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A STUDY OF THE CREATION OF A PUPIL ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE
IMPROVEMENT PLAN THAT FACILITATES AN EFFECTIVE
COMMITTEE BY UTILIZING A COLLABORATIVE
LEADERSHIP APPROACH.

By
Donald M. Robertson III

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
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Of
The Graduate School
At
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ABSTRACT

Donald M. Robertson III

A study of the creation of a pupil assistance committee improvement plan that facilitates an effective committee by utilizing a collaborative leadership approach.

2003/2004

Dr. Dennis Hurley
School Administration

The Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) was created by New Jersey's Department of Education to assist educators in identifying and implementing instructional strategies that would best address the needs of struggling students. PAC committees throughout the State face increased referral rates and limited program options, making for a frustrating situation. The Pupil Assistance Committee of the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School is faced with these same problems. To reduce the feelings of frustration among the committee members and increase committee effectiveness a review of PAC procedures must take place and a renewed focus of PAC goals must be facilitated.

A transformational leadership approach was used to best utilize the individual member's strengths in the review process and promote a positive reaction from committee members.

The project resulted in an improved PAC committee by utilizing surveys and intern observation of the PAC committee. In considering staff input the committee addressed staff concerns and solicited faculty involvement in the PAC process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of those who helped through this process and contributed to the achievement of my goal of becoming a school administrator. Marjorie P. Fopeano, my building principal who provided me with administrative opportunities during my time with her. Dr. Dennis Hurley, my Rowan advisor who guided me through the internship process. My father, who served as my role model as a child and again in my professional life. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Stephanie, whose love and support made all of this possible.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Today's public schools are faced with an ever-increasing array of challenges. One of those challenges is meeting the needs of at-risk students. To make the task more difficult, most school districts are faced with declining budgets that reduce programs and restrict options.

The Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) was created by New Jersey's Department of Education to assist educators in identifying and implementing instructional strategies that would best address the needs of struggling students. PAC committees throughout the state face increased referral rates and limited program options, making for a frustrating situation. The Pupil Assistance Committee of the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School is faced with these same problems. To reduce the feelings of frustration among the committee members and increase committee effectiveness a review of PAC procedures must take place and a renewed focused of PAC goals must be facilitated.

A transformational leadership approach was be used to best utilize the individual member's strengths in the review process and promote a positive reaction from committee members. This collaborative process was not only to produce improved PAC procedures but a feeling of ownership among the PAC members.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a more effective Pupil Assistance Committee through the creation of an improvement plan and efficient management of

school resources. The study resulted in a comprehensive improvement plan that improved the functioning and efficiency of the PAC committee. An improved PAC committee is defined generally as a committee that utilizes its time efficiently and produces a comprehensive assistance plan that takes productive steps towards meeting the needs of the troubled student.

A transformational leadership style will be employed to fully utilize committee members' strengths in the revision process. As a result of this collaborative process, a PAC improvement plan will be developed that will increase committee efficiency and enable the PAC committee to better serve the students and staff of the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School.

Definitions

- Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS)- a coordinated system in a school building that is responsible for planning and delivery of intervention and referral services.
- Pupil Assistance committee (PAC)- a committee that is responsible for creating and implementing strategies designed for students that are experiencing difficulties in the classroom.
- Type 1 school district- In New Jersey Type 1 school district has an elected Board of Education. A type 2 district has a Board of Education appointed by the district's mayor or elected officials
- District Factor Grouping (DFG)- In the State of New Jersey, DFG is used to consider the socio-economic status of each school district and used as a comparative guide,

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this project focus on the assessment of staff members' perception of the PAC committee and the analysis of PAC remediation plan success. It was difficult to accurately evaluate staff perception of the PAC committee, even through the use of a proper survey. Staff members may not be willing to put their negative feelings concerning a school committee on paper for fear of possible reprisal. This makes attitude comparison difficult but not impossible.

A second limitation of this project was the evaluation of the student remediation plan. Due to time constraints it was not possible to accurately judge the overall success or failure of each plan, generally a period of 3-4 months is given for the implementation of each student's plan before any kind of assessment is done.

Setting of the Study

The study took place in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey in Atlantic County. The following factual data was taken from the United States Census Bureau, Census 2000 report. At the time of the Census, the population was 30,726. In the past two years, the population has grown significantly. Egg Harbor Township has been designated as a Pinelands Region Growth Area, which mandates that new homes be built in this community. The consequences are that the homes are being built far more quickly than new schools can be built to accommodate the influx of students. Recently a third and fourth grade building has been constructed to accommodate for the increased growth in the township for the 2003-2004 academic year. New construction and renovations have occurred at almost all of the school buildings. Governor McGreevey placed a moratorium on new construction to help control the growth and population rate.

The population is comprised of the following races. It is predominately white with 23,512 people or 76% representative of the population. Blacks or African Americans makeup 10.4% of the population with 3,185 people representing the race. Hispanics or Latinos comprise 6.8% of the population with 2,076 people representing the race. The Asian population is at 5.1% with 1,552 people representing the race. The other races represented in lesser amounts are American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander, or some other race or combination of race. The community is made up largely of families (72.4%) with over 40% of the households with individuals under 18 years old. The median household/family income is approximately \$55,000. The socio-economic status of the community is predominantly middle class. Yet, the percentage of people below the poverty level is at 2% with over 2,000 people represented.

The community is comprised mainly of high school graduates (82.8%). The percent of people with a bachelor's degree or higher is 19% and 5.5% has a graduate degree or higher professional degree. Of the population indicated, 8,551 children are enrolled in the schools. In examining the data, one fourth of the township's population is school age.

For the purposes of this study, the school district under study was examined more closely. Data was taken from the New Jersey School Report Card for 2002-2003. Currently, the Pre-K through 12 school district has eight schools. The district is made up of three elementary schools that service Kindergarten through second grade. A newly constructed school houses the district's third and fourth grade populations. There is an Intermediate building for grades five through six, a middle school for grades 7-8, a high

school, and an alternative school. Student population growth in 2002-2003 was 450 students and 475 new students are anticipated to enter the district's schools in 2003-2004. The student mobility rate is 17.8% at the lower elementary level and 10.4% at the junior and high school levels. Student attendance is approximately 94%. The average class size is 19 students. The "students with disabilities" rate is 15% at the lower elementary level and 13% at the junior and high school levels. English is the predominate language spoken at home (over 90%), with Spanish being spoken in the home of approximately 7% of the students.

The majority of each school staff is comprised of teachers holding bachelor's degree (68%) with some advanced professional credits. Ten percent of the professional staff has a Master's degree (31%). The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent have doctorate degrees (1%). The principals have their master's degree and state certification, but none have their doctorate degree. There are five other professional staff members within the district that have doctorate degrees. In district professional development has been extensive the past four years and the state's mandate on professional credits (CEU's) has been implemented. Faculty attendance is 97% district-wide. There is an average of 10 students per faculty member. Egg Harbor Township is a Type 1 school district.

Financially, the district has many problems. There was a \$57 million operating budget for the school district in 2002-2003. In April of 2002, the budget was defeated by 17 votes. For 2001-2002, the total cost per pupil was \$8,500, which is \$2,539 below the state average. The 2002-2003 school year had \$1,036 less to send per pupil available for delivering a through and efficient education. Governor McGreevey has frozen state aid

to school to ease a statewide budget shortfall. The Pinelands Commission continues to allow growth through its mandates and the schools must grow to accommodate, the state will not provide the money to support this increased growth.

This project was take place at the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller elementary school. The Miller school houses the district's third and fourth grades. The total student population is 1084 students. The building is newly built and the 2003-2004 academic year will be the first year of operation. The population of the study will be the committee members and those who seek the services of the Pupil Assistance Committee. Classroom teacher with students who are experiencing academic difficulty, bring their concerns before the committee.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized; Chapter two-Review of Literature, Chapter three- Design of he Study, Chapter four- Presentation of Research Findings, Chapter five- Conclusions, Implications, and /further Study, References, Appendix.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Educators have long discussed ways to best educate those students that struggled in the classroom but not unnecessarily label them as handicapped. In 1982, the New Jersey State Legislature recommended the creation of the New Jersey Special Education Commission to examine the State's capacity to deliver special education program and services. That commission produced, The Turning Point: New Direction in Special Education and from that report the Pupil Assistance Committee was born. The commission recognized the need for regular education to better serve students with academic problem while not classifying them as handicapped. The Pupil Assistance Committee was created to provide a source of support for regular education students and teachers by providing them with instructional strategies. After a pilot period the PAC concept was then mandated to all New Jersey school districts.

The Pupil Assistance Committee became part of New Jersey administrative code and every school district was required to have a team in place. The committee members selected to serve on the PAC committee were faced with a unique challenge; take the most challenging at-risk students and create effective strategies to help those children. Often times no clear strategies are evident or the different educational philosophies of the members make reaching a consensus difficult. To tackle this potential difficult situation an effective administrator must employ an appropriate leadership style that will allow the

committee members to have a meaningful voice in committee decisions while maintaining committee effectiveness.

Review on the Problem

Throughout the years, educators have routinely struggled with finding ways to best educate their students. Recognizing that each individual student has a unique learning style and teaching to that style is something that all qualified educators strives to accomplish. In every educators teaching career there are those students that seem to struggle no matter what is done with them in the classroom. Are those students suffering from some form of learning disability? Should those students be referred to the district's Child Study Team for a professional diagnosis? Other than classifying a student with a learning disability, what else can a classroom teacher do for a struggling child after he/she has tried everything! The New Jersey's Department of Education addressed these very questions and a result of their inquires was the Pupil Assistance Committee or PAC.

The Pupil Assistance Committee was put into effect for all New Jersey School districts with the adoption of N.J.A.C. 6:26. Four subchapters within N.J.A.C. 6:26 outline the Pupil Assistance Committee in greater details, they are subchapter 1: General Provisions, subchapter 2: Pupil Assistance Committee Structure and Functions, Subchapter 3: Pupil assistance Committee Procedures and Plans, and subchapter 4: Pupil assistance Committee Report. With the adoption of N.J.A.C. 6:26 all New Jersey school districts were required to have a PAC team in place for each building. (New Jersey Administrative Code, 2000)

Training was necessary to successful implementation of a PAC team. The New Jersey Department of Health and the Genesis Prevention Program created a training

manual, Team Training for Pupil Assistance Committees to properly train future PAC team members in the implementation of PAC goals and procedures as well as provide background in the creation of the PAC concept. This training manual, despite some changes made to it over the years, is still used to guide PAC members in their roles as PAC team members. (Team Training for Pupil Assistance Committees, 1982)

In the text, The Principal, author Gerald Ubben examines what means to be a principal in today's schools and how to be an effective administrator and leader. His examination of various leadership styles and philosophies provide a wide selection of leadership options for a PAC chairperson to utilize while considering the managerial side of an administrator's job. For the purposes of the pack committee a transformational leadership approach is most sensible, "Transformational leadership inspires other towards collaboration and interdependence as they work toward a purpose to which they are deeply committed." (Ubben, 2001, p.14) The origins of transformational leadership is provided by Ubben which further aids the PAC chairperson when deciding which leadership approach would best suit the team. (Ubben, 2003) James Burns first coined the concept of transformational leadership in his famous work, Leadership and its concepts fit nicely with the team concept of the PAC team. (Burns, 1978)

Conclusion

As student academic achievement gains more of the national and state attention district services that work to increase academic success become increasing vital. The Pupil Assistance Committee is one such service that work towards the goal of helping those struggling students succeed by aiding their classroom teachers. With an increased importance the PAC team must work even harder to maintain efficient PAC procedures

and utilize their time efficiently. PAC team members must continually review and revise the procedures and goals as set forth in Team Training for Pupil Assistance Committees to maintain an effective and efficient committee.

Leadership becomes increasingly important as expectations place an increased amount of pressure on team members to create successful intervention strategies. Added stress can wear down a team member and consequently affect his or her productivity on the team. Author Gerald Ubben examines the challenges today's administrators face and offers a wide spectrum of leadership styles and approaches in his work The Principal.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Introduction

The design chapter of this thesis is to provide a plan for the study and to demonstrate the intern's capability for conducting the study. This chapter will identify the site and population involved in the project, describe the data collection and analysis procedures, and provide a task list outlining the actions taken to achieve the projects final outcome. The final goal of this project is the creation of a Pupil Assistance Committee improvement plan to help the committee better serve the school community. Through the course of the project changes will be made to the project's task list. These changes may result from the intern's experience over the course of the project or from feedback received during regularly scheduled maintenance meetings and teacher survey.

General Description of the Research Design

The project resulted in an improved PAC committee by utilizing surveys and intern observation of the PAC committee. Surveys were used to solicit staff opinion and attitudes, which were presented for consideration before the committee.

Ultimately once the survey data was collected, the committee internalized the data and it was used to guide the committee towards a more efficient PAC committee. The committee addressed the following questions with the aid of the collected data.

- How will the development of a Pupil Assistance Committee improvement plan help the committee better serve the school community?

- How will the creation of maintenance meetings, with the purpose of improving PAC effectiveness, help committee members improve the management of PAC procedures and improve time efficiency?
- How will improved PAC procedures help facilitate the creation of student remediation plans and strategies?

Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this project was created with improvement of committee function in mind. To that end, two surveys were created to measure teacher attitude and expectations.

The first survey, Teacher Survey I (Appendix A) was created to give the committee an understanding of staff perceptions of the committee. What is the purpose of the committee? How do you utilize the committee's services are examples of questions on Survey I. The results of this survey are considered during the routine maintenance meetings held by the PAC committee.

Teacher Survey II (Appendix B) was created to serve those teachers that had utilized the PAC committee's services during the course of the year. The results of these surveys would also be considered during maintenance meetings and would aid in improving committee functioning and in revision of procedure.

Together the surveys provide the committee with a qualitative picture of staff attitudes and perceptions of the Pupil Assistance Committee. That qualitative picture is used to help the committee improve various aspects of the committee from communication to time management.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

This project took place at a site that holds the district's third and fourth grades. The total student population was 1091 students. The building was newly built and the 2003-2004 academic year will be the first year of operation. The population of the study will be those directly influenced by the Pupil Assistance Committee.

For the purposes of this project, the study focused on the actions/attitudes of PAC committee members and teachers who bring their concerns to the committee, and building administration.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

This project utilizes an assortment of data gathering techniques from surveys to monitoring of group discussions. Initially, a survey was used to determine teacher expectations of the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). The survey was given to a stratified section of staff members and used to identify concerns and expectations of the PAC committee. Initial recommendations for change were derived from this form. The Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) met regularly during the course of the academic year to discuss PAC procedures and recommendations for change to facilitate a committee that is organized and efficient. These meetings typically took place before the regularly scheduled PAC meetings and were named maintenance meetings. The intern was present during these meetings and monitored them for recommendations for change and staff attitudes towards the committee. The intern was also present at all PAC meetings observing first hand the process and efficiency of each meeting. Finally, a second survey was given to PAC committee members and teachers involved with the PAC process to determine the teachers' attitude towards the committee and if they thought that the

committee was efficient in its organization and did it effectively meet the needs of students and staff.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The data collected for this project was analyzed as it is received during the course of the project. The initial survey provided the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) with recommendations to be discussed during the committee's maintenance meetings. This initial data served as a starting point in the reorganization plan that the committee will create. The effects on committee efficiency and committee attitudes were also observed. This observation took place through the course of the project and resulted in immediate recommendations from the intern for change. The final survey served to evaluate teacher attitude towards the committee and its operation. This final survey was measured qualitatively and will be used to fuel further changes by the committee.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter was the presentation of the research, which was collected through out the course of this project. Conclusions and the implications of the collected data will be discussed in chapter 5.

The goal of this project was to create a managerial and procedural framework that would enable the PAC committee to function more effectively. Observation of the PAC meetings over the course of this year has provided a clear picture of how the PAC functions as a team and as a school resource. In the first two PAC meetings there was little communication between team members and the results of the committee were unimaginative and ineffective. The first two cases were reviewed four weeks later to review the program and assess the child's progress. In both cases, the children showed very little growth despite the strategies the PAC committee recommended. The third meeting held was the project's first maintenance meeting. The goal of that meeting was to review and update existing PAC forms and documents.

As a result of this meeting several new documents were put into place and revisions on existing documents became an ongoing task. Committee procedure was reviewed and several changes were put into place. The role of each committee member was clarified and the goal and objectives of the committee were reviewed. It was decided that the committee would utilize a teacher survey to solicit input from the staff. The results would be discussed at the following maintenance meeting.

The maintenance meetings were also intended to increase the efficiency of the committee in regards to its record keeping and meeting time efficiency.

The maintenance meetings were also intended to increase the efficiency of the committee in regards to its record keeping and meeting time efficiency.

The records consisted of the student progress reports and records of strategies and educational accommodations. A committee member was appointed record keeper and responsible for all record keeping. The other members were all assigned specific roles within the committee.

Time efficiency was also a concern of this project. After the implementation of the maintenance meeting and role assignments time became less of a concern for the members. Meetings are held before the start of the school day and must end before the children enter the building. This leaves a window of 30 minutes, to meet and discuss and recommend an improvement plan for that student. After the changes were made the committee did not have a single meeting in which they ran out of time and hadn't written the improvement plan. More time was spent on discussion of strategies and a comprehensive improvement plan was written as a result.

Teacher input into the PAC process was essential because teachers played such an important role on the PAC committee. Teachers were responsible for bring the case to the committee and providing details regarding the student. Teachers in the past, have felt unconnected and often not an active participant in the PAC meeting. Teacher surveys were employed to gather teacher input. This input was discussed during maintenance meetings and several changes resulted. The surveys also provided teacher concerns regarding PAC forms and documentation of strategies. Both concerns were discussed during the reorganization process.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

The institution of PAC maintenance meetings had a tremendous impact on the committee during the 2003-2004 academic year. A shift was made from a single leadership style to a shared power arraignment. It was under this new arraignment that maintenance meetings were created to allow for review and revision of current procedure and policy. This new format enabled each member of the committee to have a more direct role in committee decisions. How would a transformational leadership style impact on the committee and would it lead to a more effective committee?

The creation of a maintenance meeting was the first step taken towards a better committee. It created a setting in which members could communicate their beliefs and educational philosophies. This enabled members to develop a better understanding of each other and helped forge positive working relationships. Teacher surveys helped establish a line of communication between the staff and the committee. Initially this contact was in the form of a survey. As the year progressed the meetings were expanded to include additional classroom teachers. Communication between the staff and the committee was directly responsible for several important changes.

- Revised PAC forms- Designed to simplify the document but still provide important data.

- New procedures- The PAC process was reviewed and streamlined to facilitate easy access.
- Record Keeping- a more efficient form of record keeping was created.

The transformational nature shaped the committee into a much more flexible entity. Suggestions were solicited and taken for consideration on a daily basis. Good communication enabled staff concerns to be heard and changes could be made quickly. The maintenance meeting allowed the committee time to discuss and implement these changes.

The implications of this project on leadership skills were evident from the successes of the project. A transformational leadership approach was employed early on in the project with positive results. Input was collected from all of the committee members and staff. The staff was made to feel apart of the committee and consequently felt better about the process. Staff morale regarding the committee increased due to this.

By seeking participation from a variety of staff members the committee could utilize the areas of expertise of that particular staff member. Utilizing the most qualified person for a particular area increased the effectiveness of the committee dramatically

While a shared leadership approach was used during this project it is important to note the significance of the role each member played. For example, a chairperson facilitated each meeting. The chairperson's responsibility was to ensure the continuity of the meeting and oversee the general running of the meeting. This role

was important to ensure the efficient use of time by committee members and that each person had an opportunity to express their ideas or feelings.

It is evident from this project that a mixture of leadership styles made this project a success. Collective leadership drew from the strengths of each member while the role of chairperson ensured the smooth running of each meeting.

The implications on organizational change are two fold. First, the utilization of a transformational leadership approach provided an excellent model in practice and many pros and cons were derived from the experience. Efficiency was increased due to the combined efforts of the committee and staff. The old saying says, “two heads are better than one” and in this case the more heads the better! There is another expression that fits in this scenario and that is, “to many cooks in the kitchen”. That was why the role of chairperson was essential to an orderly meeting. It was their responsibility to keep the meeting on track and to facilitate the general running of the meetings. The committee was most effective when both leadership styles were working in harmony.

The second benefit of the project was the realization of the importance for a time of reflection. This reflective came in the form of maintenance meetings. It was during those times that real progress was made within the committee. Education professionals rarely have time to discuss issues and reflect on their past practices. This reflection proved to be the surprise of the project. Taking a critical look at how and why one teaches led to many improved classrooms as well as more effective plans written by the PAC committee.

The success of this project can be measured by looking at its results. If success were defined as staff attitude towards the committee, it would be a success. If it were measured through the creation of successful improvement plans, it would be deemed a success. Perhaps with the continuation of this project into years to come? The wonderful thing about transformational leadership is that new ideas are constantly being brought to the table. Fresh outlooks and ideas can revitalize a group and achieve even more success than in the past. An interesting point of study would be to look at the Pupil Assistance Committee of the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School in the future to see how effective the committee has become. Will the continuation of the principals set forth in this project be continued faithfully? One thing was for certain, the data collected during the course of this project points towards a more effective and efficient PAC committee and that the ultimate goal of this project.

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Appendix A

Pupil Assistance Committee

Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School
Staff Survey I, 2003-2004

Please take the time to fill out this brief survey. It will help us help you!

- Have you every utilized the Pupil Assistance Committee's (PAC) services in the past?
- If so, how would you describe your experience?
- Are you familiar with the 2003-2004 PAC procedures?
- Do you feel a brief staff in-service concerning the goals and objectives as well as procedures of PAC would be beneficial to you?
- Do you have any comments of suggestions for the 2003-2004 PAC team?

*Please return this survey to the main office at your convenience.
Thank you!*

Appendix B

Pupil Assistance Committee

Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School
Staff Survey II, 2003-2004

Please take the time to fill out this brief survey. It will help us help you!

- Have you describe your experience with the PAC committee?
- Did the committee meet promptly to discuss your concerns?
- Did the PAC team adequately address those concerns? If not, what was not addressed?
- Did the case manager follow up with your case in a satisfactory manner? If not, what was not done?
- Do you feel that the PAC meeting procedure utilized time wisely? If not, what could be done to correct this?
- Do you have any comments of suggestions for the 2003-2004 PAC team?

*Please return this survey to the main office at your convenience.
Thank you!*

Biographical Data

Name	Donald M Robertson III
High School	Mainland Regional High School Linwood, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts History Stockton College Pomona, NJ
Graduate	Masters of Arts School Administration Rowan University Glassboro, NJ
Present Occupation	Third Grade Teacher Dr. Joyanne D. Miller School Egg Harbor Township, NJ