer). Similar charts, grids, and phases are used in the transfer classroom.

This investigation by Fuchs (1989) indicated that the intervention dramatically reduced the frequency of most difficult to teach students' problem behavior and caused a majority of teachers to become more positive toward these pupils. The authors reported also that the students were significantly less likely to be referred to special education than similar students in control groups (Fuchs, 1989).

This study had many weaknesses. This study did not include any data on the results. The actual rates of success, or the break down of which interventions were used is not given. Also, there is no data on the teacher's rating scales and questionnaires. There is no data given on referral rates before or after the Behavior Consultation was implemented. I thought this study was pertinent to my study because most of our prereferrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee are due to behavior problems.

Peer Collaboration: Enhancing Teacher Problem Solving Capabilities for Students at Risk

The following study used a prereferral intervention strategy called Peer Collaboration. The study focused on teacher attitudes of students with mild learning disabilities and behavior problems. Its purpose was to examine the effectiveness of Peer Collaboration in
increasing the capabilities of classroom teachers to develop and implement alternative interventions for students with mild learning or behavior problems (Pugach, M. and Johnson, L., 1988).

In the intervention group there were 44 elementary school teachers and 4 middle school teachers. A comparison group had 43 elementary teachers. The teachers were divided equally from Illinois and Wisconsin. The teachers paired up with a teacher in their school. Experimental subjects received training in peer collaboration and agreed to apply the process to at least four problems per pair.

Peer collaboration is a structured four step, problem solving process incorporating the strategies of (a) problem clarification through self-questioning, (b) problem summarization, (c) generating potential interventions and predicting their outcomes, and (d) developing an evaluation plan (Pugach & Johnson, 1988). When used by teachers, one teacher initiates the discussion and follows the steps in the process, while the peer partner, or facilitator, assist their partners in assuring that the steps are followed appropriately.

Pugach and Johnson (1988) reported three sets of data were collected from both intervention and comparison subjects prior to training. They included (a) a demographic questionnaire, (b) a description of students who were having problems in class that year,
and (c) the Teachable Pupil Survey (Kornblau, 1982). The Teachable Pupil Survey by Kornblau (1982) was administered to all of the teachers before and after the study.

The results from this survey showed that the expectations teachers in the intervention group held regarding cognitive and social abilities of their students decreased after the intervention (Pugach & Johnson, 1988). This showed that the teachers had a greater tolerance for ranges of cognitive and social abilities. In the control group, the teachers' expectations increased slightly on these dimensions. Both intervention and control group teachers showed only slight decreases in their expectations regarding school appropriate behaviors. This is interesting because after all of the training, which was based on getting teachers to be more tolerant of mild learning disabilities and problem behaviors, the teachers in both groups did not change much in their expectations of school appropriate behavior.

Another change in the teacher attitudes was teachers became more specific in their understandings of the problems they encountered and shifted to discussing them in a manner which made problems potentially more solvable (Pugach & Johnson, 1988). Teacher frustration receded when they felt they had their own repertoire of teaching strategies to choose from and they didn't need to go to the special education consultant. One thing that was necessary for these teachers to successfully implement their own intervention strategies in the classroom was adequate time to define and reflect on the actual problem.
Although teachers reported an increase in tolerance for the cognitive and social disabilities of the mild learning disabled and behavior problem students, they did not change their expectations of what appropriate school behavior should be. The study does not report on the effectiveness of the intervention strategies. Nor, does it report the effectiveness the intervention strategies had in keeping students from being referred for formal testing. The study was only six months long and there wasn't any follow up to see if teachers were still using the process.

An Analysis of Teachers' Prereferral Interventions for Students Exhibiting Behavioral Problems

The results of two studies in which regular teachers' prereferral interventions for students with behavior problems were examined. In the first study, 59 elementary school teachers volunteered. These teachers received a 2-page summary describing a third grade student named David. The summary included medical, developmental, family, school history, test information, and third grade classroom observations. All information reflected that of an average child except for his defiant, rude, and hyperactive behavior.

The 59 teachers in the first study were asked to complete a survey entitled "Actions to be Taken", which asked the teachers to respond to 40 statements about intervention. On a Likert scale from 1 to 5, the teacher was to indicate degree of agreement with the intervention. Results indicated that the teachers rated more than half of the items with
ratings greater than 3.5 (Sevcik & Ysseldike, 1986). Teachers indicated their favorite interventions involved collecting information about the student through consultation or assessment, relying on specialists, and using teacher directed actions to manage the program. The least favored treatment alternatives included tutoring, retention, placement of the child in another class, drug therapy, and moving the child at the same rate of progress as peers.

In study 2, the subjects were 26 elementary regular classroom teachers who had referred students for evaluations. A 2 page survey form was developed to elicit information from the teachers about their referred student and to find out what interventions were used by the teachers.

Results from this study indicated that the teachers listed 117 reasons for the 26 students they referred, resulting in an average of 4.5 referral reasons per student. The 26 teachers listed a total of 90 prereferral interventions used. Each intervention was put into one of eight categories: specific behavioral (31%), discussion/conference (18%), methods (17%), specialized help (10%), nonspecific behavioral (10%), structural change (10%), informational (2%), and miscellaneous (2%). Of the 90 prereferral interventions used, 90% of them were initiated by the teachers themselves, without the help of consultation.
From the two studies analyzed by Sevcik and Ysseldyke (1986), results indicate that teachers both proposed to use and actually did use interventions that involved teacher-directed actions. But, because of the vaguely completed surveys, this is questionable because we don’t know how well teachers transferred their interventions into the classroom. In addition, behavioral interventions used by these teachers indicated only 36% of these interventions involved positive reinforcement, while punishment and unspecified interventions comprised 61% of these interventions. Only 10% of the interventions in the second study were a result of a conference with a consultation team which suggests that 90% of the interventions were implemented by teachers on their own. But, the Prereferral interventions attempted in this study were not successful, since these students were referred for evaluation and their cases were used for this study.

The purpose of these studies was to examine regular classroom teachers’ prereferral interventions (both proposed and actual) for students with behavioral problems. This study used a broad sample of teachers spread out demographically. The study used checklists, surveys, and rating scales, but also allowed the teachers to write in explanations or answers.

An Analysis of Prereferral Interventions

In another study, prereferral interventions used by 105 elementary teachers before referring students, were examined. The data analyzed in this study were the teachers’ responses to three open-ended questions concerning prereferral classroom interventions,
reasons for referral, and titles of individuals to whom the referring teacher had spoken concerning the student (Ysseldyke, J., Pianta, B., Christenson, S., and Wang, J., 1983).

Teachers were asked to list the things that had been tried in the classroom to remedy the identified problem prior to referral. Their answers were categorized into methods, behavioral, structural change, specialized help, informational, materials, and miscellaneous. Also, the majority of teachers reported combining several prereferral interventions. Of the 328 interventions used only 13.4% were the direct result of a conference. Only 28.6% of the teachers mentioned a time period of implementation and they were nonspecific. 98 of the teachers reported that they talked to another person about the referred student. Special education teachers, principals, parents and other teachers comprised the top four individuals with whom teachers consulted. Most teachers spoke with more than one person. The five most occurring reasons for referral were learning-related symptoms, emotionally-manifested symptoms, attention related symptoms, performance-related symptoms, and behavior disorders.

The results of this study suggest that teachers do take on the responsibility of prereferral interventions in their classroom. These interventions are varied and also lack accountability. Once again, this study relies on the surveys completed by teachers. These surveys could be invalid for three reasons. The teachers may say one thing but do another. They may also want to appear knowledgeable and conscientious. Finally, they also may not remember exactly what happened in their prereferral intervention process.
Survey on Prereferral Practices: Responses From State Departments of Education

A six item survey by Jane Carter and George Sugai (1989) was sent to state directors of special education in all 50 states. The purpose of the study was to determine how many states apply prereferral intervention strategies and how these procedures are characterized. The survey addresses specific issues like (a) who is involved in designing and implementing prereferral interventions; (b) for which suspected handicapping conditions are prereferral interventions required or recommended; and (c) how successful are prereferral intervention strategies in maintaining students in regular education settings?

Results showed that 23 State Education Agency administrators required prereferral interventions for students suspected of having a handicap. 21 of the administrators signified that they only recommend or had no prereferral requirements. 34 states required or recommended that prereferral systems be established by local education agencies. Results indicated that teachers designed most of the prereferral interventions, followed by multidisciplinary teams, psychologists, and consultants. When asked whether prereferral interventions were successful in maintaining students in regular education settings, three-quarters of the respondents indicated that prereferral was effective only sometimes or that they had no basis for such a judgment.
The results of this study show that most state agencies support the prereferral intervention approach. However, research has to be done on how the local school districts implement their states' policies and recommendations.

Summary

Much of the literature on prereferral interventions and their effectiveness in adding to the ability of schools to respond to a broad range of academic and behavioral needs of students seems to be positive. Both the study by Graden et. al. (1985) and the study by Fuchs et. al. (1990) reported that prereferral interventions lead to a decline in students tested and then placed in special education. Graden et. al. (1985), Fuchs et. al. (1990), Fuchs, et. al. (1989) and Pugach, M. et. al. (1988) reported more positive teacher attitudes towards these students. Three of these studies, (Fuchs et. al. 1989; Fuchs et. al. 1990, Graden et. al. 1985) reported improvement in the students' problem behavior.

However, in two other articles reviewed, (Sevcik and Ysseldyke, 1986; Ysseldyke, Pianta, Christenson, & Wang, 1983) the results showed that prereferral interventions were used by teachers and most of these interventions were thought up by the teachers themselves without the use of a consultation.

Finally, a survey (Carter, J. and Sugai, G., 1989) on the policies regarding prereferral interventions of State Education Agency administrators was reviewed. It was reported that about two-thirds of the states do require or recommend that the schools set up a
prereferral intervention system. Slightly less than half of the states required that a
prereferral intervention be used.

Although, there is limited research in the area of prereferral interventions, the studies in
this review are critical to the study which is presented in this thesis.
CHAPTER III: THE DESIGN

Sample

The sample used in this study consisted of 31 students. All of these students were referred to the Isaiah Haines Pupil Assistance Committee. Of these 31 students, 18 were referred to the PAC team in the 1993-1994 school year and the remaining 13 students were referred so far in the 1994-1995 school year.

According to the 1990 Department of Labor Census, there are approximately 32,000 people living in Pemberton Township, many of which are single family households. Isaiah Haines Elementary School is one of 13 schools in Pemberton Township. There are 11 elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The district’s student population is 6,225 students. There are 1,158 students in Pemberton Township classified with special education needs. This is equivalent to about 18.6% of the student population. Of these 1,158 students, 857 of them (74%) are taught in the district. Nearly 300 of Pemberton’s students attend special education schools out of the district.

Of the 74% of students with special needs who stay in Pemberton, more than half of them are taught in self-contained classrooms, which keeps similarly classified children together. The remainder, about 301 students, are either completely mainstreamed into
regular classes or taught in resource center programs. In addition to the classified children, there are 272 students eligible for speech and language services.

Of the 31 students referred to the Haines School PAC, 13 were girls and 18 were boys. There were 7 fourth graders, 10 fifth graders, and 14 sixth graders. Of the 31 students, there were 15 whites, 12 blacks, 3 Hispanics, and 1 Japanese. The reasons for referral varied but the students were generally classified as having either poor behavior, poor academic skills, or both. 14 of the students were referred for behavior reasons, 6 were referred for academic reasons, and 11 were referred for behavior and academic reasons. Table 3.1 summarizes the reasons for referrals to the Haines School PAC.

Table 3.1
Reasons for Referral to PAC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Behavior Reasons</th>
<th>Academic Reasons</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Behavior Reasons</th>
<th>Academic Reasons</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*numbers based on records from 1993/1994 school year and from Sept. 1994 through April 1995 school year
Measures

To establish the reliability of the students used in the sample, previous school records and PAC records were analyzed. Information gathered from the PAC team’s records included the presenting problems and reasons for referral, the goals of the teachers, suggested interventions, the results of each meeting, and the success of the interventions. Students referred to the PAC team for behavior problems or academic problems generally had similar problems in previous years. The students’ behavioral or academic difficulties showed a pattern that escalated as the student grew older.

The students’ school records, PAC records, and child study team records possess face validity. Students’ school records were reviewed for an accurate statement of their success in school. The PAC records were taken from the school records and through consultation with the student, parents, and teacher. Child study team records were checked to see if those students receiving prereferral interventions were eventually referred to special education. The child study team’s records were also reviewed for the results of those students referred to the child study team in previous years. Statistics from the state were gathered from two reports: Special Education: A Statistical Report for the 1992 - 1993 School Year and Special Education: A Statistical Report for the 1993 - 1994 School Year. Both reports are produced by the New Jersey State Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.
A teacher questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed to ascertain the teachers' attitudes towards the PAC. The questionnaire consisted of 9 multiple choice questions and 7 questions rated on a scale of 1 to 5. Fifteen teachers, 5 from each grade level at the Isaiah Haines School, were given the questionnaire. The entire group of 15 responded. Questionnaires were returned and included information that pertained to the number of times teachers used PAC, the success rates of the PAC interventions, the teachers' professional opinions of PAC, and the teachers' perceived reactions of the students. The questionnaires possessed face validity since the questions measured teachers' attitudes towards the PAC and towards the students receiving assistance from PAC.

A student questionnaire with face validity was developed to gather the students' attitudes towards the PAC team's interventions. The questionnaire was given to 5 of the students receiving assistance through PAC interventions. All of the students responded. The questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed to get the students' reactions to the extra help they have received. Other methods used to measure student improvement were the results from the PAC meetings and teacher questionnaires.

Statistics from state records, district records, and Haines School records were compared. Specifically from the school years 1990 -1991 through 1994 - 1995, child study team rates, rates of child study team referrals, and rates of newly classified students each year were compared.
Design of the Study

A study was done in which data was used in order to determine if the Pupil Assistance Committee was effective in lowering the number of referrals to the child study team, lowering referral rates compared to the district and the state, lowering classification rates, improving teacher attitudes and effective instruction, and improving students' areas of weakness. In the study, the following information was obtained from the students' records and the PAC's records:

1. Past and current report cards showing grades and teachers' comments.
2. Interventions tried by the classroom teacher before referring the student to PAC.
3. Records kept by the classroom teacher documenting the interventions tried.
4. The reasons for referral to the PAC team.
5. The results of the meetings with the PAC team and the suggested interventions decided upon.
6. The results of the follow up meetings with the PAC team after the interventions were tried.

From the teacher questionnaires, the following information was obtained:

1. The teachers' attitudes towards the students' needs.
2. The teachers' feelings about the success of the PAC team's assistance in helping the students with their individual problems.
3. The teachers' feelings about whether they are better able to educate the students in their classes with these problems.
From the student questionnaires, the following information was obtained:

1. The students' attitudes towards the assistance they are getting.
2. The student's attitudes towards the relationship between the PAC team's interventions and the successes they are having in school.


District rates and numbers were gathered from the Child Study Team Department at Pemberton Township. Haines School rates and numbers were gathered from the records kept by the PAC and from the district's Child Study Team Department.

Research Questions

Overall general question:

Have prereferral interventions through a Pupil Assistance Committee been effective in adding to the ability of schools to respond to a broad range of academic and behavior problems?

In order to respond to this question, the following sub-questions will be answered.
1. Have the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee at Haines School been successful in reducing the number of referrals to the Child Study Team?
2. Have the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee at Haines School been successful in reducing the rate of referrals and classifications compared to the district's and the state's rate of referrals?
3. Through the interventions proposed by the Pupil Assistance Committee, are teachers better able to understand and educate their students with difficulties?
4. Are the students receiving assistance from the PAC showing improvement in their respective areas and how are their attitudes towards the interventions?

Analysis of the Data

When analyzing the data, the students were divided into reasons for referral (behavior, academic, or both categories). Success and failure rates of the PAC interventions were based on teacher comments and analysis. Success of the PAC in keeping students from being classified was analyzed through PAC and child study team records. The rate of students referred to the child study team from Haines School to the overall district rates and New Jersey's rates was compared using child study team and state statistics. The percentage of enrollment that is newly classified each year at Haines School was compared to the percentage of enrollment newly classified in the district and in New Jersey. Teacher and student opinions of the effectiveness of the PAC team were analyzed using questionnaires.
Summary

In this chapter, thirty-one students were examined in relation to the Pupil Assistance Committee's success in the Isaiah Haines Elementary School. All information was obtained from student records, PAC records, child study team records, state records, and teacher/student questionnaires. An analysis compared the data from the 31 students serviced by PAC. The data on referrals and classifications from the state, the district, and Haines School were compared. The teachers' and the students' questionnaires were examined for their responses on the effectiveness of the PAC at Haines School. The results of this analysis is contained in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Introduction

Results from the PAC records, district records, state records, teacher questionnaires, and student questionnaires were analyzed.

Results

General Research Question:
Have prereferral interventions through a Pupil Assistance Committee been effective in adding to the ability of schools to respond to a broad range of academic and behavior problems?

Overall, after analyzing the minutes from the PAC meetings and the responses from the teacher and student questionnaires, the results indicate that PAC is effective at the Haines School.

Research Question One:
Have the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee at Haines School been successful in reducing the number of referrals to the Child Study Team?
The number of students referred to the child study team from the Isaiah Haines School has varied. Table 4.1 summarizes the data for the number of child study team referrals, the number of students referred to the Child Study Team who have been serviced by the PAC, the number of classified students, and the number referred but not classified from Haines School.

### Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th># Child Study Team Referrals/ Rate</th>
<th># of CST Referrals from PAC</th>
<th># of evaluated referrals determined</th>
<th># of classified referrals not eligible</th>
<th># of evaluations not completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 - 91</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>19 (6.8)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 - 92</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>10 (2.8)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 - 93</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>8 (2.2)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 - 94</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>15 (4.3)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94 - 95</td>
<td>372*</td>
<td>7* (1.9)</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* numbers based on records from Sept. 1994 - April 1995

The Haines School became an elementary school for the first time in 1990-1991. In 1990-1991, Haines School consisted of two third grades, three fourth grades, three fifth grades, three sixth grades, and two special education classes. There were 19 children referred for an evaluation and 17 of them were classified. From the 1991-1992 school year through the present, the student population at Haines School has consisted of five fourth grades, five fifth grades, five sixth grades, and one special education class. Having the third grades in the year 1990-1991 may have increased the number of referrals to the child study team. Students with disabilities are often diagnosed in the primary grades. After having this abnormally high year (1990-1991), rates of referral slowed down in the following two years. 10 students were referred and 8 were classified in 1991-1992.
Eight students were referred and 6 were classified in 1992-1993. Since the PAC team hadn't started operating yet, no PAC data can be reviewed for these first three years.

Fifteen students were referred and 8 classified in 1993-1994. The rates of referral for the school had gone down from a high of 6.8 in 1990-1991 to 2.2 in 1992-1993. The rate of referrals for the year 1993-1994 actually went back up to 4.3, suggesting that the use of the PAC did not lower the number of referrals to the Child Study Team. There were, however, 18 referrals to the PAC in 1993-1994. Only four of these students went on to be referred to the Child Study Team. Perhaps, the rate of referrals to the Child Study Team would have been higher if PAC didn't exist. It is possible that the PAC interventions kept some of the other fourteen PAC students out of the Child Study Team process.

Research Question Two:

Have the interventions of the Pupil Assistance Committee at Haines School been successful in reducing the rate of referrals and classifications compared to the district's and the state's rate of referrals?

Pemberton Township's child study team referral rates have been historically higher than the state's referral rates. Haines School's referral rates have been higher than the state's rates except for the year 1992-1993. Table 4.2 compares the referral rates of the state, Pemberton Township, and Haines School.
Table 4.2
Comparison of Child Study Team Referral Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State Referral Rates</th>
<th>Pemberton Referral Rates</th>
<th>Haines School Referral Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 - 91</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 - 92</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 - 93</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 - 94</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94 - 95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.9*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*rate based on numbers from Sept. 1994 - April 1995
N/A - rates not available because the state only requires rates every other year from a district.

The rates of referral to the child study team have remained stable in the state. Haines School rates have varied with the years and so has Pemberton's. Pemberton's and Haines School’s rates of referral have consistently been higher than the state average, except for the year 1992 - 1993 at Haines School. The rates of referral to the Child Study Team are showing a downward trend at Haines School. During the first year of PAC, the referral rate actually rose. But, the rate of referral at Haines School in 1994-1995 is significantly lower indicating that the PAC team’s interventions may be helping to control the unstable referral rate at Haines School. However, this rate only reflects numbers from September 1994 through April 1995.

The percentage of enrollment that is newly classified each year is compared in Table 4.3. Except for the year 1990-1991, Haines School’s rate for newly classified students has remained somewhat unchanged. The state of New Jersey’s rate for newly classified students has remained relatively stable also.
Table 4.3
Comparison of newly classified students in 
New Jersey, in Pemberton, and Haines School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of enrollment newly classified in NJ</th>
<th>% of enrollment newly classified in Pemberton</th>
<th>% of enrollment newly classified at Haines School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 - 91</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 - 92</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 - 93</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 - 94</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94 - 95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A = percentage not available because the state did not require that Pemberton submit rates those years.

The percentages have remained very constant in the state, only varying by hundredths. The percentages of newly classified students each year in Pemberton and in Haines School show more variance and Pemberton Township’s percentage is relatively higher than the state’s and higher than Haines School.

Pemberton Township has shown a significant increase in its Child Study Team rate since the year 1989. The New Jersey Child Study Team rate has increased also but not as significantly. Table 4.4 shows the increases in New Jersey’s and Pemberton’s Child Study Team rates.
Table 4.4
Child Study Team Rates in NJ and Pemberton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NJ CST Rates</th>
<th>Pemberton CST Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89 - 90</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 - 91</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91 - 92</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 - 93</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 - 94</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94 - 95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.6*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*rate includes classified students in September 1994

According to the New Jersey State Department of Special Education, New Jersey ranks second in the nation for the percentage of students classified. Pemberton's rates are consistently much higher than New Jersey's rates and the trend indicates that Pemberton's rates are continuing to rise faster than the state's average.

Research Question Three:

Through the interventions proposed by the Pupil Assistance Committee, are teachers better able to understand and educate students with difficulties?

The responses of the teacher questionnaires were analyzed. Fifteen teacher questionnaires were handed out and completed. Fourteen of the teachers used the PAC for assistance with students. The one that did not used the PAC reported that she has been able to handle the problems in her class on her own. Teachers rated the interventions proposed by the PAC team very successful in four cases, successful in six cases, somewhat successful in twenty cases, and not successful in one case. The teachers reported using the interventions suggested by the PAC team in every single case.

However, there is no way to measure the degree to which teachers used the interventions...
and in PAC follow-ups, it was recorded in three cases with three different teachers that the PAC interventions were not implemented. Teachers also may not have filled out the questionnaire correctly.

Because of the PAC meetings and interventions proposed, twelve of the teachers felt better able to understand the needs of their students in twenty-one of the cases. Two teachers reported being somewhat better able to understand the needs of their students because of PAC.

Because of the strategies suggested by the PAC team, twelve teachers reported being better able to educate their PAC students in twenty-one of the cases. Ten teachers also reported that the strategies suggested by the PAC team helped them in dealing with other students in their classes.

Table 4.5 shows the mean scores of the 14 teachers’ responses to questions concerning the PAC team and its success. Teachers were asked to respond to the questions using a rating scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 meant not at all and 5 meant very much.
### Table 4.5
**Means for Teacher Ratings of Teacher Attitudes Towards PAC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall, are you pleased with the interventions suggested by the PAC team?</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel better able to understand the needs of the students you referred?</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel better able to educate the students in your class who have difficulties?</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After using PAC, do you feel better able to deal with problems in the future?</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did using the PAC team contribute to your professional development?</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the students referred to the PAC team benefit?</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you continue to use the PAC team for difficulties that arise in class?</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean scores of 4.0 and above showed that the teachers were pleased with that aspect of the PAC. Teachers seemed to be very pleased with the interventions suggested by the PAC team (Mean = 4.5). They also reported that they better understand the needs of their students referred to the PAC team (Mean = 4.3). Teachers almost unanimously reported that they will continue to use the PAC team for difficulties that arise in their classes (Mean = 4.6). However, the teachers reported (Mean = 3.8) that they are not as confident that the PAC team has made them better able to educate the students in their
classes who have difficulties. They also are not sure that they will be better able to deal with problems in the future (Mean = 3.9). With a mean of 4.0, teachers thought that the PAC team contributed to their professional development. And showing some skepticism on whether or not the students referred to the PAC team benefited, the teachers’ mean score was 3.7.

Research Question Four:
Are the students receiving assistance from the Pupil Assistance Committee showing improvement in their respective areas and how are their attitudes towards the interventions?

Follow up meetings with the PAC were analyzed. Out of the fourteen students referred for behavior reasons, teachers reported real improvement in behavior in seven of the cases. Teachers reported some improvement in two of the cases where the student showed improvement but occasionally fell back into old habits. Teachers reported that the interventions were unsuccessful in five cases. However, in one of the cases, it was reported in the PAC minutes that the teacher did not follow through with the suggested interventions.

Out of the six cases that were referred for academic reasons, teachers reported improvement in two of them. Teachers reported slight improvement in one other case and a child study team evaluation was recommended for two of the cases. In one case, it was reported that the teacher did not use the interventions suggested.
Out of the eleven students referred for both academic and behavior reasons, teachers reported an improvement in three of the cases. In one of the cases, a teacher reported an improvement in academics but not in behavior. In four of the cases, teachers reported sporadic improvements. In three of the cases teachers reported no improvements. Of these three cases, it was reported in the PAC minutes that in two cases, the teacher did not follow through with the suggested interventions, and in one case, the parent did not want the interventions used on their child.

From the teacher questionnaires, the majority of teachers felt that student attitudes towards the PAC interventions were positive. However, the teachers felt that the students had occasional lapses into old habits. Table 4.6 shows the results from the teachers’ questionnaire concerning students’ attitudes towards PAC interventions.

Table 4.6
Student Attitudes towards PAC interventions from the Teachers’ Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of the total number of students you referred, how many do you feel:</th>
<th>Number of students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. had very positive attitudes about the interventions and worked hard?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. had positive attitudes about the interventions and worked hard most of the time?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. had positive attitudes towards the interventions but also had occasional lapses into old habits?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. had indifferent attitudes towards the interventions and only cooperated occasionally?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. had negative attitudes towards the interventions and didn’t cooperate?</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also, results from the teacher questionnaire showed that teachers gave a mean score of 3.7 on a scale of 1 to 5, when asked whether students referred to the PAC team benefited.

Results from the five student questionnaires handed out indicated overall positive attitudes from the students regarding the PAC interventions. All five of the students recognized that their teacher tried to help them in various ways. All five students reported that they have worked hard in class at improving themselves. However, two of the students reported that their efforts have not been successful. Four of the five students reported that they get rewarded when they show improvement but only two reported that the rewards are meaningful to them. Four of the five students noted that they do work harder at improving if they are working towards a specific reward. All of the five students have Panther Pals, anonymous teachers that check in with the child’s teacher weekly to see if the child deserves any rewards. The Panther Pal rewards that the five students noted as being most valued were pencils, crayons, pens, and positive notes of praise. All five of the students reported that they liked the idea of Panther Pals and being rewarded for improvements in behavior or academics. All five of the students felt that their teachers and Panther Pals were fair in their rewards. Three of the five students reported that they have enjoyed working with their teacher and Panther Pal. One student only enjoyed it a little and the other student couldn’t decide upon an answer. Three of the five students also have noticed an improvement in themselves since the PAC team has
intervened. Two of the students reported that their improvement was due a lot to the encouragement from the PAC team and their teacher. Two more students reported that their improvement was somewhat due to the encouragement from PAC and their teacher. One student felt that the PAC team had no effect on his improvement.

The students all reported that their teachers helped them, that they tried hard to improve, that they like the idea of being rewarded by a Panther Pal, and that the rewards were fair. Overall, three of the five students were very positive about the interventions tried on themselves. A fourth student was slightly less positive about the PAC experience. The fifth student displayed some negative views concerning the amount of improvement he made and the role of the PAC interventions in his improvement.

Discussion

Referral Rates

Pemberton Township and Haines School has high Child Study Team referral rates when compared to the state. After the PAC team's first year, the referral rate at Haines School remained higher than the state average. But, after almost the whole second year of the PAC being in operation, the referral rate dropped considerably at Haines School. This may be attributed to a successful PAC team or it may be due to many other factors.
Newly Classified Rates

Haines School percentage of newly classified students has been lower than Pemberton District’s rates but consistently higher than the state’s rate for newly classified students. The rate for newly classified students at Haines School this year (1994 - 1995) is very low compared to previous years. However, the data is only representative of the student population through April 1995. This reduction in newly classified students may be due to the PAC team’s interventions which may be lowering the number of referrals to the Child Study Team.

Teacher Opinions

Eighty percent of the teachers reported that they were better able to understand the needs of their students and better able to educate their students after being involved with the PAC team. Overall, fourteen out of fifteen teachers have used the PAC team for students experiencing difficulties in the classroom. When they were asked to rate the success of the PAC team in different aspects, overall mean ratings were between 3.7 and 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest). The highest two mean ratings were a 4.5 for being pleased with the suggestions made by the PAC team and a 4.6 for whether or not they will continue to use the PAC team in the future. The lowest mean rating of 3.7 was for whether the students are benefiting.
Student Success

The attitudes of the PAC students towards the interventions attempted and the success rate of the interventions were generally positive. In the cases where behavior was the reason for the PAC referral, the teachers reported that there was some improvement in nine out of the fourteen cases. In the cases where academics was the problem, teachers reported that there was some improvement in three of the six cases. In the cases where both academics and behavior were problems, teachers reported that there was some improvement in seven of the eleven cases, and one student showing only improvement in academics.

Student attitudes towards PAC interventions seemed very positive in three out of the five students questioned. In addition, one student was somewhat positive. However, one student was negative in his experience with the interventions implemented on him. He seemed positive about the behavior modification program and admitted to trying but he wasn’t seeing any praise or rewards. This seemed to be due to an unsuccessful relationship with his Panther Pal.

Summary

The results of this study do seem to indicate that the Pupil Assistance Committee has a positive effect on Haines School’s ability to deal with the needs of its students and the broad range of academic and behavior problems. Most important were the teachers positive responses to the PAC team’s suggestions and the fact that the teachers are using
the PAC team. The results of this study on the students serviced by the PAC team were also overall positive. The majority of the teachers and students responded positively to the effect the PAC had on improving students' behavior or academics. As to whether the PAC team is successful in reducing the number of referrals and classifications in Pemberton Township, future studies will have to be performed using more than two years data.
CHAPTER V:
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The general purpose of the study was to determine if prereferral interventions, through a PAC team, were effective in adding to the ability of a school to respond to a broad range of students’ academic and behavioral needs. The population of this study consisted of 31 students. These fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students were referred to their elementary school’s PAC team for behavioral and academic needs. PAC records were analyzed for information including the problems and reasons for referral, the goals of the teachers, suggested interventions, the results of each meeting, and the success of the interventions. Both a teacher and a student questionnaire were developed to ascertain the teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards the PAC’s interventions and success. The average child study team referral rates from the state and the district were compared to the rates at Haines School. Results indicated that the referral rates and newly classified rates at the elementary school for the year, as of April 1995, were lower than last year’s state and district averages. Results also indicated that the teachers and students using the PAC services had positive attitudes towards prereferral interventions and the PAC team’s success.
Conclusions

1. Prereferral interventions, through a PAC were effective in adding to the ability of
   schools to respond to a broad range of academic and behavioral needs of students.
2. The rate of Child Study Team referrals dropped at the school where there was a PAC
   team. This rate is now lower than the district’s and the state’s rates for referrals.
3. The rate of newly classified students dropped at the school where there was a PAC
   team. This rate is now lower than the district’s and the state’s rates for new
   classifications.
4. Through the services of the PAC, teachers were better able to understand and educate
   their students with difficulties.
5. Through the services of the PAC, students showed improvement and positive
   attitudes towards interventions that helped them.

Implications for Future Research

The implications of this study suggest that prereferral interventions, through the use of
Pupil Assistance Committees, may be effective in adding to the ability of schools to
respond to a broad range of academic and behavioral needs of students. The results of
this study seem to agree with the limited research which holds that prereferral
interventions, through Pupil Assistance Committees, Student Resource Committees, Peer
Collaboration, Behavioral Consultation, or Mainstream Assistance Teams have a positive
effect in schools.
This study, along with numerous other studies, suggests that the use of prereferral interventions is in the best interest of our schools in dealing with the needs of the students. As inclusion is becoming a reality in the schools, regular educators need the support services of a Pupil Assistance Committee. Pupil Assistance Committees encourage peer collaboration, individualized attention, and updated teaching styles.

Since there is limited research in the area of prereferral interventions, further research is necessary. Further investigations are needed into the kinds of successful prereferral interventions and their impact on the student body. In addition, schools are implementing prereferral interventions in a variety of methods. Since there are so many different types of service delivery approaches, more research on the success of the different models of pupil assistance teams is also necessary.

Further research should be done in which other factors are isolated in order to determine how much student success is due to the interventions of a Pupil Assistance Committee. Other factors, such as parental involvement and values, teaching styles, and proper implementation of interventions influence a student’s academics and behavior in school. In addition, studies using larger sample sizes and longer time frames are needed to accurately determine the effectiveness of the Pupil Assistance Committees.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to get teachers’ feedback on the effectiveness of the Pupil Assistance Committee. The results from this questionnaire will be reported in my thesis in Learning Disabilities.

1. Have you ever used the PAC team for assistance with a student?  ____yes  ____no


3. If you never referred a child to the PAC team, is it because
   a. you handle the problems on your own
   b. you didn’t have any problems
   c. you think the PAC team will be unhelpful
   d. there’s too much time and work involved
   e. you are embarrassed to go to the PAC
   f. other ________________

4. Of the total number of students you referred to the PAC team, in how many cases did you try the interventions suggested by the PAC team? ______

5. Of the total number of students you referred to the PAC team, in how many of your cases were the interventions suggested by the PAC team
   a. very successful? ______
   b. successful? ______
   c. somewhat successful? ______
   d. not successful? ______

6. Of the total number of students you referred to the PAC team, how many of your students do you feel
   a. had very positive attitudes about the interventions and worked hard? ______
   b. had positive attitudes about the interventions and worked hard most of the time? ______
   c. had positive attitudes towards the interventions but also had occasional lapses into old habits? ______
   d. had indifferent attitudes towards the interventions and only cooperated occasionally? ______
   e. had negative attitudes towards the interventions and didn’t cooperate? ______

7. Because of your meetings with, and the interventions proposed by the PAC team, in how many of your cases did you feel better able to understand the needs of your students with problems? ______

8. Because of the strategies suggested by the PAC team, in how many of your cases did you feel you were better able to educate these students? ______
9. Did any of the strategies suggested by the PAC team help you in dealing with other students?______

Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5. (1 = not at all and 5 = very much)

10. Overall, are you pleased with the interventions suggested by the PAC team?
    1 2 3 4 5

11. Do you feel better able to understand the needs of the students you referred?
    1 2 3 4 5

12. Do you feel better able to educate the students in your class who have difficulties?
    1 2 3 4 5

13. After using PAC, do you feel better able to deal with problems in the future?
    1 2 3 4 5

14. Did using the PAC team contribute to your professional development?
    1 2 3 4 5

15. Did the students referred to the PAC team benefit?
    1 2 3 4 5

16. Will you continue to use the PAC team for difficulties that arise in class?
    1 2 3 4 5
Appendix B

Student Questionnaire

You have been working with your teacher to try to improve your behavior, your study habits, or both in class. Your teacher has asked the Pupil Assistance Committee to help you and encourage you to improve. Please answer the following questions.

1. In what types of ways has your teacher tried to get you to do better?

2. How hard have you worked to improve yourself in class?

3. Do you get rewarded when you show improvement? How?

4. How important are these rewards to you?

5. Do you work harder at improving when you want a specific reward?

6. Do you have a Panther Pal?

7. Does your Panther Pal reward you when you're showing improvement?
8. What types of rewards mean the most to you?

9. Do you like the idea of a Panther Pal and rewards for good behavior?

10. How fair was your teacher and your Panther Pal in rewarding you?

11. How much have you enjoyed working with your teacher and your Panther Pal in trying to improve?

12. Have you noticed an improvement in yourself since your teacher and the Pupil Assistance Committee have been encouraging you?

13. If you have seen an improvement in yourself, how much of your improvement is due to the encouragement you receive from PAC and your teacher?