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A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PUPIL ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE'S
INTERVENTIONS IN A SECONDARY HIGH SCHOOL IN NEW JERSEY

by
John P. Taima

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan College of New Jersey
May 2, 1996

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved 5/7/96

ABSTRACT

John P. Taima A Study of the Effectiveness of a Pupil Assistance Committee's
Interventions in a Secondary High School in New Jersey, 1996
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jay Kuder
Graduate Program: Special Education

The purpose of this research project was to determine if Pupil Assistance Committee interventions reduce student classification and entry into special education. Also, as part of the research project, was the statement that the Pupil Assistance Committee intervention process enables students to succeed in the secondary school systems of the state of New Jersey. Success, for the purpose of the research project, was defined as a reduction of behavioral referrals, academic improvement and achievement, and resolution of crisis situations. The school that the Pupil Assistance Committee served was a secondary school in a suburban section of southern New Jersey. Observations, interviews and intervention logs were the means of data collection that was analyzed to determine the effectiveness of P.A.C. interventions. Outcomes of Pupil Assistance Committee interventions were gathered and analyzed to observe their effect upon students referred to this body.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The area of study that I have selected to examine is the effectiveness of Pupil Assistance Committees (also known as P.A.C.s). P.A.C.s, for the duration of this paper, refer to a school-based assistance team that consists of the following personnel: a chairperson (building principal), crisis counselor, guidance counselors, regular education teacher, and special education teacher. This is in accordance with district administrative policy, which is in conjunction with the New Jersey administrative code of education section 6:26-4.1. Later in the study, terms such as "intervention assistance teams" and "mainstream assistance teams" will be used. Those terms are other states' names for the same body known as the Pupil Assistance Committee (P.A.C.) in New Jersey. The main reason that I chose this particular subject is that the P.A.C. is an increasingly important service available to educators, counselors, and administrators in the schools of New Jersey. P.A.C.s endeavor to aid students who are in academic, behavioral, and/or emotional difficulties, prior to those students being referred into special education services. P.A.C.s also attempt to help the teachers, counselors, and administrators better serve the needs of the students themselves, in their own situations.

Why others would be interested in this topic is relatively straightforward. On the simplest level, knowledge of the effectiveness of P.A.C. programs would give educational personnel another service to offer disaffected students. Better understanding

of P.A.C.s would allow professionals in the field of education to share communication, ideas, and methods. These shared concepts would not only serve students with concerns but the greater student population as a whole. The P.A.C. also allows educators who are not in the field of special education to have an effect in areas of a student's development usually reserved for those in special education. These areas include social, emotional, and psychological components, not just subject areas.

The P.A.C. that is the basis for the study is situated in a secondary school system, and has some inherent characteristics that relate only to the secondary level. These include teachers who are much more subject specific (as opposed to elementary school teachers), test-driven curricula, and students who are capable of making willful, mature, and adult decisions regarding interventions and education. Therefore, the research problem that is the focus of this paper is: Do P.A.C. interventions upon students encountering problems of various types in a secondary school setting in New Jersey improve the academic, behavioral, and/or social performance of these students?

The first hypothesis of this study is this: P.A.C. interventions reduce student classification and entry into special education. A second hypothesis is that the P.A.C. process enables students to succeed in the secondary school setting. Success, for the purpose of this hypothesis, is defined as a reduction of behavioral referrals, academic improvement and achievement, and resolution of crisis situations.

I hope to use the results of this study to: 1. Determine success of the P.A.C., and 2. Track effects of P.A.C. interventions upon students referred to the P.A.C.. What I expect to find by studying this hypothesis is whether or not P.A.C.s are effective in

meeting the various needs of the students in the schools.

In chapter two, I will review the literature that pertains directly and indirectly to the research problem. I will relate a background of the P.A.C.s, starting with the Employee Assistance Programs from private industry, through the Mainstream Assistance Teams, to P.A.C.. I will also review literature that already exists that addresses the efficacy of P.A.C.s in other school settings.

In chapter three, I will discuss the design of my project. It will include a study of one year's worth of active and inactive P.A.C. cases in the school in which I am employed. It will also track a case from referral to resolution, and include interviews with current and former P.A.C. members on the impact of the P.A.C. process.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Inclusion, Student Support Programs, and the Pupil Assistance Committee

Inclusion is a catch-all word used to describe the educational movement that seeks to place all students with disabilities into general education (Thomas, Correa, and Morsink, 1995). The broad purpose of this idea is to bring even the most severely disabled student back from a specialized school setting and have that student return to a regular school setting, with necessary support systems provided. In some cases, this would include a health professional, specialized aide, or some support personnel for the particular student. One of the branches of the inclusive education movement is a student support program.

Student support programs are known by a variety of names (due to local law and practice) but have an underlying common purpose: to help superintendents, administrators and teachers with the students that populate the schools. A support program can come in many varieties (as will be shown further in this chapter) but exist at some level in almost all of the school systems in the country. Support programs are in effect to aid the staffs of schools with the diverse population of the schools today. The diversity, to some extent, is a result of the inclusive school movement (Thomas, Correa, and Morsink, 1995). The support program can aid the school staff by providing necessary information to better serve the student's needs. The support program that exists in the

public schools of New Jersey that can exist in that capacity is the Pupil Assistance Committee (P.A.C.).

In the past, students who exhibited difficulties in school settings were referred to a Child Study Team for classification into special education services and classes. As part of the movement of including all students into regular education classes, a large number of school-based programs have been created to help keep students in regular education programs (Mellencamp, 1993; Smith, 1994). Also, as part of this movement, a number of school-based groups have been started to address a student's problems prior to referral for special education services. These related groups have many different names (due to local school law and other factors) but their underlying purpose is the same: assisting a student prior to that student being tested for a variety of special education services.

The group that deals with this specific situation in New Jersey schools is the Pupil Assistance Committee, usually referred to as the P.A.C.. The P.A.C. is a school-based pre-referral intervention group that consists of the following personnel: the building principal (chairperson), regular education teachers, guidance counselors, a crisis counselor, and a special education teacher (New Jersey Administrative Code, 1992). In this chapter, I intend to review the literature that deals with the following subjects: Background of the P.A.C., relation of P.A.C. to other pre-referral intervention groups in other locales of the country, and student outcomes of these groups and P.A.C..

As stated above, students who exhibited difficulties in school in the past were referred to the Child Study Team. As part of the inclusive school movement other solutions were sought. One of the options that was proposed and enacted was a school-

based group to address student problems prior to the student being referred to special education services (Carter & Sugai, 1989, Smith, 1994). The model of a school-based group was adapted from an intervention group found in private industry, the Employee Assistance Program. The E.A.P. model was an "in-house" program that intervenes in employee's situations when those situations are interfering with the productivity of the employee (Googins & Davidson, 1993). This program proved to be adaptable to school situations. This was because of the availability of trained staff (such as school counselors, administrators, and teachers). The "in-house" feature of the E.A.P. also was very adaptable, due to the different make-up of each school setting (Graden, 1989). However, due to the differing regulations and organization of each state's schools, the pre-referral intervention groups names were different. In the next section, I will briefly review the relevant literature pertaining to other states' pre-referral intervention programs.

Relation of Pre-referral Intervention Groups to the Pupil Assistance Committee:

An underlying purpose exists in all of the pre-referral intervention groups. That purpose is to assist students and take actions to maintain students in regular education programs (Sindelar, Griffin, Smith and Watanabe, 1992). To that purpose, a large number of programs have been started. These programs include teacher support teams, intervention assistance teams, mainstream assistance teams, teacher assistance teams, student assistance programs, and pupil assistance committees. Each program will be addressed in this section. As each program is listed, I will stress its similarities to P.A.C..

The Teacher Support Team (T.S.T.) is a program that was developed by the Massachusetts Board of Education to help administrators, teachers, and other school

personnel to identify at risk-students in regular education (Stager, 1990). The program is a school-based team that consists of teachers, administrators, and counselors who attempt to address the needs of students prior to a special education referral. In fact, one of the goals that is stated by the laws governing T.S.T.s is to reduce inappropriate special education evaluation requests (Stager, 1990). A similar goal exists within the framework of the P.A.C.. The T.S.T. was implemented as a result of Massachusetts state law requiring that student's needs were to be addressed within the regular education program before a referral for special education services would be accepted (Stager, 1990).

The Intervention Assistance Team (I.A.T.) was implemented in Ohio schools. The I.A.T. was enacted in response to administrative initiative and concern about high referral to special education programs (Gold, 1991). A similar concern was noted as part of the reasoning behind the formation of P.A.C. in New Jersey. Again, the I.A.T. is a school-based group consisting of school personnel who consult on each student referred to the I.A.T.. The majority of the referrals to the I.A.T. were made by regular classroom teachers, followed then by principals, school psychologists, guidance counselors, and special education teachers. Some of the data found in this study showed that students were as likely to be referred to special education services as often as the I.A.T. would recommend modification of teaching techniques or classroom environment (Gold, 1991). Also, the study showed that I.A.T. instructional recommendations were not readily implemented by the referring teachers.

Another form of school-based pre-referral intervention program was the Mainstream Assistance Team (M.A.T.). The M.A.T. focused more on assisting teachers

on how to better serve the needs of the at-risk student in a regular education classroom setting. The format of the M.A.T. differs from the groups previously mentioned because it is much smaller: A consultant and a project teacher. One of the stated goals of the M.A.T. that links it to P.A.C. is to decrease referrals to special education services (Fuchs, Fuchs and Bahr, 1990). The M.A.T. focuses on classroom-based interventions specifically, unlike the T.S.T. and I.A.T., which also attempted to intervene in other areas of student behavior. The M.A.T. is unique for its emphasis on classroom achievement, as well as its makeup of two members.

The Teacher Assistance Team (T.A.T.) was another group formed to address student difficulties. The T.A.T. was given a more general area than the M.A.T. to deal with. The T.A.T. was started to address more school wide problems, provide preventative intervention for at-risk students, and identify appropriate referrals to special education (Chalfant, 1991). T.A.T. programs were made up of teachers, counselors, and administrators who volunteered to join the T.A.T.. (This is a similarity it shares with the P.A.C.). T.A.T. referrals were primarily generated by regular education teachers, as was the case in almost all of the programs in this review. In one study of the outcomes of T.A.T. referrals, thirty percent of the cases were successfully resolved, forty percent were partially resolved, fourteen percent were partially resolved and referred to special education, ten percent were partially resolved and sent to another resource, five percent were referred directly to special education, and one percent was referred directly to another resource (Chalfant, 1991). Resolved, in this case, meant a description of the continued activities and development of the students referred to the T.A.T. (Chalfant,

1991).

A fundamental difference between P.A.C. and T.A.T. exists. The T.A.T. program was implemented voluntarily, not mandated by law, as was the P.A.C. program. The authors of the study felt that mandatory implementation of the T.A.T. would be unsuccessful and that administrators and teachers should not be pressured to establish teams (Chalfant, 1991), an odd conclusion, given the relatively high success of the T.A.T., according to the data found in the study.

Student Assistance Program (S.A.P.) is another intervention program that has elements in common with the P.A.C.. S.A.P.s are broader based than the groups mentioned previously in this chapter, a feature shared with P.A.C. programs. S.A.P.s vary greatly, but have some elements that are at the core of each individual S.A.P.: addresses drug and alcohol use, sociological concerns, student conflicts, and at-risk behaviors that interfere with academic achievement (Cooley, 1993). S.A.P.s were initially created to specifically address the problem of student drug and alcohol use, but spread into other areas rapidly. This crossover into areas of social, emotional, and academic achievement by the S.A.P. came about because of the awareness that student alcohol and drug use was linked to those other areas (Relcher, 1995). S.A.P.s are also directly targeted to out-of-school behaviors, a feature not found in most of the other programs found in this review.

There is a large amount of literature about the effectiveness of S.A.P. programs. The research suggests that the efficacy of S.A.P.s varies a great deal (Dykeman, 1994; Harrison, 1992; Pollard & Houle, 1993). One theme is repeated through all of the literature pertaining to the effectiveness of the S.A.P.s: S.A.P.s have, on the whole, been

found to be effective at identifying at-risk students in the school setting (a trait shared with all the programs mentioned in this chapter). The research suggests not that S.A.P.s are ineffective in identifying at-risk students, but in methods of addressing that particular student's problems (Pollard & Houle, 1993).

While there are many elements within S.A.P. programs that they share with P.A.C.s, there are a few differences. S.A.P.s are primarily made up of school counselors and administrative personnel, unlike the P.A.C.. S.A.P. programs still tend to generally focus upon substance abuse (Moore & Forster, 1993) while P.A.C. programs tend to focus more on school-based problems.

Student Outcomes of Pupil Assistance Committees:

The pre-referral intervention group that exists in the schools of New Jersey is the Pupil Assistance Committee (P.A.C.). The P.A.C. is mandated by law in New Jersey (Administrative Code of Education, section 6:26-4.1). The P.A.C. shares many features with the other programs reviewed previously in this chapter. The P.A.C. is a school-based pre-referral program that addresses the concerns of at-risk students. The P.A.C. consists of teachers, counselors, and administrators who have voluntarily joined the program, as was the case in many of the programs in this chapter. P.A.C. interventions are also seen as part of the process leading up to a formal request for special education services, unlike most of the programs previously mentioned. In fact, the P.A.C. intervention itself is a requirement that has to be met prior to referral for special education services (Smith, 1994).

Research on outcomes of P.A.C. referrals is scarce. However, there is research

from other programs mentioned in this chapter that is applicable. In a paper presented in 1993, researchers found that S.A.P. programs in California successfully intervened in the lives of the students they served (Pollard & Houle, 1993). In a study of pre-referral intervention groups of all types, researchers found that students had positive outcomes, but cautioned that additional research was needed (Sindelar, Griffin, Smith, and Watanabe, 1992). The overriding feature of all the research on student outcomes of pre-referral intervention programs is that more research is necessary (Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr, 1990).

That statement is reinforced by the fact that I was able to locate only one project that specifically dealt with student outcomes of P.A.C. interventions in New Jersey. That particular paper dealt exclusively with a specific population of students from a high socio-economic level and the impact of P.A.C. interventions upon students referred to that area's P.A.C. (Melville, 1994). This paper focused upon using the P.A.C. interventions to address student underachievement in this setting. Underachievement, in this paper, was defined in this way:

A student who, despite at least average aptitude (as measured by at least two nationally normed standardized tests) and at least average achievement (as measured by at least two nationally normed standardized tests) achieves at a below average level, as judged by classroom teachers for at least two years and as reported on year-end report cards. (Melville, 1994, p.9)

The results of this paper were mixed. Out of forty-five students (twenty-one of whom are represented as underachievers) referred to the school's P.A.C. in school year 1993-1994,

twelve were shown to have demonstrated in academic performance an improvement, or an improvement in behavior. A more precise analysis of results of individual student's outcomes was not able to be determined from the data presented in the paper. As for the impact of P.A.C. intervention upon student underachievement, no mention is specifically given (Melville, 1994).

Conclusion:

While there is a fairly large amount of literature pertaining to pre-referral intervention programs in schools in general, there is a paucity of information about the outcomes of these interventions upon students. This is especially true as it relates to the P.A.C. program of New Jersey schools. This is to be expected, due to the relative newness of the P.A.C. program. As a result of my project, I shall attempt to add to the information available about outcomes of P.A.C. interventions upon students. This information will include an overview of results of two years' worth of active and inactive P.A.C. cases, and will also track a case from referral to resolution. The source for this data will be P.A.C. cases from the school in which I am employed, a secondary school system in southern New Jersey.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

This chapter presents the design of the project. The project is to determine whether Pupil Assistance Committee (P.A.C.) interventions are effective in helping students to succeed in school. Success, for the course of this project, will mean that the referred student's academic achievement improves, behavioral referrals decrease or end, and/or the student's school situation stabilizes.

The subjects of the research project are students who have been referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee (P.A.C.) at the school where I work. The students who make up the subjects of the study are of both genders, are currently in grades nine through twelve, and range in age from fourteen to nineteen. The data that I gather will pertain to the entire group of students who were referred to the P.A.C. in the school year 1995-1996, and to carry over cases from school year 1994-1995. The setting for this P.A.C. is a secondary school in a suburban setting in southern New Jersey..

Procedure:

A student is referred to the P.A.C. for a variety of reasons (see Appendix A, pages 31 and 32). The P.A.C. then functions as a school-based pre-referral intervention group that meets to discuss appropriate interventions and strategies to assist these students. Some of the interventions and strategies are listed on Appendix B, page 33. The results are then observed at the next P.A.C. meeting that a particular student's case is discussed

(either thirty or sixty days interval as per group recommendation). Records of each case are kept to assist the P.A.C. in determining whether the interventions have had a positive effect (see Appendix D, page 37). Then, recommendations are made by the group to continue the case, or to "close" it. These recommendations, based on case information from the records and newly gathered data, are made by a variety of factors. These factors can include: student drop out of school, student expulsion from school, student not wanting to accept the recommendations of the P.A.C., academic improvement, crisis resolution, and absence of behaviors that lead to the initial referral to the P.A.C.. The records of the P.A.C. cases were the source for my data. A data table was constructed from the data. This table shows the grade level of the student, gender, case number, case disposition (open or closed), and reason for case closure, if the case is closed. Those reasons include grade stabilization, crisis resolution, student refusal of P.A.C. interventions, student drop out of school, student expulsion, or student referral to the school's Child Study Team for a formal evaluation.

In addition to this data from the P.A.C., I tracked in detail one particular case referred to the P.A.C.. This case was tracked from initial referral to resolution. The subject of this part was a randomly drawn student from the P.A.C. cases of school year 1995-1996. The advantage of choosing a student from the current year is that the student will most likely still be enrolled in the school, thus allowing me the ability to observe whether the P.A.C. interventions have a positive effect upon the student.

To summarize, the research project is an analysis of the results (or outcomes) of P.A.C. interventions upon the students served by the P.A.C. at the school that they attend.

The data obtained as a result of the research design of this chapter will be analyzed in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the Data

The data that was collected as a result of the research design that was described in chapter three are analyzed in this section. The data were gathered in the secondary school in which I am employed, and the subjects were students referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee, or P.A.C., in this school. The P.A.C. is a school-based pre-referral intervention committee that consists of teachers, counselors, and administrative personnel. The subjects were students of both genders, enrolled in grades nine to twelve, who ranged in age from fourteen to nineteen. The students were referred to the P.A.C. as a result of various concerns regarding these students. These concerns included, but were not limited to, the following areas: academic failure, grade retention, lack of attendance, behavioral difficulties, and emotional problems (see Appendix A, page 31). Also, as part of this chapter, I tracked one particular case from referral to closing. In this case, I noted reason or reasons for the referral, intervention steps, and/or strategies recommended, results of these recommendations, and the closure of this particular case.

Analysis of the data revealed many details, but I have focused upon the results that were most pertinent to the research question. As stated in chapter one, the research question dealt with the P.A.C.'s effectiveness in minimizing referrals to the school's Child Study Team for student classification. Also, the second part of the hypothesis dealt with the P.A.C.'s ability to assist students in succeeding in the secondary school setting.

Analysis of the data, as it pertained to the first part of the hypothesis, revealed that out of the sixty-three students referred to the P.A.C., five students were then sent on to the Child Study Team for a formal evaluation for classification.

As to the second part of the hypothesis, the following data were gathered. The data revealed that a total of twenty-two cases were closed. Four cases were closed due to student dropout and/or moving out of the school district, and one was closed due to student expulsion from school. Ten cases were closed because the students were shown to be no longer in need of assistance from the P.A.C.. To explain further, a case by case review of those ten is in order. Case 9596-11 was closed due to the student's overall grade average rising from a 60 average to a 71 average, and by the student no longer being in danger of failing any class or subject. (For reference, the district grading average is that any grade below 65 is failing.) In case 9495-10, the student's grades went from failing average to passing average, as well as the number of behavioral referrals diminishing from frequent to practically non-existent. This can be explained by the P.A.C. intervention of a mentor to aid the student in dealing with class problems and misbehavior. In case 9596-22, the case was closed when a family crisis resolution was reached. This was done, in part, by the P.A.C. recommendation that the student seek outside counseling. In case 9596-04, the case was closed by the student's grades improvement, due to P.A.C. intervention in getting the student in-school tutoring in the subjects in which the student was having difficulty. In case 9596-27, the case was closed due to the success of the student in her classes. Her classes had been dropped down to a more achievable level on the recommendation of the P.A.C.. In case 9596-21, the

reasoning for closing this case was the same as in case 9596-27. In case 9495-25, the case was closed for the same reason as in case 9596-22, crisis resolution. The reason that the P.A.C. was able to determine that crisis resolution had been attained is that the school crisis counselor continually kept in contact with the students, parents, and outside counselor and reported the results (respecting confidentiality laws) to the P.A.C. This was a P.A.C. intervention, as well. Cases 9596-05 and 9596-32 were both closed after the students overall grades reached passing averages, and were in no danger of failing a class or subject. These two cases had both their classes changed to a more achievable level, and tutoring provided, as per P.A.C. recommendation.

The seven cases that were closed due to student unwillingness to accept P.A.C. recommendations will be discussed in the following paragraph. It must be noted that if a student is of age eighteen or over, they are legally adults, and can refuse any assistance, if they so choose. Also, as P.A.C. has no disciplinary component for non-compliance, P.A.C. interventions are voluntary. In case 9596-08, the parent refused to accept the offer of in-school counseling for the student, and the student refused the tutoring offered by the P.A.C.. In 9596-16, the student (with parental support) refused to accept a schedule change from an honors level to an academic level. In case 9495-49, the student, an eighteen year old sophomore, refused any and all assistance offered by the P.A.C.. In case 9495-13, the student (with parental support) refused tutoring and in-school counseling. In case 9495-26, the student refused schedule changes to a more achievable level, and the parent refused, as well. Case 9596-11 was a nineteen year old senior, and refused any and all recommendations. Case 9495-02 fell into the same category as case

9596-11. The remaining thirty-six cases remained open, and were still in the process of resolution (refer to data table, Appendix C, pages 35 and 36).

The one case that was tracked in detail followed what could be seen as an average path of a P.A.C. case in this school. Case number 9596-28 was referred by her guidance counselor to the P.A.C.. The student, an eleventh grader, was referred because of academic failure, depressed behavior, and an apathetic approach to school. The following recommendations were made by the P.A.C.: to see if she was appropriately placed in her classes (honors level), to monitor her academic success, and to have her meet with the school's crisis counselor. These recommendations were put into place immediately after the initial meeting. As part of the P.A.C. procedure, her parents were notified of the meeting, and of the P.A.C.'s recommendations. Her case was then reviewed after thirty days, and there had been some changes. Her placement in honors classes had been found to be inappropriate, and so she was placed in college preparatory classes instead. Her initial results in the college preparatory classes were encouraging. The school's crisis counselor had met with the student to discuss her emotional state, which turned out to be a larger concern than previously thought. The crisis counselor then recommended to the student and her parents that outside counseling would be appropriate. They agreed. It was then decided that it would be appropriate to carry the case over to the next meeting, in thirty days' time.

At this meeting (sixty days after the initial P.A.C. meeting) information was again gathered from teachers and counselors of this student to see if there had been improvement. The student's grades had improved significantly (from a sixty average

overall to an eighty average overall), her behavior and attitude had become much more positive, and she was continuing therapy with an outside counselor. It was then determined by the P.A.C. that her case should be closed, for the reasons for her initial referral to the P.A.C. had been greatly lessened and/or eliminated.

In chapter five, I will make recommendations to improve the effectiveness of P.A.C. interventions, and shall include results of interviews with current P.A.C. members as to their perception of the effectiveness of P.A.C. interventions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Discussion

In this chapter, I shall make conclusions about the results of the research project and discuss implications of those results. I shall also discuss ways that this project could be revamped for further research and application to other schools, student populations, and administrators.

To briefly review, the hypothesis that was the basis for the project was: Are Pupil Assistance Committees (P.A.C.s) effective in minimizing referrals to schools' Child Study Teams for student classification, and are P.A.C.s able to assist students in succeeding in the secondary school setting? Success, as stated in the original research question, was defined as a reduction of behavioral referrals, academic improvement, and resolution of crisis situations.

As to the results of the research project, the following data was found. Out of the sixty-three students referred to the P.A.C. in the school year of 1995-1996 in the school where the project was conducted, five students went on to formal Child Study Team evaluations. That would seem to indicate that the first part of the hypothesis was valid. As to the second part of the hypothesis, the data revealed that a total of twenty-two cases were closed. Out of those twenty-two cases, ten were closed because the students were shown to be no longer in need of assistance from the P.A.C. (due to academic success, behavioral improvement and/or crisis resolution, as determined by group

recommendation, as was related in chapter four). Out of the remaining twelve closed cases, seven were closed due to the students' unwillingness to accept assistance, four were closed due to the student dropout and/or moving out of the school district, and one was closed due to student expulsion from school. The remaining thirty-seven cases remained open, and were still in the process of resolution.

To compare the results of this research project, I have gathered (in chapter two) literature about other intervention programs that exist in the school setting, and elsewhere. The groups that I used to compare the P.A.C. outcomes with were other states' school-based pre-referral intervention programs. These other programs have a variety of names, but share an underlying principle. That principle is to assist students and take actions to maintain students in regular education programs. The literature that was most relevant to this research project was on the outcomes of other pre-referral groups' interventions upon students who were exhibiting difficulties (of various natures) in their school system. Research on specific outcomes of other pre-referral intervention programs was scarce, but the research that was found strongly indicated that pre-referral programs' interventions were effective in lessening the amount of referrals to special education. That would seem to coincide with the findings of this research project. The research from other pre-referral intervention groups would have been more useful if it focused more upon specific outcomes of group recommendations, however. Data of that nature was not easily found. Also, another problem with comparing P.A.C. to other groups came about. P.A.C. is one of the few groups that is mandated as a required step before student classification. The other pre-referral groups used from other states are not

mandated, merely voluntary. Therefore, finding data was not easily accomplished as could be.

Comparison of literature between other pre-referral intervention groups and the P.A.C. revealed similar results upon the second part of this project's hypothesis. The second part of the hypothesis dealt with the ability of the P.A.C. interventions to help students succeed in a secondary school setting. As was the case with this research project, data was suggestive of a link between P.A.C. interventions and student success, but no definite cause and effect relationship between the two was found. In fact, data gathered from reviewing literature about other pre-referral intervention groups suggested a tenuous relationship between intervention and success in school. The data gathered on outcomes from other states' pre-referral intervention programs suggested that the group's strongest result was in screening the number of students being referred to special education, not in helping students succeed in school.

There were some limitations to this project that may have had a limiting effect upon the scope of this project. One was the inability to continue this project for a longer period of time. The ability to make this project a longitudinal study of the outcomes of P.A.C. interventions would have been a great benefit, I believe. Another limitation of this study was that there was a paucity of data available from other pre-referral intervention groups. Having the ability to draw upon a wealth of data would have been a great asset in conducting this research project. Having a larger amount of data about intervention outcomes would have been especially helpful when it came to comparing and contrasting the results of this research project against other outcome-based studies. Another

limitation that affected this project was that there was little to no research done about the P.A.C. itself. It would have been beneficial to see if the P.A.C. model that was used in this project was similar to other P.A.C.s, if this P.A.C. had any distinctive procedures that lead to these results, or that this P.A.C. was unique or different enough to skew the results of this project. As this P.A.C. existed in a vacuum (research wise), it would be impossible to compare the outcomes of this P.A.C.'s interventions.

Implications of this project for others are many. For schools (especially in New Jersey, where the P.A.C. exists) the project strongly suggests that the P.A.C. is effective in reducing the number of students being inappropriately referred to special education. That, of course, would be extremely beneficial to schools in terms of not using scarce time and money on inappropriate referrals to the Child Study Team. For the teachers of students who are exhibiting difficulties in their regular education classes, the implication of this project is that the P.A.C. can be used to aid them with these children. As shown in Appendix B, page 33, the P.A.C. suggests interventions that address students' behavioral, academic, and emotional needs. These interventions have been shown to be at least somewhat effective in addressing these students' needs. The P.A.C. can also give to teachers another resource to use to help their students. For students, the P.A.C. can give them a concerned, non-judgmental, and nondisciplinary school group to assist them with their concerns. As shown in chapter four, the P.A.C. was able to assist a student through a crisis, and also able to help that student to be academically successful. The fact that the P.A.C. consists of a variety of educational, administrative, guidance, and crisis personnel also can aid in the student's academic achievement in school. This varied group can

provide a number of interventions to best serve the need of a referred student. As shown in Appendix B, page 33, the P.A.C. interventions can include almost any school-based activity, and in certain cases, out of school interventions, as well.

Future research on outcomes of pre-referral intervention programs would be an excellent area for others to explore. As stated previously in this chapter, there exists a paucity of studies on this topic. The reason that this would be a good area for future researchers to study is that as the public school becomes more diverse, educational professionals will need more and broader information to better serve the needs of their student population. Research on outcomes of school-based pre-referral intervention groups would aid educational professionals as they attempt to meet the needs of their school children.

The purpose of this research project was to determine if Pupil Assistance Committee interventions reduce student classification and entry into special education. Also, as part of the research project, was the statement that the Pupil Assistance Committee intervention process enables students to succeed in the secondary school systems of the state of New Jersey. Success, for the purpose of the research project, was defined as a reduction of behavioral referrals, academic improvement and achievement, and resolution of crisis situations.

Interviews with members of the P.A.C. that was the basis for this research project were conducted, and the information gathered by this interview was broken down into three main areas of discussion. The first area of discussion was that the members felt that the P.A.C. process was extremely beneficial to not only the referred student, but to the

referring teacher, administrator or counselor. A statement that best sums up the first area of discussion was made by the chairperson of the P.A.C., (who was also the building principal): "It gives all of us in the school another option to use with students who are having problems." The second area of discussion that arose from the interview process was that the P.A.C. interventions would be more effective if they were mandatory. As shown in chapter four, there was a considerable number of students who refused (for whatever reason) P.A.C. assistance. The result of the student refusal was that the P.A.C. was forced to close those students' cases, without student acceptance of assistance. The third area of concern was that teachers not in the P.A.C. were unclear of the purpose and/or abilities of the P.A.C., and therefore, not accessing the P.A.C.. This area of concern was neatly summed up by one P.A.C. member by the statement: "I did not know what the P.A.C. could do until I joined it." This third area of concern can be addressed by disseminating information about the P.A.C. and its abilities, which is part of the reason why this research project was completed.

In conclusion, this research project dealt with determining whether or not P.A.C. interventions were effective in reducing referral to special education and in helping students to succeed in secondary schools in New Jersey. While acknowledging the need for more outcome-based research on this area, I feel that the question was answered with a resounding yes.

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APPENDIXES

- A: Pupil Assistance Committee Referral Form
- B: Pupil Assistance Committee Intervention Strategies (sample)
- C: Data table and key (from chapter four)
- D: Sample of Pupil Assistance Committee Record Sheet

APPENDIX A

Pupil Assistance Committee

Request for Assistance Form

Student Name _____ Date of Request _____

Student ID# _____ Referred by _____

DOB: _____ Grade: _____ HR: _____

Reason for referral (please be brief) _____

If you have observed or suspected any of the following behaviors, please complete this checklist and then pass on your Request for Assistance to Pupil Assistance Committee. **WE ARE NOT ASKING YOU TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS OR TO DIAGNOSE A STUDENT'S BEHAVIORS.** We only want to know if you see a problem developing so that we can intervene early enough to bring about a positive resolution to the underlying issues that may be contributing to the stated concerns. These behaviors are not to be taken in isolation, but considered together when forming a student profile. Excessive, uncharacteristic behaviors, that impede the success of the student in school are to be reported.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic	Comments:
_____ homework	_____
_____ recent academic failure	_____
_____ lack of interest	_____
_____ cutting class	_____
_____ excessive tardiness	_____
_____ frequent absenteeism	_____
_____ present but inattentive	_____
_____ inconsistent performance	_____
_____ other	_____

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social	Comments
_____ dropping extra-curricular activities	_____
_____ isolating	_____
_____ rejected by peers	_____
_____ aggressive toward others	_____
_____ change in peer group	_____
_____ immature manner	_____
_____ other	_____

Please return form to Building Principal.

APPENDIX A (Continued)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Behavioral	Comments:
_____ arguing	_____
_____ disruptive	_____
_____ refusal to cooperate	_____
_____ cursing	_____
_____ inappropriate actions toward other students	_____
_____ suspected drug/alcohol involvement	_____
_____ increased in disciplinary actions	_____
_____ sleeping in class	_____
_____ behaviors which are not age-appropriate	_____
_____ other	_____

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal	Comments
_____ neglect of personal hygiene	_____
_____ suspected health problems (odors, etc.)	_____
_____ injuries, burns, bruises	_____
_____ mood swings	_____
_____ rapid weight change	_____
_____ frequent trips to bathroom	_____
_____ frequent crying	_____
_____ other	_____

So that we do not overlook any attempts that have already been made to correct the problem situation, please list any actions that have been taken by yourself or others who are involved with the student being referred. (Examples include, but may not be limited to the following: spoken with appropriate persons such as the student, parent, counselor, administrator, Child Study Team, or others; presented specific academic interventions; et cetera).

Contact With:	Dates/Number of Contacts and Comments
Student	_____
Parent/guardian	_____
Administration	_____
Guidance Counselor	_____
Crisis Counselor	_____
After-School Tutor	_____
Other	_____

Has the parent been notified that a Request for Assistance is being made? Yes Date _____ No
Please return form to Building Principal.

APPENDIX B

Pupil Assistance Committee**Intervention Strategies**

- _____ In school support group
- _____ Mentoring by a volunteer teacher
- _____ Establish a study partner situation
- _____ Encourage to stay for extra help
- _____ Refer to Child Study Team
- _____ Recommend outside counseling
- _____ Possible contract to maintain academic standards
- _____ Classroom strategies:
 - _____ Sit in front of classroom
 - _____ Have him repeat instructions/write in notebook and check
 - _____ Steer him towards topic at hand
 - _____ Homework card
 - _____ Check notebook

APPENDIX C

Key to Data Table

The grade level, case number, gender and case status columns are self-explanatory. The reason column stands for why a particular case was closed. The numbers signify the following rationales for closing cases:

1. grade stabilization and/or crisis resolution.
2. the student refused P.A.C. interventions and/or assistance.
3. the student dropped out of school and/or moved out of district.
4. the student was expelled from school.
5. the student was referred to the Child Study Team for an evaluation for classification.

APPENDIX C (Continued)

Data Table				
Grade Level	Case Number	Gender (m/f)	Open/Closed	Reason
12	9596-22	male	closed	1
12	9596-03	male	closed	3
12	9596-01	male	open	
12	9596-25	male	closed	2
12	9495-26	male	open	
12	9596-51	female	open	
12	9495-04	male	closed	1
12	9596-09	female	open	
12	9596-44	male	open	
12	9596-27	female	closed	1
12	9596-10	female	open	
12	9495-35	male	open	
12	9596-11	male	closed	2
12	9495-02	male	closed	2
11	9596-38	female	open	
11	9495-33	male	open	
11	9596-28	female	closed	1
11	9495-04	male	open	
11	9495-54	female	open	
11	9596-21	male	closed	1
11	9495-24	female	open	
11	9495-25	female	closed	1
11	9495-37	female	open	
11	9596-05	female	closed	1
11	9495-53	male	open	
11	9596-32	male	open	
11	9495-29	male	closed	1
11	9596-07	male	closed	3
11	9495-52	female	closed	5
10	9596-37	male	open	

Grade Level	Case Number	Gender (m/f)	Open/Closed	Reason
10	9596-36	male	open	
10	9495-11	female	closed	1
10	9596-35	male	open	
10	9495-12	male	closed	4,5
10	9596-25	male	open	
10	9596-08	male	closed	2
10	9596-34	male	open	
10	9596-41	female	open	
10	9596-16	female	closed	2
10	9596-17	male	open	
10	9495-10	male	closed	1
10	9596-06	male	open	
10	9596-33	male	open	
10	9596-13	male	open	
10	9596-42	female	open	
10	9495-49	female	closed	2
10	9495-32	female	open	
10	9596-14	female	open	
9	9596-24	male	closed	5
9	9495-13	female	closed	2
9	9495-31	female	open	
9	9495-11	female	closed	3
9	9495-20	male	closed	3
9	9596-19	male	closed	3
9	9596-31	male	open	
9	9596-39	male	open	
9	9596-30	female	open	
9	9596-15	female	closed	5
9	9596-23	female	open	
9	9596-20	male	closed	5
9	9596-18	female	open	
9	9596-29	male	open	
9	9596-40	male	open	

APPENDIX D

Pupil Assistance Committee Record Sheet

Edgewood Senior High School

INTERVENTION TEAM LOG

MEETING DATE

Case #	Student Name	Monitor	Problem	Suggest Interview	Review Date	Parent Notification
Grade						