Using Student Voice to Strengthen Tutoring Services in Middle Schools

by

Marcia Veal Johnson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
December 13, 2010

Approved by

Paris S. Strom, Chair, Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Frances K. Kochan, Wayne T. Smith Distinguished of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Ellen Reames, Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Paris Strom, Dr. Ellen Reames, and Dr. Fran Kochan for their continued support throughout my graduate studies. Dr. Strom is recognized for his time, direction, and assistance with analyzing the data collected for this study and his genuine concern for the development of children and youth. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Reames for her encouragement as I returned to the process and her belief that I could accomplish my goals. I truly appreciate the kindness Dr. Kochan has demonstrated throughout my years at Auburn. I would also like to thank my outside reader, Dr. Bruce Murray, for his insights.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Chuck, whose love has sustained me through all our years together; my children and their spouses, Adam and Kristie, Amy and Arthur, Micah and Mandy, and Jacob and Ellen, who provided me strength and encouragement to continue; my grandchildren, Tyler, Megan, Kaitlyn, Marjorie, and Arthur, for sharing their love and energy; and my friends and fellow colleagues for their encouragement. Most of all, I would like to thank God for providing me the strength and perseverance to complete this project at this point in my life.

Abstract

This study examines the use of student learning polls as indicators of student perceptions for tutoring services for the purpose of continuous improvement planning. As an integral part of the educational reform known as No Child Left Behind, continuous improvement plans must be developed by leadership teams when schools fail to make adequate yearly progress for two years. This team must include stakeholders from various levels such as parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and students.

The Tutoring Poll was administered via the Internet in a computer lab setting. The study consisted of 361 respondents from a rural, Title I middle school in the southeast section of the United States. Four demographic subgroups were analyzed to determine the significance of each variable. These include gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age. The study provides information about student views on the delivery of tutoring strategies used as action steps for school improvement.

Analysis of the data reveals results of the polls and provides insights for professional learning communities to create strategies and action steps for continuous improvement plans. The inclusion of student voice extends the parameters of the learning communities.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

When President George W. Bush was sworn into office in January, 2002, he made education his number one domestic priority. On January 23, 2001, his *No Child Left Behind* plan for comprehensive education reform was sent to Congress. He requested that the members of Congress engage in a bipartisan debate on how the federal government could work to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers.

This act was considered the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. It redefined the federal role in K–12 education to help improve the academic achievement of all students in the United States of America (Ed.gov, 2004). The purpose of the act was to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child would be left behind (Section 1, Short Title, 2001). The primary purpose of this act was to promote academic success for all students (Daly, et al., 2006).

This law required states to establish standards to measure student progress and improve the proficiency level of all students (Finn & Hess, 2004). Student achievement and student progress were the main focus of the Act and determined by outcome measures (Daly, et al 2006). *No Child Left Behind* was based on four pillars of thought: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (Ed.gov, 2004).

Under *No Child Left Behind,* states are working to close achievement gaps between various subgroups of students. These subgroups include all students, economically

disadvantaged students, special needs students, racial/ethnic groups, and limited-English proficient students. Since *No Child Left Behind* began, districts have worked diligently to close these gaps.

Accountability for Results

H.R. 1 will result in the creation of assessments in each state that measure what children know and learn in reading and math in grades 3-8. Student progress and achievement will be measured according to tests that will be given to every child, every year. It will empower parents, citizens, educators, administrators, and policymakers with data from those annual assessments. The data will be available in annual report cards on school performance and on statewide progress. These will give parents information about the quality of their children's schools, the qualifications of teachers at their children's schools, and their children's progress in key subjects.

When schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), they are labeled as "schools in need of improvement" (Daly, et al., 2006). When this occurs, a continuous improvement plan must be written. This plan is created by a school leadership team, which should include teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, and students.

Statement of the Problem

In many instances, continuous improvement plans do not involve representatives from all stakeholder groups. One of the groups consistently omitted is that of students. There is limited information available on how the use of student voices could provide insights into strategies that would improve student proficiency. The purpose of this research was to determine how student perceptions could be used to identify variables that affect student proficiency.

To gather critical information from students, results from student polling were collected. The learning poll that used is the tutoring poll (Strom & Strom, 2006). This poll was used to identify student perceptions in tutoring strategies and the delivery of intervention procedures.

When students are allowed to provide input into the school improvement process, they feel more ownership of the plans for improvement. If students' opinions are considered, the types of instruction they prefer, interferences to learning and factors that contribute to or detract from their motivation can be determined (Strom, Strom & Wing, 2008). When student opinions are gathered with adult opinions, the combined perspectives more accurately reflect the needed change (Strom, Strom, & Wing, 2008).

Students consider polling as a safe form of self-disclosure and are more comfortable staing their true opinions about school when they know that the responses are anonymous (Strom, Strom, & Wing, 2008). When students can have a voice in planning for instructional strategies, there is more engagement in learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to further the knowledge base in the use of polling to engage student voice in the continuous improvement process by examining the degree to which their perceptions differ based upon selected demographic factors which included gender, age, ethnicity, and grade level. The purpose was also to examine students' perceptions in the area of tutoring.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

1. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by gender?

2. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by ethnicity?

3. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by grade level?

4. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by age?

Significance of the Study

There was a need for research in this area in order to determine the effects of students' voice in continuous improvement planning. Student proficiency continues to be a problem, particularly in middle school students. If students felt genuine ownership of their educational programs, then academic proficiency might improve (Smyth, 2006). This research provides valuable information to school leadership teams - teams that include both teachers and administrators, and can be used to design instructional strategies and action steps which are targeted for student participation. It can also provide information to school systems, which will allow them to better address areas of need for communication between and among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Although learning communities and leadership teams are used frequently to design continuous improvement plans, little research has been completed on the value of considering students' perceptions in the organizational decision-making process (Dickinson & Erb, 1997).

Organization of Study

Chapter I introduces the study of using student learning polls as a viable source of information when writing continuous improvement plans. It discusses concerns that there is limited student voice when making decisions for instructional strategies and action steps.

Chapter I also includes research questions, the significance of the study, the methods used, and the definition of terms within the study. Chapter II contains a review of the literature concerning *No Child Left Behind*, school improvement, stakeholders involved in school improvement (such as principals, teachers, and parents), student voice, student learning polls, and tutoring. Chapter III reports the procedures utilized in the study. This includes data that were collected, the names of the student polls used, demographic data and the procedures used to collect the data. Chapter IV provides the findings of the study. Chapter V includes a summary, conclusions that were determined by the study, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Methods

The research design for this study was be a mixed study of both qualitative and quantitative data to determine how learning polls can be included in the continuous improvement planning process. Data, which have been previously established, were analyzed by the researcher to seek out obvious patterns in various subgroups. This information will help to determine what strategies students indicated are more beneficial in the process of learning. The polls from which the data were collected are online polls that students have previously taken. The poll that was used is the tutoring poll. This poll was developed by Strom and Strom (2007).

The information from the poll was collected from the data of a rural, Title I middle school with seventh and eighth grade students. The population included African American, and Caucasian students. The subgroups also included male and female students

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement Levels – defines how well students are mastering the state's academic content standards at grade level

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – used to determine whether or not a school or school system has met its annual accountability goals as determined by *No Child Left Behind* legislation

Aggregate – the total of all students; also called the "All Students" group

Alabama Alternate Assessment (**AAA)** – a test administered to any special education student whose IEP team determines the student is unable to participate in general state assessments, with or without accommodations

Alabama High School Graduation Exam (**AHSGE)** – a test based on the Alabama Courses of Study

Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) – a test based on the Alabama Courses of Study for reading and mathematics; administered to all students in grades 3–8

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) – state's established annual requirement for the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher in a grade and subject

Baseline – state's established beginning point for percentage of students that must be proficient

Confidence Interval – a method of meeting AYP by testing whether or not a proficiency index is statistically different from the goal

Disaggregate – breakdown by group

Grade Spans – for a school system, an accountability status is reported separately for each of three grade spans: 3-5 Grade Span, 6-8 Grade Span, and High School Span

Group – distinct group within a larger group; Alabama identifies the following groups: all students, special education, major racial/ethnic groups, limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged (free/reduced meals)

Group Size – the minimum number of students (40) required for the group to be included in accountability

Interim 2% Flexibility Option for Special Education – a method of meeting AYP by adjusting the percent proficient for the special education group if this group is the only group that does not make AYP for a school or system

N-2 Rule for Small Schools – for schools and school systems that do not meet the minimum requirement of 40 in the aggregate; required to test at least two fewer students than their enrollment in order to meet the participation requirement

No Child Left Behind – This is the federal act that was introduced in 2001 and signed into law in 2002, which requires accountability among schools and school districts using an established set of criteria

Partially Proficient – partially meets academic content standards (Level II)

Participation Rate – percentage of students participating in state assessments

Polling – A systematic, scientific, and impartial way of collecting information from a subset, or sample, of people that is used to generalize to a greater group, or population, from which the sample was drawn (Lake, 1987)

Proficiency Index – reporting metric that allows test scores to be combined across grades in determining AYP

Proficient – meets academic content standards (Level III or higher) 26

Safe Harbor – a method of meeting AYP if a group decreases by at least 10% from the preceding year those who are not proficient, meets the 95% participation rate, and meets goal or makes progress on the additional academic indicator

School Improvement – used to describe whether a school or school system has met its accountability goals over time

Student Voice – the use of students' opinions, comments, and ideas in planning for instructional purposes

Tutoring – the provision of services for students to improve performance in areas of academic weakness

Uniform Averaging – a method of meeting AYP by averaging the proficiency index or participation rate of the most recent three years, including the current year

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

No Child Left Behind requires states to establish standards to measure student progress and improve the proficiency level of all students (Finn & Hess, 2004). Student achievement and student progress are the main focus of the Act and are determined by outcome measures (Daly, Burke, Hare, Mills, Owens, & Moore,2006). *No Child Left Behind* was based on four pillars of thought: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (United States Department of Education, ed.gov, 2002). A review of the literature included *No Child Left Behind* legislation; school improvement; professional learning communities, which involve the stakeholders in the school improvement process; student voice; student learning polls; and tutoring.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to further the knowledge base in the use of polling to engage student voice in the continuous improvement process by examining the degree to which their perceptions differ based upon selected demographic factors which included gender, age, ethnicity, and grade level. The purpose was also to examine students' perceptions in the area of tutoring.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

1. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by gender?

2. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by ethnicity?

3. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by grade level?

4. How are students' perceptions, as reported on the tutoring poll, influenced by age?

The History of *No Child Left Behind*

When President George W. Bush was sworn into office in January, 2002, he made education his number one domestic priority. On January 23, 2001, his *No Child Left Behind* plan for comprehensive education reform was sent to Congress. He requested that the members of Congress engage in a bipartisan debate on how the federal government could work to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Finn & Hess, 2004).

When the 2000 presidential campaign was in full force, both parties included education reform as one of the most critical topics to be addressed. As a reflection of the 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk," many of the components of both parties' plans were similar. Each believed that the states should use tests to determine how schools were meeting academic standards and hold those schools accountable when they failed to meet the established standards (Finn & Hess, 2004).

Once George Bush was elected, and after he introduced the *No Child Left Behind* plan, major negotiations occurred. As a result, bipartisan measures gained support from Republicans

and Democrats. Included in the support of the plan, with radical reshaping of the original plan, was Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy and California Representative George Miller, the highest-ranking members of Congress' two education committees (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Finn & Hess, 2004).

No Child Left Behind was considered the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. It redefined the federal role in K–12 education to help improve the academic achievement of all students in the United States of America (United States Department of Education: Ed.gov, 2004). The purpose of the Act was to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child would be left behind. The primary purpose of this Act was to promote academic success for all students (Daly, Burke, Hare, Mills, Owens, Moore, & Weist, 2006; Reeves, 2003). Less than a year later, despite the unprecedented challenges of engineering an economic recovery while leading the Nation in the war on terrorism following the events of September 11, President Bush secured passage of the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (United States Department of Education: Ed.Gov, 2004). The new law reflected a remarkable consensus—first articulated in the President's *No Child Left Behind* framework on how to improve the performance of America's elementary and secondary schools, while at the same time ensuring that no child is forever trapped in a failing school (Ed.gov, 2004).

This law required states to establish standards to measure student progress and improve the proficiency level of all students (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Finn & Hess, 2004). Student achievement and student progress became the main focus of the Act, as determined by outcome measures (Daly, et al., 2006). *No Child Left Behind* was based on four pillars of thought: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education

methods, and more choices for parents (Ed.gov, 2004; Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004; Vannest, Mahadevan, & Mason, 2009).

Under *No Child Left Behind,* states are working to close achievement gaps between various subgroups of students. These subgroups include all students, economically disadvantaged students, special needs students, racial/ethnic groups, and limited-English proficient students. Since *No Child Left Behind* was enacted, districts have worked diligently to close these gaps (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003; Vannest, Mahadevan, & Mason, 2009).

Many strategies have been used in an effort to bridge the gap, strategies such as the provision of tutoring for low-performing subgroups, improving the collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers, and training teachers in specific methods to address the academic needs of low-performing subgroups (Center on Education Policy, 2007). *No Child Left Behind* also emphasizes programs, practices, and materials that are based on scientifically researched methods. Federal funding is used to provide support for programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and result in an increase in achievement levels. (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003; Ed.gov, 2004; Vannest, Mahadevan, & Mason, 2009).

Another component of the foundation of *No Child Left Behind* is the freedom and flexibility for states and communities. There is more flexibility for states and school districts in how they use federal education funds. Within this flexibility districts can target their funds for specific needs such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving professional development for teachers (Ed.gov, 2004; Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004; Vannest, Mahadevan, & Mason, 2009).

A major emphasis of *No Child Left Behind* were the opportunities that parents are now afforded when schools do not meet state standards. These included the option for school choice where parents can transfer their children to better-performing schools within their district. Also, students from low income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services (Ed.gov, 2004; Reeves, 2003; Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004). According to Ed.gov, 2004, H.R.1 outlines strategies for progress.

Accountability for Results

H.R. 1 will result in the creation of assessments in each state that measure what children know and learn in reading and math in grades 3-8. Student progress and achievement will be measured according to tests that will be given to every child, every year. It will empower parents, citizens, educators, administrators, and policymakers with data from these annual assessments. The data will be available in annual report cards on school performance and on statewide progress reports. They will give parents information about the quality of their children's schools, the qualifications of teachers, and their children's progress in key subjects.

Creating Flexibility at the State and Local Levels

To reduce federal red tape and bureaucracy, as well as enhance local control, H.R. 1 will reduce the overall number of ESEA programs at the U.S. Department of Education from 55 to 45. It will offer most local school districts in America the freedom to access up to 50 percent of the federal dollars they are eligible to receive among several education programs without federal approval.

Strengthening Teacher Quality

H.R. 1 directed states to put a highly-qualified teacher in every public school classroom

by 2005. The bill also made it easier for local schools to recruit and retain excellent teachers. It also created a Teacher Quality Program that allowed greater flexibility for local school districts. (Ed.gov, 2004)

Expanding Options for Parents of Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

H.R. 1 creates meaningful options for parents whose children are trapped in failing schools and makes these options available immediately:

- Public School Choice: Parents with children in failing schools would be allowed to transfer their child to a better-performing public or charter school immediately after a school is identified as failing
- Supplemental Services: Federal Title I funds (approximately $500 to $1,000 per child) can be used to provide supplemental educational services - including tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs - for children of failing schools.
- Charter Schools: H.R. 1 expands federal support for charter schools by giving parents, educators and interested community leaders greater opportunities to create new charter schools.

In a study of teacher perceptions regarding special populations in NCLB, Vannest, Mahadevan, and Mason (2009) determined that, although teachers stated that there was a problem with morale in meeting requirements for this subgroup, they indicated positive perceptions in using evidence-based practices. This supported the standard of scientifically-based research methods. According to Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003), one of the successful strategies for improving the performance of special populations is team planning. These teams include special education teachers, general curriculum teachers, parents and other stakeholders. General education teachers support the team through their knowledge of state standards, and

by 2005. The bill also made it easier for local schools to recruit and retain excellent teachers. It also created a Teacher Quality Program that allowed greater flexibility for local school districts. (Ed.gov, 2004)

Expanding Options for Parents of Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

H.R. 1 creates meaningful options for parents whose children are trapped in failing schools and makes these options available immediately:

- Public School Choice: Parents with children in failing schools would be allowed to transfer their child to a better-performing public or charter school immediately after a school is identified as failing
- Supplemental Services: Federal Title I funds (approximately $500 to $1,000 per child) can be used to provide supplemental educational services - including tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs - for children of failing schools.
- Charter Schools: H.R. 1 expands federal support for charter schools by giving parents, educators and interested community leaders greater opportunities to create new charter schools.

In a study of teacher perceptions regarding special populations in NCLB, Vannest, Mahadevan, and Mason (2009) determined that, although teachers stated that there was a problem with morale in meeting requirements for this subgroup, they indicated positive perceptions in using evidence-based practices. This supported the standard of scientifically-based research methods. According to Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003), one of the successful strategies for improving the performance of special populations is team planning. These teams include special education teachers, general curriculum teachers, parents and other stakeholders. General education teachers support the team through their knowledge of state standards, and

formulate the accountability programs (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009). On July 9, 2002, the Alabama State Board of Education passed a resolution outlining a long-range assessment plan, along with the principles to be used in the development of an assessment program and an accountability system. At the national level, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was being proposed. This Act required the use of criterion-referenced achievement tests to be administered in grades 3-8 and at least once at the high school level to be used for determining adequate yearly progress (AYP) for schools (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009).

The State of Alabama submitted its plan for accountability in 2005 and the United States Department of Education completed a review of Alabama's assessment system. It was not until October of 2007, after several revisions by the Alabama State Board of Education Assessment Division, that the United States Department of Education officially approved the current standards and assessment system under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Ed.gov, 2004).

The assessment system for the State of Alabama includes three academic indicators to determine adequate yearly progress. These areas include participation rate, proficiency, and either attendance or graduation rate. Schools which have grade 12 use the graduation rate as the additional academic indicator. Schools which do not have grade 12 use the attendance rate as the additional academic indicator (Alabama State Department of Education 2009). These indicators are also used to provide information for various subgroups at each grade level. No Child Left Behind requires the inclusion of the following groups: all students, special education students, free/reduced lunch students, racial/ethnic subgroups, and limited-English proficient students. A school must have a 95% participation rate in the assessment component for each

parents can provide input into how to build on their child's ability to make progress. The special education teachers can share their knowledge and training regarding individualized instructional strategies (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005).

Evidence-based practices are an integral part of closing the achievement gaps for students with special needs. Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) noted that best practice indicators such as inclusion, data-based instruction, and home-school communication should be used. There was also evidence of strong positive perceptions of high standards for teachers and paraprofessional qualifications. This is in line with the "highly qualified" standard. Teachers are expected to have expertise in the subject area content they are teaching, along with the skills to teach well what they know. Roellke and Rice (2008), in surveying administrators in three states, listed concerns in hiring and retaining "highly qualified teachers" as required by No Child Left Behind. Some districts offered signing bonuses and provided high quality professional development to attract and retain highly qualified teachers (Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004). The evidence continues to indicate that there have been additional positive results from some of the standards and regulations of the No Child Left Behind Act, but there remain many challenges for educators at all levels (Graczewski, Ruffin, Shambraugh, & Therriault, 2007).

The History of No Child Left Behind in the State of Alabama

In 1995, the State of Alabama passed a law requiring the administration of a nationally-normed achievement test in grades 3-11. This assessment would be used to identify those schools that were in need of improvement. In 2000, another state law was passed to give the State Board of Education the authority to determine the assessment and accountability programs that would be used in Alabama. At this time, the State Superintendent of Education appointed a Test Advisory Committee to determine what assessments would be used to

A major emphasis of *No Child Left Behind* were the opportunities that parents are now afforded when schools do not meet state standards. These included the option for school choice where parents can transfer their children to better-performing schools within their district. Also, students from low income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services (Ed.gov, 2004; Reeves, 2003; Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004). According to Ed.gov, 2004, H.R.1 outlines strategies for progress.

Accountability for Results

H.R. 1 will result in the creation of assessments in each state that measure what children know and learn in reading and math in grades 3-8. Student progress and achievement will be measured according to tests that will be given to every child, every year. It will empower parents, citizens, educators, administrators, and policymakers with data from these annual assessments. The data will be available in annual report cards on school performance and on statewide progress reports. They will give parents information about the quality of their children's schools, the qualifications of teachers, and their children's progress in key subjects.

Creating Flexibility at the State and Local Levels

To reduce federal red tape and bureaucracy, as well as enhance local control, H.R. 1 will reduce the overall number of ESEA programs at the U.S. Department of Education from 55 to 45. It will offer most local school districts in America the freedom to access up to 50 percent of the federal dollars they are eligible to receive among several education programs without federal approval.

Strengthening Teacher Quality

H.R. 1 directed states to put a highly-qualified teacher in every public school classroom

students is measured by the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, more commonly referred to as the AHSGE. The requirements listed above are established for all student subgroups (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009).

States are mandated to establish targets for student achievement that increase proficiency levels in the areas of reading and math so that all students meet proficiency of 100% by the year 2013–2014. To do this, states are required to set steadily rising performance targets in these areas. When schools do not meet proficiency (Levels III or IV) for two consecutive years, they are designated as "schools in need of improvement" (McClure, 2005).

Schools that do not meet adequately yearly progress are placed in School Improvement (Daly et al., 2006). These schools are labeled as "schools in need of improvement" and they are required to institute changes so that all students may receive adequate and appropriate instruction to enable them to reach proficiency (McClure, 2005). To be identified for school improvement, a school must miss AYP in the same component (reading, math, or the additional academic indicator) for two years in a row. If a school does not meet adequate yearly progress for two years, they are placed into School Improvement, Year 1. If a school does not meet adequate yearly progress for three years, they are placed in School Improvement, Year 2. Failure to meet adequate yearly progress for four, consecutive years results in the school being placed in School Improvement, Year 3. At this point the State may send an intervention specialist into the school to provide technical assistance (Alabama State Department of Education, 2009).

When failure to make adequate yearly progress occurs, a Continuous Improvement Plan must be written. States are responsible for providing a statewide system of intensive and sustained support to assist schools in implementing improvement strategies. Support teams also must be established to assist schools in writing and implementing this plan, which is written by a

leadership team, ideally comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders, and students (McClure, 2005).

States bear the responsibility of notifying schools of their AYP status before the beginning of each school year. This notification is critical since schools must prepare their Continuous Improvement Plans based on test results. These CIPs will identify the strategies, action steps, and processes that will be implemented to bring about the necessary progress, and may include school-wide reforms. Parents must be notified regarding the status of their child's current school, and tutoring options must be offered if school choice is not available (Reeves, 2003). School choice is an option for school systems that have more than one school within the district of the same grade configuration. Otherwise, supplemental educational services must be provided for tutoring those students who did not meet proficiency (United States Department of Education - NCLB, 2002).

When schools fail to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, a continuous improvement plan must be written. These continuous improvement plans provide an instrument to direct schools toward improvement and translate external expectations into schools' internal obligations (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). Schools and teachers involved in data-driven school improvement efforts must identify teacher-level innovations, such as the use of effective instructional strategies, believed to have a high potential for enhancing student achievement (Marzano, 2000). The general method for implementing school improvement plans is to establish clear expectations at the start of the plan and provide support where appropriate (Vrabel, 1999). Without the full-scale commitment and involvement of all the administrators and teachers within a school, the implementation of a continuous improvement plan may not be effective and may affect only a few teachers and very few students (Cooper, Slavin, & Madden,

1998). Effective instructional strategies are integral parts of the School Improvement Plan and must be carried out by all teachers, and these strategies must be well aligned with the goals and objectives of the curriculum (Vrabel, 1999). Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress in the state of Alabama must embrace research-based instructional strategies that are written into their school improvement plans (Black & Pritchett, 2008).

Professional Learning Communities

Bennis (1996) quotes Mark Twain from *Life on the Mississippi*:

> Two things seemed pretty apparent to me. One was that in order to be a [Mississippi Riverboat] pilot, a man had got to learn more than any one man ought to be allowed to know; the other was that he must learn it all over again in a different way every 24 hours. (p. 101)

This dynamic statement by Mark Twain is relevant in the field of education today. In the quest to determine what teachers should teach, how teachers should teach, what students should learn, and how students should learn, educators fight an endless battle. The concept for professional learning communities provides a foundation for this process.

The School Improvement Plan (now referred to as the Continuous Improvement Plan or CIP) becomes the formal document that is used by the school and the school district as a guide to eliminate achievement gaps through the provision of instructional strategies and action steps (*No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001). The responsibility for the development and the implementation of the continuous improvement plan must be accepted by all stakeholders within a professional learning community.

When educators are faced with the challenges that have been presented with *No Child Left Behind,* it is necessary to develop collaboration, collegiality, cooperation, and creative

problem solving (McEwan, 2003). Professional learning communities provide for collaboration among stakeholders for school improvement within said professional learning community. School support teams are to be established in order to deliver the designated school improvement services. These formulate professional learning communities which may include highly qualified teachers and principals, central office personnel, parents, community members, and students (Dufour, 2004).

School support teams must:

- Review and analyze all aspects of a school's operation and make recommendations for improvement;
- Collaborate with school staff and parents to design and implement a school improvement plan;
- Monitor the implementation of the plan and request extra assistance from the district or state as needed; and
- Provide feedback at least twice a year to the district and state regarding the effectiveness of personnel and the presence of outstanding teachers and principals. (McClure, 2005)

Leadership

Ecker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) and Hord (1997) provide great emphasis on the role of school administrators. They suggest that principals should become learning leaders rather than instructional leaders or managers. Their research indicates that the focus should be on learning rather than on teaching. Within this mindset is the ideology that leaders must know what learning outcomes are expected and when they are accomplished. Fullan (1994) explains that leaders who can accomplish creating a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures

can promote lasting reforms. Senge (1990) created a paradigm shift in the educational realm with his research on learning communities. His simple but astute explanation of professional learning communities concluded that people are continually learning how to lead together. "People continually expand their capacity to create desired results where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured" (p. 3). Positive learning environments and collaborative team learning must be the responsibility of all stakeholders, including teachers and students, within a learning community (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005).

Hord (1997) concludes that collaboration increases academic effectiveness. She further states that academically successful professional learning communities contain the following components:

- The collegial and facilitative participation of the principal who shares leadership – and thus, power and authority – through inviting staff input in decision making
- A shared vision that is developed from an unswerving commitment on the part of staff to students' learning and that is consistently articulated and referenced for the staff's work
- Collective learning among staff and application of the learning to solutions that address students' needs
- The visitation and review of each teacher's classroom behavior by peers as a feedback and assistance activity to support individual and community improvement
- Physical conditions and human capacities that support such an operation (p. 18).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), "The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as

professional learning communities" and that "collaborative investigation" is a process of the professional learning community. Collaborative leadership is an integral part of a successful learning community to build capacity for all stakeholders. These stakeholders include students, teachers, families, and community members (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003).

Research indicates that, although the standards established by *No Child Left Behind* have provided a positive impetus for education, there have been challenges that have come with many of the requirements. Superintendents must include instructional leadership as an integral part of *No Child Left Behind*. The area of concern that transcends so many of the reports was that of the special needs population — those of special education students, as well as those students who demonstrate limited English proficiency (ESL).

Harriman (2005) and Sherman (2008) indicated that educators found that the greatest challenges were in the special populations. Harriman (2005) determined that educators in small or rural schools shared that an important issue in the accountability framework is the special education population. A major concern is the difficulty in balancing the demands of existing requirements of special education, such as the implementation of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), and the additional bureaucratic demands of *No Child Left Behind*. He indicated that many of the respondents stated that accountability measures have encouraged teachers to focus carefully on content standards and the results of the assessments in order to formulate instructional plans.

Sherman (2008) explored how achievement gaps in Virginia were affected by *No Child Left Behind* regulations. Her study involved superintendents' perception on elements that targeted minority groups to eliminate these gaps. Her findings demonstrated positive outcomes of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation to encourage high expectations for all students. Although

all superintendents in the study desired success for all students, they all shared levels of frustrations in the area of holding special education students to the same expectations as other students, as well as students who were identified as ESL (English as a Second Language).

Superintendents were interviewed from all types of districts, including urban, suburban, and rural. They stated that teacher perceptions had to be changed where student expectations are concerned. Another area of concern was the level of funding. They felt that the funding was inadequate to accomplish the goals of the No Child Left Behind regulations (Sherman, 2008).

Instructional leadership is critical in the development of professional learning communities. Mullen (2008) states that principals must determine how much authority to give the members of a professional learning community when designing the framework.

According to Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown (2000), principals who embrace leadership teams as a method for improving teaching and learning bring about greater instructional change. Reeves (2006) acknowledged that decision-making is stronger and provides better results when a diverse group is involved rather than a single individual.

Teachers' Perspectives

Vannest, Mahadevan, and Mason (2009), in a study of perceptions of *No Child Left Behind* in viewing special populations, found that although teachers' perceptions indicated that there was a decrease in morale rather than improved practices, there was an indication of a positive impact with evidence-based practices. This supports the standard of scientifically-based research methods. According to Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003), one of the successful strategies for improving the performance of special populations is team planning. These teams include special education teachers, general curriculum teachers, parents and other stakeholders. General education teachers support the team through their knowledge of state standards and

parents can offer their input into how to build on their child's ability to make progress. The special education teachers can provide individualized instructional strategies (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005).

Evidence-based practices share an integral process of closing the achievement gaps for students with special needs. Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) noted that best practice indicators were included such as inclusion, data-based instruction, and home-school communication. There was also evidence of strong positive perceptions of high standards for teachers and paraprofessional qualifications. This is in line with the "highly qualified" standard. Teachers are expected to have expertise in the subject area in which they are teaching, along with the knowledge and skills to teach what they know. Roellke and Rice (2008) determined that administrators surveyed in three states shared the concerns for the "highly qualified teachers" as required by No Child Left Behind in hiring and retaining teachers. Some districts offered signing bonuses and provided high quality professional development to attract and retain highly qualified teachers (Simpson, LaCava, & Graner, 2004).

Learning organizational structures where the professional staff and other stakeholders work together to share missions, vision and values for the purpose of bringing about school improvement is the major component of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003 Senge, 1993). There is much evidence that professional learning communities are more successful when the members agree on a shared vision and common goals. This concept of a shared vision has emerged as an organizational theory (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002; and Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Mitra (2004) supports the importance of a shared vision and opportunities for stakeholders to provide a voice in the improvement planning process. He recommends a shift in

the paradigm to include more than just teachers and administrators in establishing processes for school improvement. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state:

> The lack of a compelling vision for public schools continues to be a major obstacle in any effort to improve schools. Until educators can describe the school they are trying to create, it is impossible to develop policies, procedures, or programs that will help make that ideal a reality…. Building a shared vision is the ongoing, never-ending, daily challenge confronting all who hope to create learning communities. (p. 64)

In a study by Graham (2007), professional learning community structures were beneficial in "facilitative, substantive, collaborative, and ongoing conversations among teachers about issues of teaching and learning," but to build the sense of community is very complex.

This study supports the concept that Fullan (1993) presented that people change within an organization and work together when the reform is meaningful for them. With this ideology in mind, the effort to formulate meaningful professional learning communities must be focused on shared visions and goals. Within the framework of professional learning communities for the purpose of school improvement, a critical component which has been identified is the leader's role as the change agent. These leaders use collaboration to engage in meaningful activities for teachers and students and to formulate and articulate the shared vision (Graham, 2007; Hord, 1997; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990). Huffman and Jacobson (2003) further determined that professional learning communities provide a viable process for stakeholders to engage collaboratively in dialogue and planning for the purpose of school improvement and student achievement.

Damore and Wiggins (2006) recommended that professional educators should develop and support ideas within a larger educational community and use research to support ideas. They

developed a framework of collaboration which encompasses six elements with indicators. These elements include positive attitude, team process, professional development, leadership, resources, and benefits. Some of the indicators that encompass these six elements include shared goals, communication, accountability, collaboration and the connection of input into classroom practice to provide benefits. Hilliard (1990) suggested that students can be ensured of meaningful, engaged learning when whole-school programs, which involve teachers, administrators, specialists and support staff, are developed through collaboration to improve school wide instruction.

Parental Involvement

In a study by Graczewski, Ruffin, Shambaugh, and Therriault (2007), the role of parents and community in the collaboration with educators to select and implement a school improvement reform model is significant. A partnership has to be developed by school and district administrators which includes teachers, parents, the community and the students (Fullan, 2002; Graczewski, et al., 2007).

Parent involvement was introduced as a voluntary national educational goal during the Clinton administration. Research demonstrates that parental involvement improves student performance. Giles and Hargreaves (2006) suggest that leaders must consider methods to increase the level of parental contributions to school improvement. In a study by a Yale Child Study Center Team, Comer and Haynes (1991) it was determined that meaningful participation by parents created effective schools and that it is necessary for families and schools to work collaboratively to achieve the best results.

Goldring and Hausman (1997) pointed out that parents have positive perspectives to share because they understand their children's needs. Many times they also are cognizant of the

perception and values of the community. This concept is also supported in a research report by Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu (2006). They asserted that teachers' efforts to develop common goals, with input from parents, help to strengthen student learning. Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown (2000) found that soliciting parent and student voice is a critical element toward improving student performance. The process model that was developed in the study by Chrispeels indicates that interaction among all the stakeholders is a complex path necessary to create school improvement.

According to this study, parents, teachers, leaders, and students possess and should contribute valuable knowledge to this school improvement process. They also found that when strong professional relations are present among teachers and leaders, new practices are shared more easily and are accepted at a higher level by all stakeholders. Morrisey (2000) ascertained that communication is of major importance within learning communities. She extended the notion that the infrastructure of professional learning communities develops collegiality and collaboration to improve the teaching process.

Student Voice

Professional learning communities generally refer to adult collaboration to formulate shared visions, expertise, and experience (Damore & Wiggins, 2004). Students are frequently left out of the collaborative equation in many learning communities (Boyer & Bishop, 2004; Smyth, 2006). However, this research indicated that students reported positive growth when their perceptions were included and that student voice requires leaders to promote change in perceptions.

One of the most critical periods of education is the middle school years. Elias,

Patrikakou, and Weissberg (2007) acknowledged that collaboration with families and schools can provide a constructive framework for adolescents. Leren (2006) conceived that students are aware of which models and methods work for them, what they see as interesting and what does not work. He further suggested that students gain ownership when they are allowed to provide input into the planning of classroom activities. With this ability to interact with the teachers in these decisions, Leren (2006) extends the notion that the students will develop a sense of ownership. Therefore, he feels that students should have a voice in the decision-making process for school improvement. When students are included on school teams, there is a sense of bonding with teachers, and there is an increase in their academic achievement (Boyer & Bishop, 2004).

Current Study

This current study reflects the struggle of a rural, Title I middle school that has experienced a low performance in test scores as compared to state scores. A consideration of this study is to determine if the concept of professional learning communities could provide a framework for school improvement with particular emphasis on student voice.

Students are capable of reflecting on what they have learned and they can provide conversation about learning (Innes & Moss, 2000). Smyth (2006) further showed that students feel that when their lives, opinions, and feelings are ignored, they develop negative attitudes toward school. Common vision is once again a major point for school improvement. Smyth (2006) asserted that this vision must be developed by building trust among the groups within schools with a major emphasis on the voice of students. Fielding (2004) pointed out that,

Student voice operating in person-centered mode is explicitly and engagingly mutual in

> its orientation towards widely conceived educational ends that will often include measurable results, but are not constituted or constrained by them. It is about students and teachers working and learning together in partnerships rather than one party using the other for often covert ends. (p. 308)

He further stated that leaders should strive to provide opportunities for the staff and students to work together within a broader school community. Mitra (2006) also recommends that partnerships that include students, teachers, and administrators can serve as catalysts to help improve the instructional program. She asserted that student voice must occur from within the school to create positive effects and positive change. One of the major components for student voice to be productive is that stakeholders must garner support for the acceptance of the students' voice efforts.

There are different ways that student voice can be developed. One way is through descriptive feedback. Mitra (2009) stated that assessments which are mandated by No Child Left Behind are just one means of determining what students know. She suggests that, in addition to products that are expected, teachers should ask students about their learning within teaching moments. She further points out that descriptive feedback creates trust and allows for more time to be delegated for learning activities.

How can schools improve student outcomes and improve school climate? Many schools struggle with this question, but few have decided to go straight to the source and ask their students. By increasing student voice in schools, students have the potential for contributing their opinions on a variety of levels, including sharing their views on problems and potential solutions in their schools. Such initiatives have served as a catalyst for change in schools,

including helping to improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships and leading to changes in student assessment and teacher training (Fielding, 1999). Seeking student views on school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Cushman, 2003; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997). Many researchers have realized that by not involving students, and particularly those who are failing subjects or rarely attending school, it is easy for school reformers to shift the blame for failure onto students rather than look at problems with the school's structure and culture (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

In addition to the potential benefits of student voice efforts for schools, research also documents the potential benefits for the youth involved. Increasing student voice has been found to improve student learning, especially when student voice is linked to changing curriculum and instruction (Oldfather, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 1998). Consulting with students on their views of teaching and learning has improved students' understanding of how they learn, helped students to gain a stronger sense of their own abilities, and improved instruction so that teachers do a better job of meeting student needs (Ruddock & Demetriou, 2003).

Increasing student voice in schools also has been shown to help to re-engage alienated students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools. Psychological research has demonstrated the connection between autonomy and motivation. If an individual has a sense of control over his/her environment, he/she will feel more intrinsically motivated to participate (Mitra, 2003). Recent research has reinforced the importance of teachers developing a learner-centered approach to instruction to increase student motivation. The more teachers become focused on student learning styles and needs in that particular classroom context, the

greater the student interest in schoolwork and learning (Stone, 1997). An increase in attachment to school has been seen in programs seeking to build new relationships in Canadian schools. The Manitoba School Improvement Program (Earl & Lee, 2000, Lee & Zimmerman, 2001), for example, found that students who had been sullen and unreachable became some of the most passionate participants in the school reform process once they became involved. Research conducted with middle-school students in the United States also found that students highly valued having their voices heard and honored (Oldfather, 1999).

Despite the increasing amount of research that argues the merits of student voice, most studies do not provide an understanding of the process by which student voice can make schools more democratic places geared to involving youth in decision making. Of the little research that has examined student voice efforts with empirical or theoretical rigor (including Fielding, 2004; Lee & Zimmerman, 1999; Rudduck, Wilson & Flutter, 1998), hardly any has been conducted in the United States. Since few United States schools have emphasized increased levels of student voice and participation as a part of their change work research by Merton (1987) provided a strategic case for studying student voice in school reform. Drawing upon over 100 semi-structured interviews and over 100 observations conducted over a two-and-a-half year period, the study examined the experiences of a high school to build a framework for understanding student voice. After providing background information on the school and its student voice activities, the study examined strategies used to increase student voice and to influence teacher perspectives on youth. It then considered the organizational supports for student voice that enabled these strategies.

When students are given the opportunity to provide input into their educational activities,

they become more engaged in the learning process (Fielding, 2004; Leren, 2006; Smyth, 2006). They also pointed out that effective teaching occurs when students are involved with planning what they will be doing and when activities include real-life experiences. Smyth (2006) extended the notion that educators should move from policies and mandates to relational reforms. There is a critical need to create relationships among students, teachers, and administrators through the development of trust, collaboration, and communication (Smyth 2006). Fielding (2004) indicated that student voice encompasses many facets such as student organizations, interpersonal relationships, and traditional activities. He further reported that new strategies use student perceptions to provide critical insights into school planning, effective teaching and learning which should lead to higher performance in academic areas.

Mitra (2003) presented findings of researchers (Fine, Kelly, Stevenson & Ellsworth; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez) that failure is blamed on the students rather than organizational concerns. Mitra (2003) further found that research indicated that the inclusion of student voice has been determined to impove student learning. Including students and their perceptions within the learning community can serve as a catalyst for change in the improvement of teaching and learning, teacher-student relationships, and procedural decisions in school management (Day, Rudduck, & Wallace, 1997; Mitra, 2003, 2004; Rudduck, Wilson, & Flutter, 1998; Smyth, 2006).

These leaders use collaboration to engage in meaningful activities for teachers and students and to formulate and articulate the shared vision (Graham, 2007; Hord, 1997; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Louis & Miles, 1990). Huffman and Jacobson (2003) further determined that professional learning communities provide a viable process for stakeholders to engage

collaboratively in dialogue and planning for the purpose of school improvement and student achievement. These learning communities must include the voice of students.

Before this can be accomplished, Mitra (2006) stated that those working inside the school must show support of this concept. Furthermore, teachers who allow students to critique their instruction must realize that the students' feedback is about the learning first and only indirectly about their teaching techniques. She recommends that students should be guided in their ability to reflect on their learning.

Leren (2006) stated that students know what methods of instruction works for them and can share what they do not see as helpful with their teachers. Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) made the distinction that school improvement is about creating a stronger relationship between the students and the school by increasing student engagement. They further suggested that to include them in the learning community in the educational process would improve their progress as learners. Their research defined two data sources for collecting information for students: outside researchers and teachers within the school setting. This second source, where teachers communicate with students, allows students to work with teachers collaboratively in planning instruction and to offer constructive suggestions. Hilliard (1990) suggested that students can be ensured of meaningful, engaged learning when whole-school programs which involve teachers, administrators, specialists and support staff are developed through collaboration to improve school wide instruction.

From 2000 to 2003 Rudduck coordinated an initiative (Consulting Students About Teaching and Learning) which included school-focused projects and a meta-study to determine elements involved in student voice. The data from this project indicated that when student voice

was given serious consideration, four concepts occurred.

- A stronger sense of membership - the organizational dimension - so that they feel positive about school
- A stronger sense of respect and self-worth - the personal dimension - so that they feel positive about themselves
- A stronger sense of self-as-learner - the pedagogic dimension - so that they are better able to manage their own progress in learning
- A stronger sense of agency - the political dimension - so that they see it as worthwhile becoming involved in school matters and contributing to the improvement of teaching and learning (p. 3)

Rudduck (2006) ascertained that student-centered school improvement efforts, which included student voice, provided relevance, relationship, and recognition. He reported that these three areas are critical in student achievement. One of the concerns that surfaced when considering student voice is the concept that the diversity of the groups may influence how their perceptions are accepted (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, 2006; Silva, 2001). They pointed out that high-achieving, middle class girls were more confident as learners than lower-achieving, working class boys. Rudduck (2006) reported that Fielding constructed three stages of student involvement.

> We recognize that many schools at the moment are in or are contemplating moving into the first stage, where pupils are "sources of data." This stage offers a practical agenda for school improvement and students may be aware that they or students from elsewhere have helped shape that agenda. It can make a difference to the improvement of teaching

> and learning but does less for student empowerment. In the next stage pupils are more actively involved in the interpretation of externally derived data and may be asked to compare it with their own experiences. In the third stage students and teachers together identify a problem, plan and initiate an inquiry and plan action in the light of data from the inquiry. (p. 5)

In a study by Shively (2000) students reported that their voice should be heard to provide a positive response to learning. Mitra (2003, 2004) shared that there has been great concern that most educational reforms do not use information or input from students in the decision-making process. She further reported that relationships with trust are necessary to create environments so that communication between students and teachers can occur. In a four-year meta-study, Jarvis (2002) ascertained that a combination system of target-setting and academic tutoring would lead to effective learning, increased student achievement, and result in school improvement. One of the main purposes of his study was to help students understand how they learn using different approaches and to help them learn how to select appropriate learning strategies.

In September 2000 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded a grant to support the Small Schools Project, which worked with 94 high schools. One of the strongest components of this project was the power of student voice in reference to the development of student participation and in the decision-making process (Birmingham-Young, 2000). Their data showed that "when students are included in making decisions, school becomes more relevant to their personal interests and to the real world" (p. 3). They made the distinction that student voice did not refer to students taking over school leadership, but rather students should participate

alongside the teachers and administrators.

Within this Small Schools Project survey, instruments were used to determine what students would change. The use of student surveys and student polls has become a powerful source of information for educators in determining student perceptions on learning. Numerous instruments have been developed for obtaining student feedback. Richardson (2005) reported various sources which can be used to rate student perceptions of teacher performance or school effectiveness. Marsh (1982) created the Student's Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ) to identify the quality level of nine aspects of effective teaching. These included learning/value, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examinations/grading, assignments and workload/difficulty. Another questionnaire is the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory which is used to measure students' satisfaction with their personal higher education experiences (Richardson, 2005).

Learning Polls

Another highly successful means of determining student perceptions to increase academic performance is by using student learning polls (Strom & Strom, 2007; Strom, Strom, & Wing, 2008). Strom and Strom pointed out that changes in curriculum, instructional methods, and forms of evaluation usually occur in response to government mandates without input from the students most affected by such decisions. Finding out the student view can yield insights about preferred ways of learning, obstacles to achievement, and factors that influence motivation, engagement, and satisfaction. Listening to the voice of adolescents can enlarge the perspective of educators and enable them to make more informed decisions about school improvement (Strom, 2009).

Strom and Strom (2002) developed a method to systematically, confidentially, and anonymously acquire student perceptions on conditions of learning. They designed an electronic polling system using the World Wide Web via the Internet. Strom, Strom, and Wing (2008) determined that polling via the Internet was a safe form of self-disclosure.

Wing (2007) explained that the use of polling and surveys is a "high-profile methodology and frequently used in today's society. It is widely used by media, industry, politicians, and social scientists" (p. 10). Wing further discussed the use of these in the field of education. Strom & Strom (2002) stated that because students in the 21st century have a higher level of technological ability, the concept of using the Internet for polling student perceptions would serve as a viable method to record student responses. They explain that students of this generation consistently use technology innovations such as computers, cell phones, Ipods, electronic gaming systems, and other tools which require technical abilities. They extended the notion that it is critical to determine what opinions students possess concerning forms of instruction, and variables that support their efforts or those that interfere with their learning. Student perceptions can be analyzed through their polling procedures in areas of interest to those educators involved in school improvement such as tutoring, internet use, time management, and boredom (Strom & Strom, 2007)

Tutoring

Of significant importance in planning for strategies to improve student proficiency is the use of effective tutoring (Rosenblatt, 2002). Rosenblatt proposed the question, "How, in this current climate of constantly seeking to progress, do we set about improving?" (p. 21). He further stated that effective tutoring promotes motivation to learn. When seeking to discover the

answer to this question, educators often collaborate to determine action steps that can be taken. Many times these groups (the professional learning communities discussed earlier) do not include the voice of students.

Also, students from low income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services (United States Department of Education: Ed.gov, 2002; Reeves, 2003; Simpson, 2004). No Child Left Behind provided for tutoring services for low-income students. In many instances these are provided by Supplemental Educational Services. Supplemental Services: Federal Title I funds (approximately $500 to $1,000 per child) can be used to provide supplemental educational services - including tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs - for children of failing schools. Unfortunately, rural area students participate in these services at a very low rate (Klein, 2007; Strom et al., 2008).

According to the United States Government Accountability Office, only 23 percent of eligible students took advantage of the free tutoring services in 2005-2006 (Borja, 2006). Methods of tutoring and strategies used in tutoring vary greatly. Merrill, Reiser, Merrill, and Landes (1995) investigated strategies that tutors use that lead to higher performances by students. One of their findings determined that when students are given feedback frequently during tutoring, students demonstrated greater gains. Individualized instruction creates higher gains in student performance than traditional instruction (Bloom, 1984; Merrill, 1995). The United States Department of Education has been urged to revisit tutoring programs which are required for schools that are in need of improvement to determine how tutoring services can be delivered in the most effective methods (Gewertz, 2004).

One of the most recent concepts to address students who are not meeting proficiency is the Response to Intervention Design (Frey, Lingo, & Nelson, 2004). This method uses three tiers of classification of instructional methods. Tier I addresses the needs of the students who are successfully performing within the traditional learning programs. Tier II students are those whose instructional level falls slightly below the expected level of performance. Tier III is the level where intensive instruction must be provided for students who demonstrate severe deficits in their performance (Frey, Lingo, & Nelson, 2004).

Strom and Strom (2002) concluded that students should be polled for feedback to determine their perceptions of what methods of tutoring are most beneficial or provide the greatest benefits. According to Strom, Strom, and Wing (2008),

> The tutoring poll detects how students see the importance of tutoring as a means to overcome academic failure, ways of motivating them to admit the need for assistance, convenient times to schedule tutoring sessions, anticipated response from friends and relative to an admission of a need for tutoring, reasons why individuals may recognize a need for assistance, preferred conditions for tutoring, ways to deal with difficult course content, subjects where tutoring is needed, expected teacher response to requests for tutoring, procedures to make know access to tutoring, disseminating tutoring results, and willingness to volunteer as a tutor. (p. 295)

Strom, Strom and Wing (2008) further reported that the monumental purpose of school improvement or school reform is to improve the conditions of learning for students. When students are allowed to have a voice within the process of school improvement, they possess more ownership of their learning and, in turn, become more actively engaged in learning

(Cushman, 1997; Levin, 2000; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997).

Since the *No Child Left Behind* Act was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush, the educational reforms that have been introduced, implemented, changed, and revised have been numerous (Levin, 2000 & Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 2000). The evidence continues to show that there have been positive results from some of the standards and regulations of the *No Child Left Behind* Act, but there remain many challenges for educators at all levels (Graczewski, Ruffin, Shambraugh, & Therriault, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the effects of student voice, as determined by the polling of middle school students in a rural area, on the conditions of learning, using the tutoring learning poll developed by Strom and Strom (2002).

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

Student proficiency is a critical concern for students in rural, Title I middle schools. Continuous Improvement Plans must be developed to address instructional strategies to improve students' academic performance. These plans should include the collaboration of all stakeholders. In many instances one group of these stakeholders which is consistently omitted is that of students. When students' opinions are combined with those of adults, the larger perspective gives a greater indication of needed changes (Epstein, 2007; Pophan, 2005; Savage, 2007; Strom, Strom, & Wing, 2008). Smyth (2006) reported that when students feel ownership of their educational programs, then academic proficiency may improve. Mitra (2004) found that engaging students in dialogue increased their sense of self-worth, efficacy, and membership in the school. Strom (2006) stated that

> Changes in curriculum, instructional methods, and forms of evaluation usually occur in response to government mandates without input from students most affected by decisions. People generally acknowledge that growing up in a technological society is considerably different from the ways things were done in their own adolescence. Nevertheless, adults continue to rely on their own observations about education as the only source of perception regarding school reform. This practice causes many students to conclude that grownups do not value reciprocal learning or care about the concerns of teenagers. (p. 2)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to further the knowledge base in the use of polling to engage student voice in the continuous improvement process by examining the degree to which their perceptions differ based upon selected demographic factors which included gender, age, ethnicity, and grade level. The purpose was also to examine students' perceptions in the area of tutoring.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

1. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by gender?
2. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by ethnicity?
3. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by grade level?
4. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by age?

Design of the Study

A quantitative study was developed to address key research issues for improving student academic proficiency in rural, Title I middle school students in the Southeast region of the United States. The critical component of the investigation was an Internet learning poll that surveyed students' perceptions on tutoring (Strom & Strom, 2002) (see Appendix 1).

The findings of this poll were used to determine what information students provided on their perceptions of tutoring and how this information could be used for school improvement planning. To provide a quantitative or numeric description of attitudes and opinions of a

population, a survey design can be used to study a sample of that population. With the results of this sample the researcher can make generalizations about that particular population (Creswell, 2009).

Instrumentation

The Conditions of Learning Polls created by Strom and Strom (2002) included the Tutoring Poll which assesses student perceptions on specific tutoring methods. Questions were reviewed, revised, piloted, and tested for reliability. To address content validity, open-ended questions were established to allow students to respond if they did not feel their view was represented by the possible responses. This information was collected for qualitative analysis purposes.

During the design of this internet poll, representatives from the respondents provided feedback to the questions. The purpose of this poll was to find out what variables students at this rural, middle school perceived as significant in the tutoring process. These variables included concepts such as students' recognition for the need of tutoring, what times of day were most beneficial for tutoring services, the method of delivery of instruction, and who they felt should deliver instruction for tutoring. This poll was accessed by students via the Internet and included 16 questions that surveyed the students' perceptions of tutoring and four questions which provided demographic information including gender, age, grade level, and ethnicity. On the 16 questions which addressed perceptions of tutoring, students were asked to select the answer that indicated how they felt. On most of the items they were allowed to select more than one answer. Students were also allowed to insert written responses on a line marked "other".

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) stated that evidence shows that people provide better open-ended responses containing more information in web-based surveys than in

traditional pen and paper surveys. According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2010), survey research is the "systematic collection of data about participants' beliefs, attitudes, interests, and behavior using standardized measures." Students were allowed to answer some of the questions with open-ended responses. This information was collected for qualitative analysis purposes.

Population

The following information and charts compared longitudinal data that were collected to analyze the performance of students in the rural middle school used in this study to seventh and eighth grade students at the state level. Although the data demonstrated some growth in district reading and math scores, these continue to remain below the state performance level. Therefore, research was necessary to determine various approaches to strengthen tutoring strategies for middle school students.

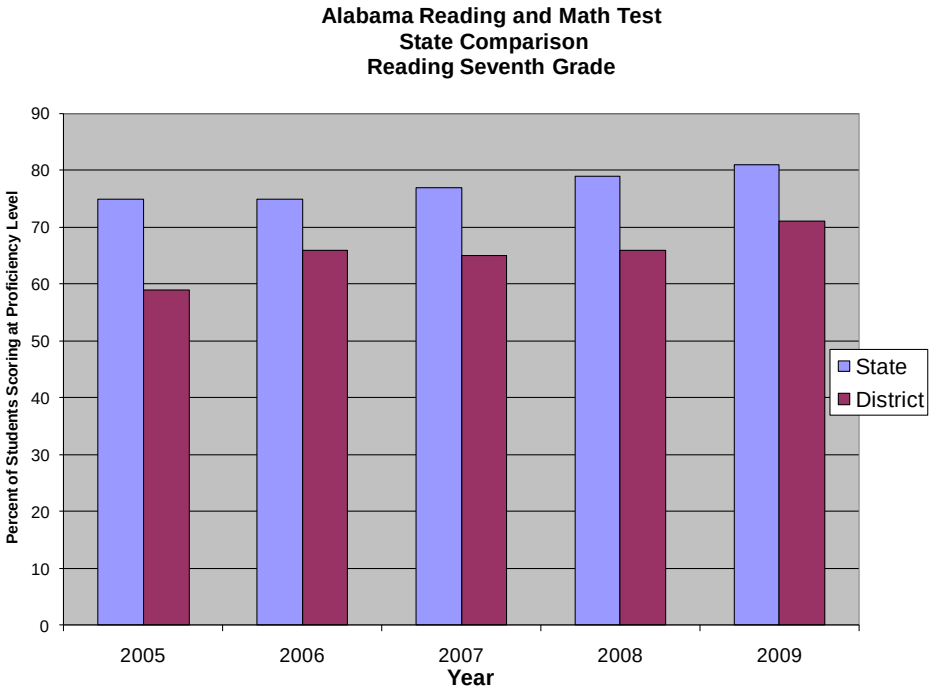


Figure 1.

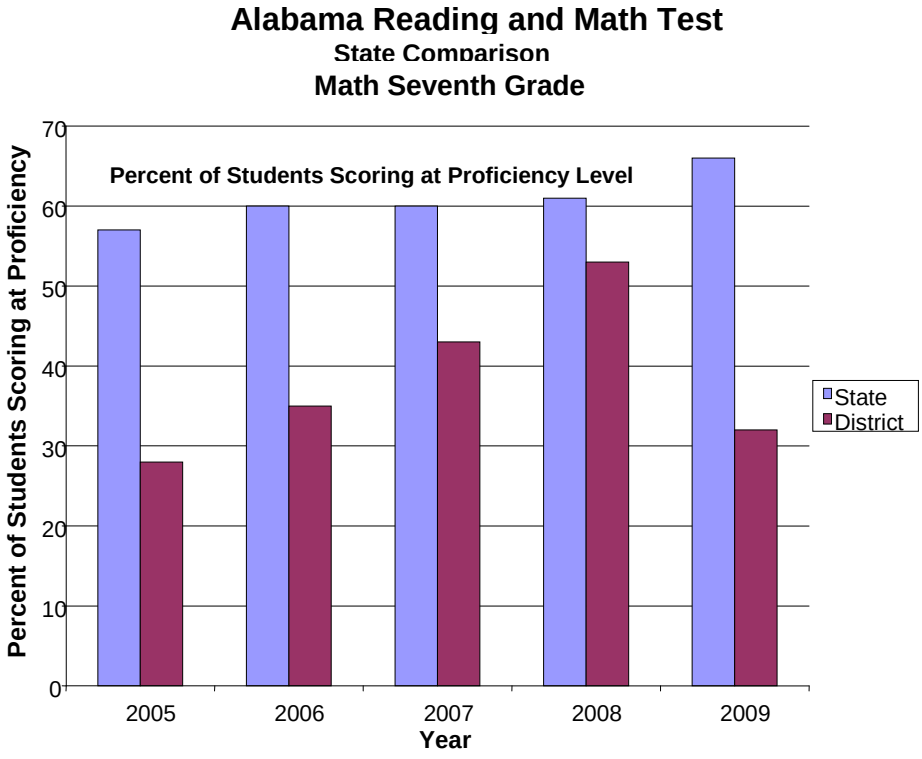


Figure 2.

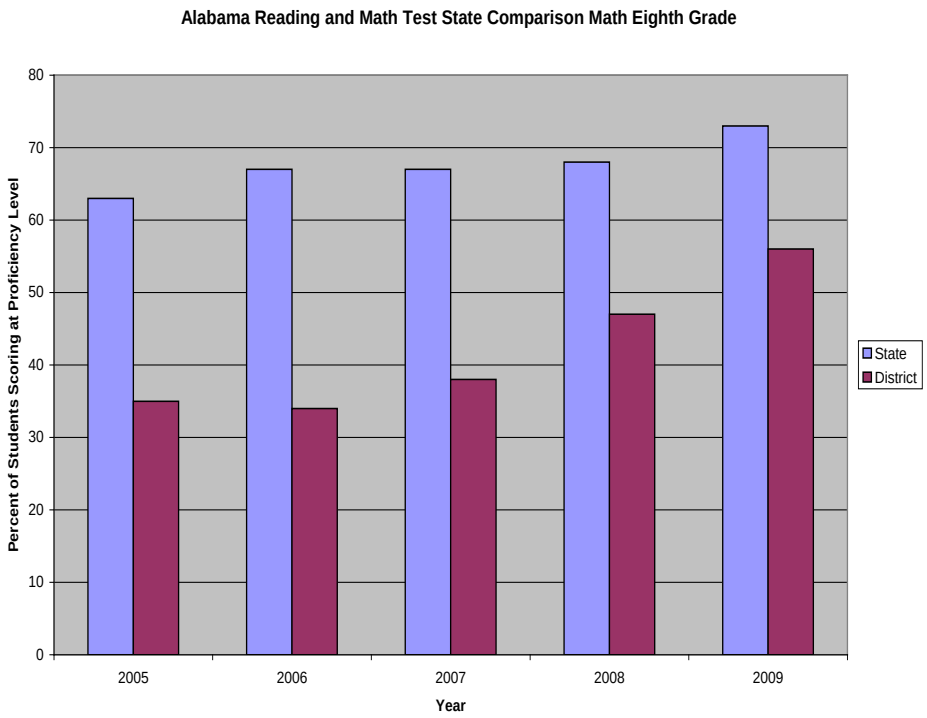


Figure 3.

Sample

The study included seventh and eighth grade middle school students (n = 361) in a rural, Title I middle school in the Southeastern region of the United States. The demographic information on the poll consisted of four areas: age, grade level, gender, and ethnicity. The age of the participants in this study ranged from 12 to 15 years. The average age of the sample for this study was 13.46. The study was virtually comprised of the same amount of males versus females. The majority of the students self-identified as White (51%). The remaining participants identified as African American (37%), Hispanic (4%), Native American (1%), and Other (5%). For the purpose of this research, the information on White students and African American students was used.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the students participating in this study by age. Table 2 presents the distribution of the students participating in this study by grade. Table 3 presents the distribution of the students participating in this study by gender. Table 4 presents the distribution of the students participating in this study by ethnicity.

Table 1

Distribution and Percentage of Participants by Age

Age	n	%
12	43	12%
13	155	43%
14	119	33%
15	32	9%

n = 360

Table 2

Distribution and Percentage of Participants by Grade

	n	%
Grade 7	209	58%
Grade 8	137	38%

n = 360

Table 3

Distribution and Percentage of Participants by Gender

	n	%
Male	179	50%
Female	179	50%

n = 358

Table 4

Distribution and Percentage of Participants by Ethnicity

	n	%
African-American (Black)	138	37%
Asian	3	1%
Caucasian (White)	183	51%
Hispanic	15	4%
Native American	3	1%
Other	17	5%

n = 359

Methods

The investigation examined the responses of seventh and eighth grade students with a sample size of 361 in a rural, Title I middle school. As a preparation for the polling process, the creator of the learning polls held a training session with the school administrators, the two teachers assigned to serve as proctors in the process, a district level administrator and the district technology administrator. The polling process served as an outreach program for the designer of

the polls to assist the school officials in gathering information for the purpose of continuous improvement planning of the school.

The polls were completed online in a computer lab setting. The district technology director had installed URL links on each computer desktop in the computer lab so that the students could be directed to the link on the computer, open it, and then click on the link to the poll. This procedure was completed to eliminate any frustrations that may have developed for students who could not access the site and possibly have created time constraints for completion of the polls.

The quantitative area included data collected from students that completed the online poll. This poll was completed to gather information about students' perceptions on variables which affect tutoring services and the results were analyzed to assist with continuous improvement planning. The students were asked to respond to questions on the polls which were relevant to tutoring issues such as their perceptions on the most convenient time of the delivery of tutoring services, the person who should provide the tutoring, and what types of settings they preferred for tutoring. This study was approved by the IRB.

Data Collection

Two teachers served as proctors and were given a one-page document which provided instructions for the polling process (see Appendix 2). The proctors created a schedule for each of the students to visit the computer lab during their English class. Each class was assigned a 30-minute time block to complete the polls. A one-page document, with a five-step process for instructions, was provided to the students so that they knew exactly what to do and in what sequence (see Appendix 3). The students were also provided with the web-site (www.learningpolls.org) so that they could access the poll.

Each student was assigned a six-digit random, alpha-numeric code on a sticker label to eliminate their identity of their answers. Although the school was identified for data collection in the initial polling process, neither the school nor the school district was identified in the reporting of the results for purposes in this study. The school code and the random individual codes were entered by each student at the end of the poll. These students' random codes ensured complete anonymity and eliminated the possibility for the students to vote more than once on the poll. No identifying information from the computer or the participant was recorded by the school or by the learning polls website to increase anonymity. This included the computer identity number, the IP address, and the email address.

Data Analysis

The response to each question had to be tested because the students were given the opportunity to choose more than a single option for response purposes on most of the poll items. This created a separate data field. Non-parametric Chi-square testing was conducted for the responses on each question item of the poll. This method of analysis was used to determine if relationships were dependent or independent between responses and demographic variables of gender, grade level, ethnicity and age. Qualitative data, which was collected from the comments that students made in the "other" box to most of the poll items, was analyzed for emerging trends or supportive information that could be used in planning tutoring services for school improvement purposes.

Data results were reported in bar graph form so that it could be accessed by the school administrator who had been given a password to assist with gathering information for continuous improvement purposes. The primary investigator and the sponsor professor had access to the

raw data in spreadsheet format. These raw data were converted into frequencies by gender, age, grade level, and ethnicity.

Summary

This research was conducted to consider the perceptions of middle school students in relation to tutoring strategies used to improve student proficiency in reading and math. An Internet learning poll for tutoring (www.learningpolls.org) was used to collect anonymous data from the sample population. Students completed the online poll and results of the data were collected via the Internet in bar graph form. Students completed demographic information, multiple choice questions, and open-ended questions. Chapter IV of this study presents an in-depth analysis of this data.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to further the knowledge base in the use of polling to engage student voice in the continuous improvement process by examining the degree to which their perceptions differ based upon selected demographic factors which included gender, age, ethnicity, and grade level. The purpose was also to examine students' perceptions in the area of tutoring.

Quantitative Results

Reports were generated for the Internet tutoring poll showing the percentages of students who selected a particular response. The demographic data for the respondents were also displayed in the reports. Chi-square non-parametric statistic tests were performed on individual responses for each question in the tutoring poll. Students could select more than one response to each question; therefore, it was necessary to test each response and report each separate data field. These tests were used to analyze the relationships of the demographic variables of age, grade, gender, and ethnicity and to determine whether these relationships were dependent or independent.

Table 5 exhibits the questions and responses of the tutoring learning poll, the four demographic areas, and the chi-square statistics for each of the variables which demonstrated a significant difference. A two-sided test with a p value of $< .05$ was used. Each of the columns displays the chi-square statistic for a dependent relationship or an em (--) dash for an

independent variable. An independent relationship indicates that the cell frequencies are within the anticipated range and no significant differences were discovered using the two-sided p value of < .05. All relationships that are dependent, indicating significant differences, show the Pearson chi-square statistic with a $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, and $p < .001$***. The statistics can be compared vertically to determine magnitude, but cannot be compared horizontally because of a difference in the degrees of freedom. The range of statistics is indicated in each column.

Table 5

Relationships between Tutoring Responses and Gender, Grade, and Ethnicity (n=361)

Question and Responses	Pearson Chi-Square Statistics			
	Age	Gender	Grade	Ethnicity
	(3df)	(1df)	(1df)	(1df)
1. Most students I know who need tutoring				
a. Recognize their need and will ask for help	--	--	--	--
b. Deny they have a problem with the subject	--	--	--	--
c. Feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help	--	--	--	--
d. Blame their difficulties on poor teachers	--	--	--	6.596**
2. More students would seek tutoring if				
a. It was more convenient and available	--	--	--	--
b. Teachers would offer them this option	--	--	--	--
c. They cared about academic success	--	--	--	--
d. Parents were aware that they needed it	15.682***	9.553**	5.488*	--
3. Seeking help from a tutor				
a. Shows that I recognize a need for help	10.930*	--	--	--
b. Would embarrass me in front of friends	--	--	--	--
c. Reflects my desire to learn and succeed	--	--	--	--
d. Helps meet requirements for graduation	--	--	4.073*	--

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Question and Responses	Pearson Chi-Square Statistics			
	Age	Gender	Grade	Ethnicity
	(3df)	(1df)	(1df)	(1df)
4. When students fail a class or a test required to graduate, they should				
a. automatically be assigned a tutor	--	--	--	--
b. Take monthly practice tests	--	--	--	--
c. Go to summer school	--	--	--	--
d. access a computer program for help	--	4.015*	--	--
5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is				
a. Right after school	12.100**	6.117*	--	10.443***
b. During the evening	--	--	--	--
c. On weekends	8.818*	--	--	--
d. At lunchtime	--	--	--	11.190***
e. Before school	--	--	--	--
6. If I told my friends that I was going to get tutoring				
a. They would make fun of me	--	--	--	--
b. They would try to talk me out of it	--	--	--	--
c. They would suggest I drop the class	--	--	--	--
d. They would encourage my efforts	11.403**	10.992***	7.627**	--
7. If I told my parents that I was going to get tutoring				
a. They would suggest I drop the class	--	--	--	--
b. They would encourage my efforts	--	--	--	--
c. They would allow me to make the decision	--	--	--	--
d. They would question if I really need help	--	--	--	--
8. The reasons I would seek a tutor are				
a. Poor listening habits in class	--	5.088*	--	--
b. Excessive absences from class	--	--	--	--
c. Difficulty focusing because of disruptions	--	--	--	4.798*
d. My teacher does not explain the material well	--	--	--	--
e. Trouble reading or remembering materials	--	--	--	--
f. Not passing a section of the state test	--	--	--	--

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Question and Responses	Pearson Chi-Square Statistics			
	Age	Gender	Grade	Ethnicity
	(3df)	(1df)	(1df)	(1df)
9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer				
a. A small group setting	--	--	--	--
b. One on one with a tutor	14.053**	4.463*	4.981*	--
c. Computer program or online support	--	--	--	--
d. Video lessons to watch and repeat	--	--	--	3.926*
10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I				
a. Ask the teacher questions	--	--	--	6.734**
b. Meet with my counselor	--	--	--	--
c. Ask classmates or friends for help	--	6.229*	--	7.524**
d. Seek no help even though I may fail	13.576**	4.052*	--	3.934*
11. When I request tutoring, my teacher(s)				
a. Arrange for help without delay	--	--	--	--
b. Put me off and ignore my request	--	--	--	--
c. Suggest checking with a counselor	--	--	--	--
d. Tell me that I should try harder	--	11.395***	--	--
12. I prefer a tutor to be				
a. My teacher whose class I am struggling in	--	--	--	--
b. Another teacher in the same subject area	--	--	--	--
c. Someone from a tutoring company	--	--	--	--
d. Classmates who know the subject	--	--	--	--
13. My school should let students know about tutoring				
a. At orientation and in the handbook	10.513*	--	--	--
b. On the school website	--	5.120*	--	6.111*
c. On daily announcements	8.674*	--	7.887**	--

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Question and Responses	Pearson Chi-Square Statistics			
	Age	Gender	Grade	Ethnicity
	(3df)	(1df)	(1df)	(1df)
14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring are				
a. Mathematics	--	--	--	--
b. English	14.695**	6.527*	10.030**	--
c. Science	--	--	--	--
d. Social Studies	--	--	--	--
15. Parents should receive school reports showing				
a. Group progress of students who receive tutoring	--	--	--	--
b. Gains that tutored students make in specific subjects	--	--	--	4.796*
c. Number of dropouts and whether they had tutoring	--	--	--	--
d. Comments by students about their tutoring experience	--	3.927*	--	8.943**
16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor				
a. In the subjects that I understand well	8.253*	11.33**	2.000***	--
b. to help students from families who don't speak English	--	--	--	--
c. To help students with learning disabilities	--	--	--	--
d. For classmates in my cooperative group	--	--	--	--

$p < .05$*
$p < .01$**
$p < .001$***
-- = no significance

In the demographic variable of age, items which indicated a level of significant difference included the following areas.

2d. More students would seek tutoring if parents were aware that they needed it (15.682***)

3a. Seeking help from a tutor shows that I recognize the need for help (10.930*).

5a. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is right after school (12.100**).

5c. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is on weekends (8.818*).

6d. If I told my friends that I was going to get tutoring they would encourage my efforts (11.403**).

9b. If I were to seek help, I would prefer one on one with a tutor (14.053**).

10d. If a subject is difficult to understand, I seek no help even though I may fail (13.576**).

13a. My school should let students know about tutoring at orientation and in the handbook (10.513*).

13c. My school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (8.674*).

14b. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring is English (14.695**).

16a. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor in the subjects that I understand well (8.253*).

In the demographic variable of gender, items which included a level of significant difference included the following items.

2d. More students would seek tutoring if parents were aware they needed it (9.553**).

4d. When students fail a class or a test required to graduate, they should access a computer program for help (4.015*).

5a. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is right after school (6.117*).

6d. If I told my friends that I was going to get tutoring, they would encourage my efforts (10.992***).

8a. The reasons I would seek a tutor are poor listening habits in class (5.088*).

9b. If I were to seek help, I would prefer one on one with a tutor (4.463*).

10c. If a subject is difficult to understand, I ask classmates for help (6.229*).

10d. If a subject is difficult to understand, I seek no help even though I may fail (4.052*).

11d. When I request tutoring, my teacher(s) tell me I should try harder (11.395***).

13b. My school should let students know about tutoring on the school website (5.120*).

14b. The subject I am most likely to seek tutoring in is English (6.527*).

15d. Parents should receive school reports showing comments by students about their tutoring experiences (3.927*).

16a. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor in subjects that I understand well (11.33**).

In the demographic variable of grade level, items which indicated a level of significant difference included the following areas.

2d. More students would seek tutoring if parents were aware that they needed it (5.488*).

3d. Seeking help from a tutor helps meet requirements for graduation (4.073*).

6d. If I told my friends I was going to get tutoring, they would encourage my efforts (7.627**).

9b. If I were to seek help, I would prefer one on one with a tutor (4.981*).

13c. My school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (7.887**).

14b. The subject in which I am most likely to seek tutoring is English (10.030**).

16a. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor in subjects that I understand well (2.000***).

In the demographic variable of ethnicity, items which indicated a level of significant difference included the following areas.

1d. Most students I know who need tutoring blame their difficulties on poor teachers (6.596**).

5a. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is right after school (10.443***).

5e. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is at lunchtime (11.190***).

8c. The reasons I would seek a tutor is difficulty because of disruptions (4.798*).

9d. If I were to seek help, I would prefer video lessons to watch and repeat (3.926*).

10a. If a subject is difficult to understand, I ask the teacher questions (6.734**).

10c. If a subject is difficult to understand, I ask classmates or friend for help (7.524**).

10d. If a subject is difficult to understand, I seek no help even though I may fail (3.934*).

13b. My school should let students know about tutoring on the school website (6.111*).

15b. Parents should receive school reports showing gains that tutored students make in specific subjects (4.796*).

15d. Parents should receive school reports showing comments by students about their tutoring experience (8.943**).

. The results of the findings in Table 5 revealed critical data. Of the thirteen items which demonstrated a significant difference in the area of gender, the larger percentages occurred with females in ten of the areas. Those areas which included higher percentages in males were 8a – the reasons I would seek a tutor are poor listening habits in class (31% males, 21% females); 10d – if a subject is difficult to understand, I seek no help even though I may fail (17% males, 9%

females) and 14b – the subject in which I am most likely to seek tutoring in is English (males – 27%, females – 16%).

In the area of ethnicity, eleven areas presented a level of significant difference. Of these eleven areas, the larger percentages occurred in eight of the items in the category of white students. Item 5a revealed that more African American students (61%) preferred tutoring right after school compared to White students (43%). Item 10a revealed that 64% of African American students would ask their teachers questions as compared to 49% of White students. In item 10d nine percent of African American students stated they would seek no help even though they may fail as compared to only one percent of White students.

In the demographic area of grade level, seven items revealed a significant difference in grades seven and eight. Of the seven items, seventh graders demonstrated higher percentages in all areas with the exception of item 14b. Twenty-nine percent of eighth grade students indicated that the subject that they needed tutoring in was English as compared to 15% of seventh grade students.

In the demographic area of age, eleven items revealed a significant difference in ages. Item 3a indicated a higher percentage at the age of 12 (65%) than the other ages (13 – 48%, 14 – 44%, and 15 – 31%). This item stated that seeking help from a tutor showed that the student recognized a need for help. Item 5c demonstrated a low percentage at the age of 15 (25%) as compared to the other ages (12 – 55%, 13 – 56%, and 14 – 47%). This item stated that the most convenient time for the student to attend tutoring is right after school. This implies that the older students prefer a different time for tutoring. Item 14b revealed that the higher percentage of students needing tutoring in English was at the age of 15. This could be easily aligned with the findings for eighth grade students.

Research Question #1: How are student perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by gender?

The students responded to 16 items on the tutoring poll. Table 6 indicated the frequency and percentage of items and answers with a response rate of 50% or higher in relation to gender. Item 1c indicated that more than 53% of the females (n = 95) stated that most students that they know who need tutoring feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help. According to item 2c, 52% of the females polled (n = 93) indicated that more students would seek tutoring if they cared about academic success. Item 5a demonstrated that 56% (n = 101) of the female students prefer tutoring sessions to be held right after school. Information in item 6c revealed that 58% (n = 105) of female students believe their friends would encourage their efforts if they told their friends they were going to get tutoring. Item 7b and 7c presented information for males and females with a response rate higher than 50%. Fifty-two percent (n = 94) of the males and 61% (n = 109) of the females indicated in item 7b that their parents would encourage their efforts if they told them they were going to get tutoring. This was a nine percent higher rate to this response for this question by females. In item 7c, 51% (n = 93) of the males and 53% (n = 96) of the females indicated that their parents would allow them to make the decision if they told them they were going to get tutoring. Fifty percent of the females (n = 90) specified in item 8c that a reason why they would seek a tutor was because of difficulty focusing because of disruptions. In item 9b, 55% of males (n = 100), and (66%) of females (n = 119) showed that they would prefer tutoring to be one on one. Fifty percent of males (n = 91) and 57% of females (n = 103) reported in item 10a that they would ask the teacher questions if a subject is difficult to understand. Sixty-two percent (n = 112) of the females reported that they would ask classmates for help. Item 13c revealed that 60% (n = 109) of males and 57% (n = 102) of females indicated that the

school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements. Fifty-two percent of the females (n = 93) reported in item 14a that math would be the subject for which they would most likely seek tutoring. Only females indicated a willingness to volunteer as a tutor with a percentage of greater than 50%. Sixty-seven percent of females (n = 120) reported that they are willing to volunteer as a tutor in subjects they understand well.

Table 6

Gender Frequency Percentage of Items/Answers with a Response of 50% or Higher

Totals	Gender			
	Male (n = 181)	%	Female (n = 180)	%
1. Most students I know who need tutoring				
c. feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help	80	44%	95	53%
2. More students would seek tutoring if				
c. they cared about academic success	77	43%	93	52%
5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is				
a. right after school	78	43%	101	56%
6. If I told my friends I was going to get tutoring				
c. they would encourage my efforts	74	41%	105	58%
7. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring				
b. they would encourage my efforts	94	52%	109	61%
c. they would allow me to make the decision	93	51%	96	53%

(table continues)

Table 6 (continued)

Totals	Gender			
	Male (n = 181)	%	Female (n = 180)	%
8. The reasons I would seek a tutor are				
c. difficulty focusing because of disruptions	73	40%	90	50%
9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer				
b. one on one with a tutor	100	55%	119	66%
10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I				
a. ask the teacher questions	91	50%	103	57%
c. ask classmates or friends for help	89	49%	112	62%
13. My school should let students know about tutoring				
c. on daily announcements	109	60%	102	57%
14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring in are				
a. mathematics	89	49%	93	52%
16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor				
a. in the subjects that I understand well	89	49%	120	67%

Research Question #2: How are student perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by ethnicity?

The students responded to 16 items on the tutoring poll. Table 7 indicated the frequency and percentage of items and answers with a response rate of 50% or higher in relation to ethnicity. Item 1c indicated that more than half of the White students (n = 94 or 51%) believe that most students who need tutoring feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help. In item 3a,

53% (n = 97) of the White students indicated that seeking help from a tutor shows that they recognize a need for help. Sixty-one percent (n = 80) of the African American students demonstrated in item 5a that the most convenient time to attend tutoring sessions is right after school. Fifty-four percent of the White students (n = 99) responded in item 6c that if they told their friends they were going to get tutoring, the friends would suggest that they drop the course. In item 7b, both African American and White students demonstrated a response higher that 50%. Fifty-five percent of the African American students (n = 73) and 56% of the White students (n = 103) stated that if they told their parents they were going to get tutoring, their parents would encourage their efforts. In addition to this question, 54% of the African American students (n = 71) and 52% of the White students (n = 96) responded in item 7c that if they told their parents they were going to get tutoring, the parents would allow them to make the decision. Item 9b stated that 64% of African American students (n = 84) and 61% of White students (n = 113) would prefer one-on-one tutoring. Item 10a indicated that 64% of African American students (n = 84) would ask the teacher(s) questions if the subject was too difficult to understand. White students (63%; n = 115) responded that they would ask friends for help if the subject was too difficult to understand. When asked for the best method to advertise tutoring, 57% (n = 104) of White students responded that the administrators should use the school website. Sixty-one percent of the African American students (n = 80) and 56% of the White students (n = 103) stated that they should be notified on the daily announcements. Fifty-four percent (n = 99) of White students demonstrated in item 14a that they would most likely be tutored in math. In item 16a, 59% of African American students (n = 78) and 60% of White students (n = 110) indicated a willingness to tutor in subjects that they knew well.

Table 7

Ethnicity Frequency Percentage of Items/Answers with a Response of 50% or Higher (n=361)

Totals	Ethnicity			
	Black (n = 132)	%	White (n = 184)	%
1. Most students I know who need tutoring				
c. feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help	64	48%	94	51%
3. Seeking help from a tutor				
a. shows that I recognize a need for help	58	44%	97	53%
5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is				
a. right after school	80	61%	79	43%
6. If I told my friends I was going to get tutoring				
d. they would encourage my efforts	61	46%	99	54%
7. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring				
b. they would encourage my efforts	73	55%	103	56%
c. they would allow me to make the decision	71	54%	96	52%
9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer				
b. one on one with a tutor	84	64%	113	61%
10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I				
a. ask the teacher questions	84	64%	90	49%
c. ask classmates or friends for help	62	47%	115	63%
13. My school should let students know about tutoring				
b. on the school website	56	42%	104	57%
c. on daily announcements	80	61%	103	56%

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Totals	Ethnicity			
	Black (n = 132)	%	White (n = 184)	%
14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring in are				
a. mathematics	60	45%	99	54%
16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor (n = 361)				
a. in the subjects that I understand well	78	59%	110	60%

Research Question #3: How are student perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by grade level?

The students responded to 16 items on the tutoring poll. Table 8 indicated the frequency and percentage of items and answers with a response rate of 50% or higher in relation to grade level. Item 1c indicated that more than half of the seventh grade students 52% (n = 112) believed that most students who need tutoring feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help. In item 3a, 50% (n = 107) of the seventh grade students indicated that seeking help from a tutor shows that they recognize a need for help. In item 5a, 52% (n = 112) of seventh grade students felt that the best time for tutoring was right after school. Fifty-six percent (n = 119) of seventh grade students indicated in item 6c that if they told their friends they were going to get tutoring, they would encourage my efforts. Item 7b had a response rate higher that 50% for both grade levels. Fifty-seven percent (n = 122) of seventh grade students and 55% (n = 81) of eighth grade students indicated that if they told their parents that they were going to get tutoring, their parents would encourage their efforts. The response to item 7c demonstrated that 55% of the seventh

grade students (n = 118) believe their parents would allow them to make the decision. Item 9b indicated that 65% of seventh grade students (n = 140) and 54% of eighth grade students (n = 79) would prefer one-on-one tutoring services. Fifty-eight percent of seventh grade students (n = 124) indicated in 9c that they would like to have tutoring delivered though computer programs or online. In item 10a, 56% of seventh grade students (n = 120) and 50% of eighth grade students (n = 74), indicated that they would ask the teacher questions if the subject was too difficult to understand. Also, 58% (n = 124) of seventh grade students and 52% (n = 77) of eighth grade students reported in item 10c that they would ask their classmates for help. When asked how the students should be notified of tutoring services which are available, 50% of seventh grade students (n = 107) indicated in item 13b that they feel it should be put on the school website. Sixty-five percent of the seventh grade students (n = 138) and 50% of the eighth grade students (n = 73) reported in item 13c that it should be included in daily announcements.

In item 14a, 52% of seventh grade students (n = 111) indicated that they were more likely to seek help in math. Sixty percent of seventh grade students (n = 128) and 55% (n = 81) of eighth grade students indicated in item 16a that they would be willing to tutor other students in subjects they understand well.

Table 8

Grade Frequency Percentage of Items/Answers with a Response of 50% or Higher (n = 361)

Totals	Grade			
	7th (n = 214)	%	8th (n = 147)	%
1. Most students I know who need tutoring				
c. feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help	112	52%	63	43%
3. Seeking help from a tutor				
a. shows that I recognize a need for help	107	50%	32	22%
5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is				
a. right after school	112	52%	67	46%
6. If I told my friends I was going to get tutoring				
c. they would encourage my efforts	119	56%	60	41%
7. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring				
b. they would encourage my efforts	122	57%	81	55%
c. they would allow me to make the decision	118	55%	71	48%
9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer				
b. one on one with a tutor	140	65%	79	54%
c. computer program or online support	124	58%	44	30%
10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I				
a. ask the teacher questions	120	56%	74	50%
c. ask classmates or friends for help	124	58%	77	52%
13. My school should let students know about tutoring				
b. on the school website	107	50%	72	49%
c. on daily announcements	138	65%	73	50%

(table continues)

Table 8 (continued)

Totals	Grade			
	7th	%	8th	%
	(n = 214)		(n = 147)	
14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring in are				
a. mathematics	111	52%	71	48%
16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor				
a. in the subjects that I understand well	128	60%	81	55%

Research Question #4: How are student perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by age?

The students responded to 16 items on the tutoring poll. Table 9 indicated the frequency and percentage of items and answers with a response rate of 50% or higher in relation to age. Item 1c indicated that 52% of 13 year old students (n = 55) believed that most students who need tutoring feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help. Item 2c revealed that 53% (n = 26) of 12 year old students believe that more students would ask for tutoring if they cared about their academic success. In item 3c, 51% (n = 25) of the 12 year old students indicated that seeking help from a tutor reflects a desire to learn and succeed. Fifty-five percent (n = 27) of 12 year old students and 56% (n = 87) of 13 year old students indicated in item 5a that they would prefer to seek tutoring right after school. In item 6d, 59% of 12 year old students (n = 29) and 53% of 13 year old students (n = 58) reported that if they told their friends that they were going to get tutoring, they would encourage their efforts. A response rate greater than 50% was reported for ages 12, 13, and 14 in item 7b. Sixty-seven percent (n = 33) of 12 year olds, 59% (n = 92) of 13 year olds, and 51% (n = 61) of 14 year olds stated that if they told their parents they were

seeking tutoring, their parents would encourage their efforts. In 7c, 57% of 12 year olds (n = 28), 52% of 13 year olds, (n = 81), and 53% of 14 year olds (n = 16) indicated that if they told their parents they were seeking tutoring, they would allow them to make the decisions. Three subgroups also indicated a response rate greater than 50% in item 9b. Seventy-four percent of 12 year old students (n=36), 65% of 13 year old students (n = 101), and 58% (n = 69) of 14 year old students indicated they would prefer one-on-one tutoring services. A response rate greater than 50% was also reported in item 10a for three of the age groups. Fifty-seven percent (n = 28) of the 12 year olds, 56% (n = 87) of the 13 year olds, and 53% (n = 64) of the 14 year olds reported that if a subject was too difficult to understand, they would ask the teacher questions. These same age groups also reported in item 10c that they would ask classmates or friends for help. Sixty-one percent (n = 30) of 12 year olds, 62% (n = 96) of 13 year olds, and 50% (n = 60) affirmed this response.

When asked how they would like to be notified of tutoring services, 58% (n = 69) of 14 year olds selected the school website. The other three age groups demonstrated a preference for the daily announcements in item 13c. Seventy-one percent (n = 35) of 12 year olds, 62% (n = 97) of 13 year olds, and 56% (n = 20) of 15 year olds selected this method of information. Fifty-four percent (n = 65) of 14 year olds and 50% (n = 18) indicated they would most likely seek help in the area of math as noted in item 14a. In item 15a, 51% of 12 year old students (n = 25) reported that students should receive school reports showing group progress of students who receive tutoring. In item 16 a, students revealed that they were willing to volunteer as a tutor in subjects that they understood well. Fifty-seven percent (n = 28) of 12 year olds, 60% (n = 93) of 13 year olds, and 63% (n = 75) of 14 year olds affirmed this response.

Table 9

Age Frequency Percentage of Items/Answers with a Response of 50% or Higher

Totals	Age							
	12 (n = 49)	%	13 (n = 156)	%	14 (n = 120)	%	15 (n = 36)	%
1. Most students I know who need tutoring								
c. feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help	23	47%	81	52%	55	46%	16	44%
2. More students would seek tutoring if								
c. they cared about academic success	26	53%	76	49%	55	46%	13	36%
3. Seeking help from a tutor								
c. reflects my desire to learn and succeed	25	51%	64	41%	51	43%	14	39%
5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is								
a. right after school	27	55%	87	56%	56	47%	9	25%
6. If I told my friends I was going to get tutoring								
d. they would encourage my efforts	29	59%	83	53%	58	48%	9	25%
7. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring								
b. they would encourage my efforts	33	67%	92	59%	61	51%	17	47%
c. they would allow me to make the decision	28	57%	81	52%	64	53%	16	44%

(table continues)

Table 9 (continued)

Totals	Age							
	12 (n = 49)	%	13 (n = 156)	%	14 (n = 120)	%	15 (n = 36)	%
9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer								
b. one on one with a tutor	36	74%	101	65%	69	58%	13	36%
10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I								
a. ask the teacher questions	28	57%	87	56%	64	53%	15	42%
c. ask classmates or friends for help	30	61%	96	62%	60	50%	15	42%
13. My school should let students know about tutoring								
b. on the school website	22	45%	75	48%	69	58%	13	36%
c. on daily announcements	35	71%	97	62%	59	49%	20	56%
14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring in are (n=361)								
a. mathematics	22	45%	77	49%	65	54%	18	50%
15. Students should receive school reports showing								
a. group progress of students who receive tutoring	25	51%	66	42%	51	43%	12	33%
16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor								
a. in the subjects that I understand well	28	57%	93	60%	75	63%	13	36%

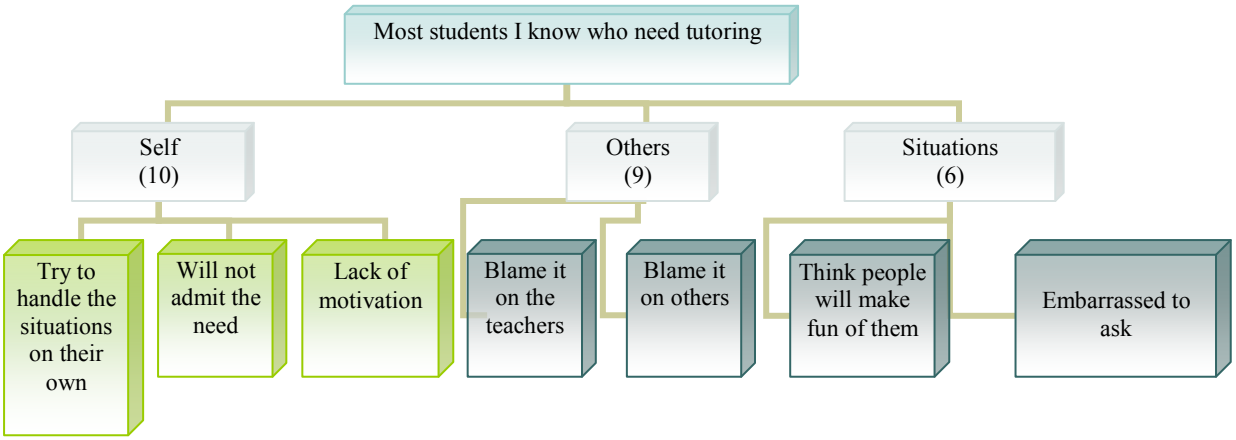
Qualitative Data Results

Each question on the Tutoring Poll allowed students to submit open-ended responses to provide a more in-depth explanation of their perceptions. The actual responses were compiled in an Excel document for analysis. The following concept maps report general areas of responses that may be compared to the quantitative data for the development of patterns that can be aligned with the multiple choice responses. There were frequent similarities among the open-ended responses when compared to the multiple choice responses given by the students.

When the open ended responses were compared to the multiple choice responses, there were seven questions which demonstrated a parallel with the open-ended responses. This analysis demonstrates the concept that the students exhibited consistency with most responses throughout the process. An observation should be made on the item which identifies the subject that most students identified as an area of need. In the multiple choice question, the most responses which indicated a need for help were in the area of math. In the open-ended question the most responses were in the area of Spanish. The multiple choice question did not list Spanish as an option.

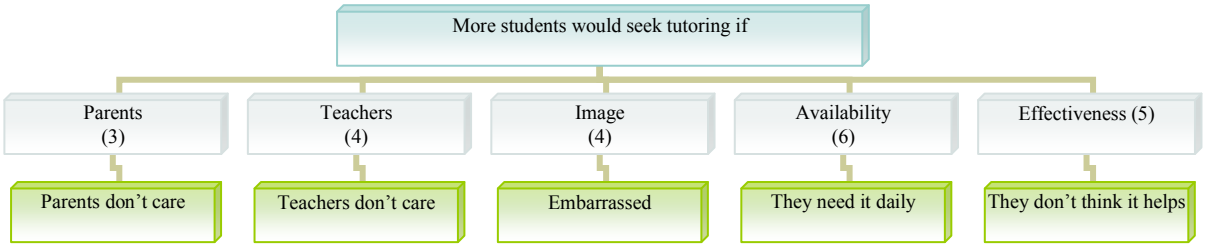
This type of information can be used by school improvement teams to understand student perceptions in the continuous improvement planning process. If there are relationships in student responses, this could be considered a strong indication of what types of strategies and actions that could be used in the Continuous Improvement Plan. Therefore, the similarities in the responses to multiple choice items and open-ended items could be a strong indicator of specific areas that need to be addressed.

Question 1:



Three general categories were prevalent in student responses: (1) reference to themselves, (2) references to others, and (3) situational concerns. Within the reference to themselves, students gave answers such as "they can do things 'theirselves' ", "deal with their bad grades", and say "they don't need it." In response to others they responded with statements such as "blame it on the teachers" and "teachers don't teach good." Situational references included statements such as "people will make fun of them" and "are embarrassed to ask."

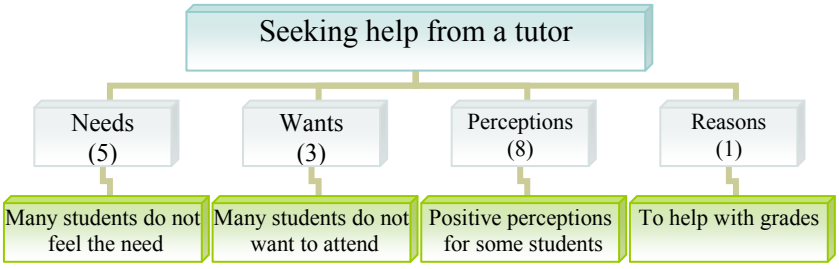
Question 2:



This question provoked responses in five general categories: (1) parents, (2) teachers, (3) image (4) availability, and (5) effectiveness. Some students referenced a lack of concern by

parents such as “if there (their) parents cared.” Some students referenced negative concerns about teachers such as “”if the teachers would recomind (recommend) them,” “teachers don’t cair (care),” teachers don’t pay attention,” and “teachers don’t teach fun.” Many students indicated that asking for tutoring proposed a negative image. These remarks included “don’t really want to go thinking that they are dumb,” “they weren’t embarrassed” and “they weren’t ashamed or embarrassed about it.” Some of the responses of the students’ perceptions revealed that they did not feel that tutoring was effective. These statements included comments such as “if it helped” and “if it wasn’t so boring.” A final area of thought on this question was availability. Students indicated issues with the availability of tutoring. These statements included “if they had a class for kids that need tutoring,” “if they had it every day after school,” if it was easier to get to,” and “who can pay the money.”

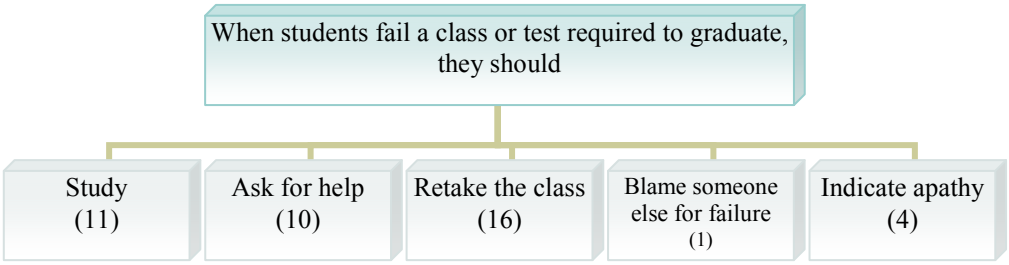
Question 3:



This question demonstrated four general areas of thought: (1) needs, (2) wants, (3) perceptions, and (4) reasons. Many students indicated they did not feel the need for tutoring. This area included statements such as “I won’t need a tutor,” “I never needed tutoring,” “I don’t need help,” and “I don’t need it.” Some students indicated through their responses that they did not want tutoring. These responses included statements such as “I don’t seek it” and “I don’t

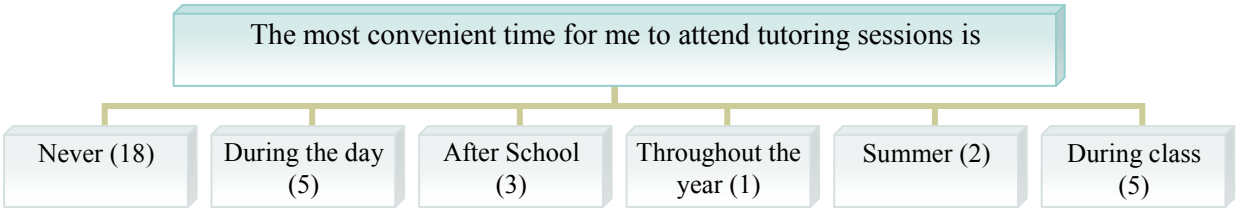
want it." Some students indicated positive perceptions for tutoring such as "shows bravery and will lead to better grades," "shows that you are wise," "helps me in certain subjects," "makes me feel as like I am smart" and "helps a lot of people at my school." A final area exhibited by this response was reasons students seek help through tutoring. These statements included comments such as "helps me a lot in math if I could get tutors," and "is to help grades."

Question 4:

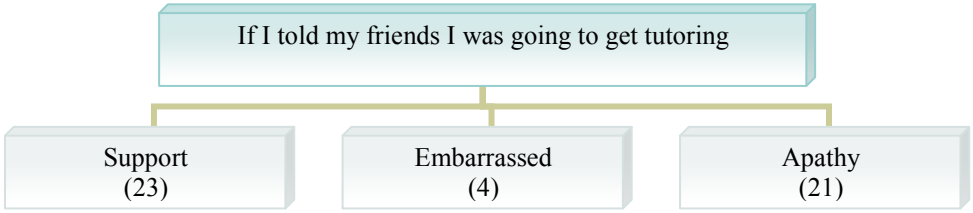


Five areas surfaced in the responses by students on this question: (1) study, (2) ask for help, (3) retake the class, (4) blame someone else for failure, and (5) indicated apathy. Many students indicated a responsibility to study by statements such as "study or/and get help if needed," "try harder and study more," "ask teacher to help them study," "get another chance and tell them to study harder," study more and read more about what's going on in class," and "study more often." Some students indicated a need to ask for help. Replies included "ask teachers to help them study," "ask for help from a tutor," "ask for help and try again next year," and "ask a parent for help." Some students indicated the need to retake classes. Responses included "retake it ASAP," "take it again," "take extra classes," "get a chance to take it before graduation day," "should get another chance to pass it," and "take it over again." One student placed blame on the teacher: "tell momma teacher ain't teaching." Some students demonstrated apathy by stating "give up" and "do nothing."

Question 5:



This question elicited a wide range of succinct responses: (1) never – 18; (2) during the day – 5; (3) after school – 3; (4) throughout the year – 1; (5) summer – 2: (5) during class – 5. Some of these responses could be overlapping concepts such as during the day, during class, and throughout the year.

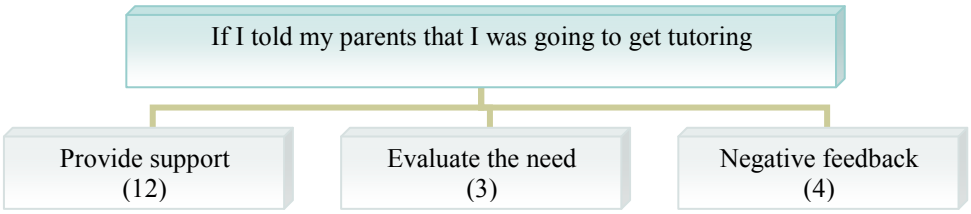


This question elicited a variety of responses which could be grouped into three general categories: (1) supportive, (2) embarrassment, and (3) apathy. Some students demonstrated a supportive approach through statements such as "they would ask to stay for tutoring with me," "Good luck, is what they would say," "they would go with me," "they wouldn't really care, they would be proud," "they would laugh and then tell me to do it," " they would joke, but they would be happy," "they would be like, good, that's awesome," "they would come with me so we could have fun," they would say, get smarter," "they would encourage me to do it," "let me make my one decision and support me, " "they would say ok and that's 'wats' up," ""they would say that's good for you," "they would try to help me too," "they would be like, ok," " they would say ok, that's you," "they would ask me if I needed any help," ""say go if you need help," "they would

tell me to try harder," "join with me," "wow, ok," "they would say ok", "they would help even if I wasn't in tutoring."

Some students indicated that their friends would be apathetic by statements such as "they wouldn't really care," "they wouldn't do nothing," "they wouldn't do anything or say anything," "they probably would not ever care," "they would probably tell me I don't need it," and "they would say whatever." Some students exhibited a possible level of embarrassment through statements such as "it would not come up in conversation," "they will tell everybody," "they would sarcastically make fun of me," "they would think it's funny," embarrass me in front of the whole school" and "think I am stupid."

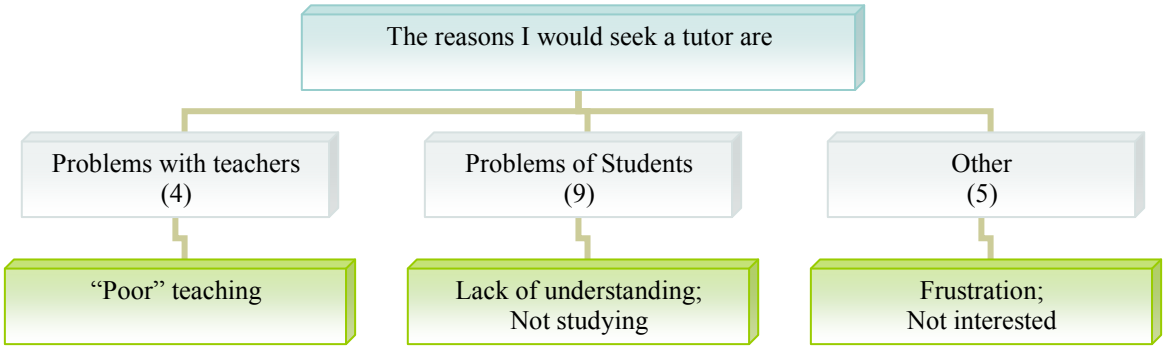
Question 7:



This question evaluated the students' responses to what they felt their parents' perceptions would be for tutoring. Three main ideas were indicated: (1) provide support, (2) evaluate the need, and (3) negative feedback. Many students noted support through statements such as "they would ask me what time to get picked up," "they would say, you have F's, you need that anyway," " "they would get my sister to help me," "they would make me go," " they also would help," "they would say good job," "they would help me be the best I could," "they would let me go," "they would help me even when I wasn't in tutoring," "be proud and think I would be smarter when I left. Some students indicated that their parents would evaluate the need for tutoring. These comments included "they would talk to the teacher," they would look at my

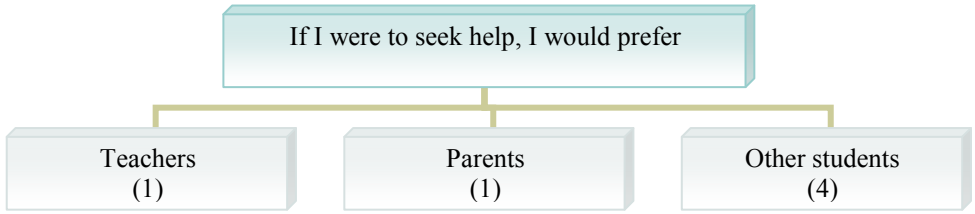
grades and see if I needed it," "they would say I don't need it," "they would ask why I need tutoring, I am very smart" and "they would not care and see if I do need it." Some students replied with negative feedback such as "they would make fun of me," "they would say no," "they wouldn't have gas to bring me" and "I would not tell them."

Question 8



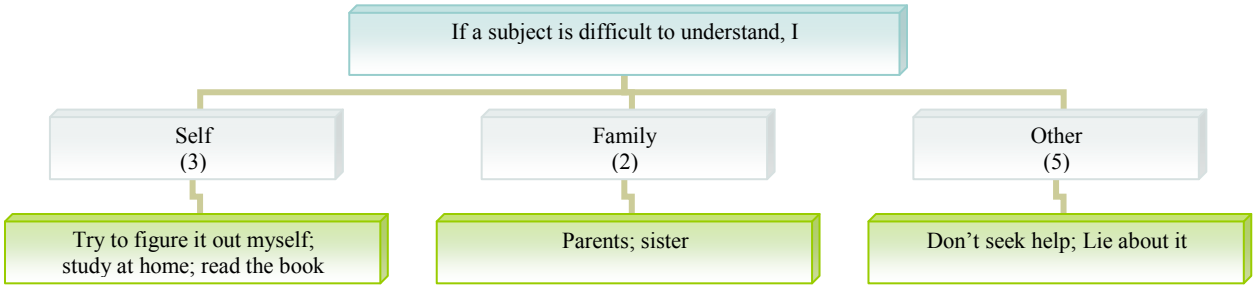
Student responses to this question were categorized into three areas: (1) problems with teachers, (2) problems of students, and (3) other areas. Two students implied that the reasons tutoring was needed was because of poor teaching. One student stated, "some teachers are poor in teaching," and another student stated, "bad teachers." The largest response area indicated problems that students demonstrated such as "because I do not do nothing," "not listening when teacher is teaching," "difficulty focusing," "not studying," "not understanding how the teacher got the answer (math)," "not remembering," "get distracted too easily," "unable to process the material at hand," and "not understanding what it means." Other areas identified included "state required to pass," "making bad grades," "not interested", "frustration."

Question 9



Although responses were limited to this question, three general areas were noted: (1) teachers, (2) parents, and (3) other students.

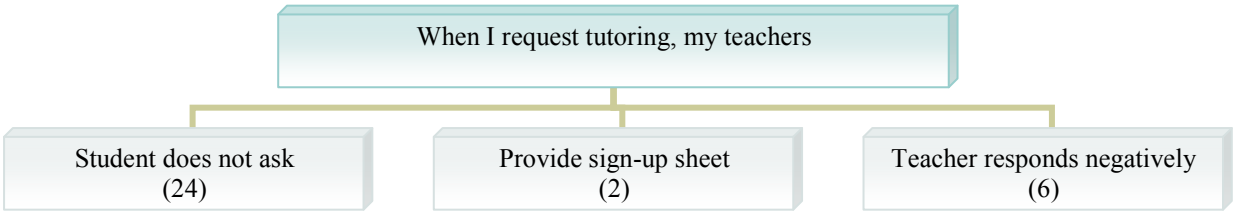
Question 10:



Students demonstrated reliance on two major sources of help: (1) themselves, and (2) family members. Some students made other comments which were negative. Many students indicated that they would seek help from family members such as "ask my parents for help," "ask my parents to help me with my homework," "ask my sister for help," "ask my mom," "ask my mum for help," and "ask a parent to help me out with it."

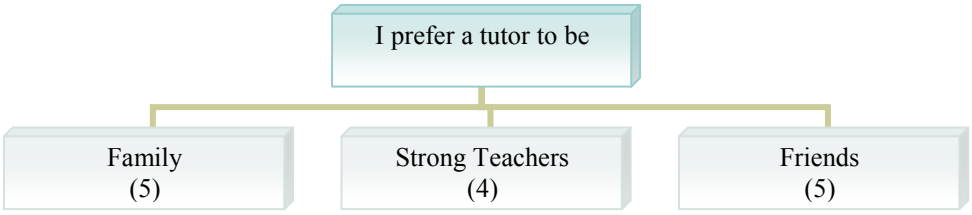
Some students indicated that they try to handle the problem on their own. "I don't seek help," "try to figure it out myself,", "try to do it by myself because the teacher is busy," "ask for help," "read my textbook and pay attention," and "study at home." Some students responded with negative connotations: "I would just make a F," "I will lie and say they didn't try to help me," "thinking about otha tings in life lik success," "don't try," and "I Hate Work."

Question 11



This question had a limited number of responses. General concepts included (1) students do not ask, (2) teacher provides a sign-up sheet, and (3) teacher responds negatively. Responses by 27 students indicated they had never asked for tutoring. These included comments such as "never requested tutoring," "I don't need a tutor," "I never asked my teacher, and "I haven't made a request for tutoring." One student stated that "my teacher would give me a sign-up sheet for my parents. Other students reported that the teacher would say "no, you need to pay more attention," "teacher would tell me I'm retarded," "some teachers would not care, some would," "tell me to try harder," "tell me to shut up," and "tell me they don't give a crap."

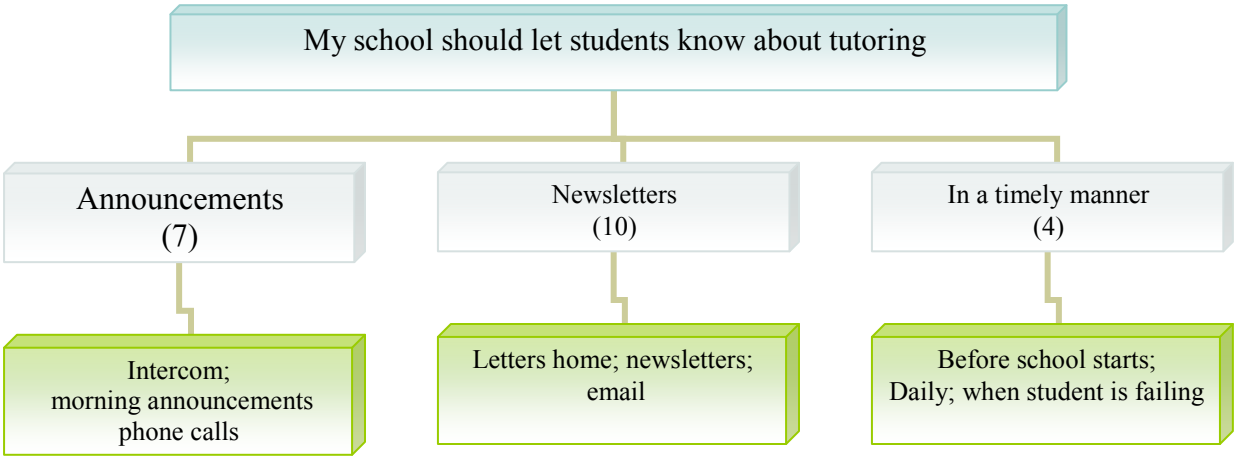
Question 12



Most students responded within three categories to this question: (1) family, (2) strong teachers, and (3) friends. Three students preferred the tutor to be a family member. Those were "my mom, she's a school teacher," "a family member I am comfortable with" and "at home." Another category included strong teachers and other people who demonstrated subject knowledge. They stated "my best class teacher," "a math genius," "anyone who could guide me through without a struggle" and "a very smart person." Some students indicated that they would

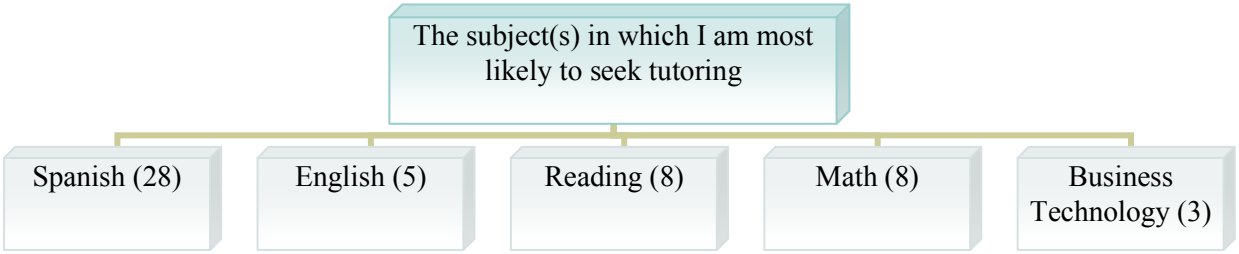
prefer friends: "a friend that would care, and would not play." The largest category of responses was suggestive in nature and not listed in these findings.

Question 13



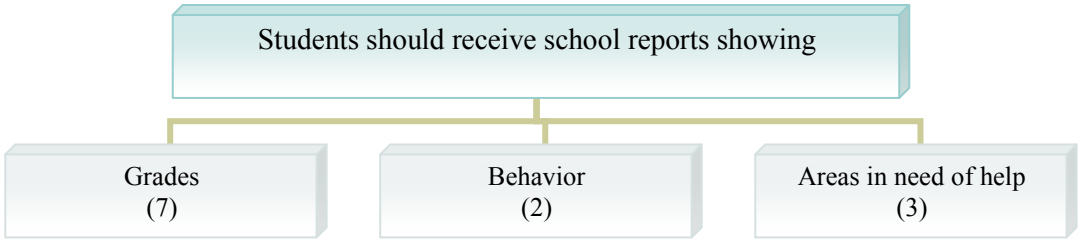
Three areas of request were demonstrated through student responses: (1) announcements, (2) newsletters, and (3) in a timely manner. Students requested that tutoring be announced over the intercom daily, in letters and newsletters sent home, by email, and other "pass out" sheets. The students indicated that all announcements should be made in a timely manner. Some stated "every day," "morning and afternoon," "when the student is failing the course," or "before school starts."

Question 14



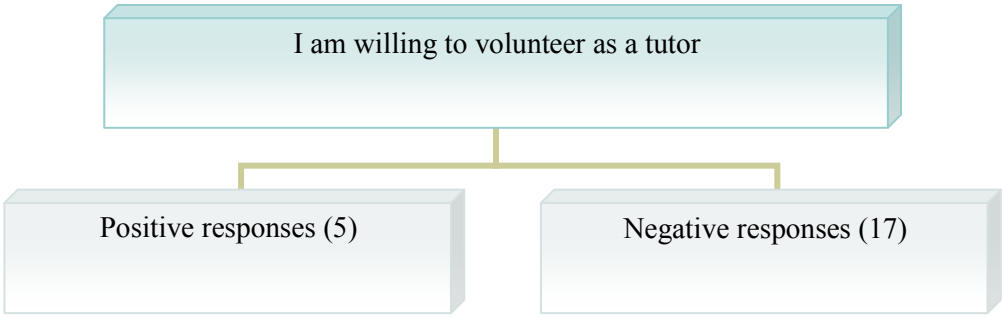
An overwhelming response to this question was Spanish (28). The other areas of concern were English (5), reading (8), math (8), and business technology (3).

Question 15



The general responses of students indicated that they felt that grades or academic performance, behavior, and areas in need of help should be shared in reports.

Question 16



Seventeen students responded that they would not volunteer and five demonstrated a willingness to help.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

There were some similarities among the open-ended responses when compared to the multiple choice responses. In the first question, students indicated on the multiple choice items that students were embarrassed to ask for tutoring services. This is noted also on the open-ended responses. Students responded with a high frequency to question six on the multiple choice

answer that their friends would encourage their efforts if they decided to get tutoring. This was also demonstrated in the open-ended responses by statements that students felt their friends would give them encouragement if they chose to attend tutoring. On question seven, students indicated on the multiple choice responses that they felt their parents would encourage and support their efforts if they were to seek tutoring. This is supported by the open-ended responses that students made which indicated support from parents. There was a strong parallel with multiple choice answers and open-ended answers in question 13. Students indicated the desire in both types of responses to have the tutoring advertised on the school's daily announcements. Whereas many of the multiple choice questions demonstrated a parallel with the open-ended responses, question 14 had a contrast in responses. On the multiple choice items, math occurred as the top answer for most of the subgroups. On the open-ended answers, Spanish (which was not a choice given) surfaced as the top response. This qualitative data provides additional insights into student perceptions on tutoring services which can be used to determine the conditions of learning when designing continuous improvement plans.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to further the knowledge base in the use of polling to engage student voice in the continuous improvement process by examining the degree to which their perceptions differ based upon selected demographic factors which included gender, age, ethnicity, and grade level. The purpose was also to examine students' perceptions in the area of tutoring.

The review of the literature revealed common elements which surfaced during the educational reform process known as *No Child Left Behind*. Research demonstrated that student achievement and student progress were the main focus of the act (Daly, et al., 2006). When schools fail to meet adequate yearly progress, they are placed in school improvement. A Continuous Improvement Plan must be written by a leadership team which involves administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students. The Continuous Improvement Plan is the formal document that is used by the school and the district as a guide to eliminate achievement gaps through the provision of instructional strategies. The collaboration, collegiality, cooperation, and creative problem solving is the responsibility of all stakeholders known as the professional learning community (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Kahanek, 2004; McEwan, 2003).

These professional learning communities collaborate to design and implement the Continuous Improvement Plan. Often students are frequently left out of the collaborative

process (Smyth, 2006). The research pointed out that students reported positive growth when their perceptions were included. Student voice requires leaders to promote change in perceptions. The research further demonstrated that there is an increase in students' academic achievement when students are included on school teams. Strom and Strom (2007) developed a highly successful method of determining student perceptions by using student learning polls. The use of the anonymous polls which are administered via the Internet provides critical information to school leaders that can be used for instructional decisions. This study reviewed the results of the Tutoring Learning Poll (Strom & Strom, 2007) given to 361 students in a rural, Title I middle school in the Southeast portion of the United States.

The findings, which were discussed in Chapter Four, revealed critical information which can be used to help determine how instructional programs can be designed and delivered through tutoring services.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

1. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by gender?
2. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by ethnicity?
3. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by grade level?
4. How are students' perceptions reported on the tutoring poll influenced by age?

Summary of Findings

A Pearson chi-square test was performed to analyze the data collected in questions 1–16 on the Tutoring Learning Poll. The data established the student responses which demonstrated significant differences.

Gender

The data for questions 1–16 presented a significant difference in 13 of 66 possible options and gender was the most significant influence in tutoring for middle school students. The majority of students indicated that parents would encourage their efforts if they decided to pursue tutoring (53% – male; 61% – female). Also, the students indicated that their parents would allow them to make the decision to receive tutoring (51% – male; 53% – female). The majority of students also preferred tutoring services to be one on one (56% – male; 66% – female). The students also noted that they would ask the teacher(s) for help if the subject was difficult to understand (male – 50%; female – 57%). The majority of students also indicated that the school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (male – 60%; female – 57%).

Ethnicity

The data for questions 1–16 presented a significant difference in 11 of 66 possible options and was tied as the second most significant demographic influence in tutoring for middle school students. The majority of students indicated that parents would encourage their efforts if they decided to pursue tutoring (55% – African American; 56% – White). Also, the students indicated that their parents would allow them to make the decision to receive tutoring (54% – African American; 52% – White). The majority of students also preferred tutoring services to be one on one (64% – African American; 61% – White). The majority of students also indicated

that the school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (African American – 61%; White – 56%). When asked if they would be willing to tutor, students responded they would help in areas that they understand (African American – 59%; White – 60%).

Age

The data for questions 1–16 presented a significant difference in 11 of 66 possible options and was tied with the second most significant demographic influence in tutoring for middle school students. The majority of students indicated that parents would encourage their efforts if they decided to pursue tutoring (67% – age 12; 59% – age 13; 51% – age 14; 47% – age 15). There was a drop at each age level. Also, the students indicated that their parents would allow them to make the decision to receive tutoring (57% – age 12; 52% – age 13; 53% – age 14; 44% – age 15). The majority of students also preferred tutoring services to be one on one (74% – age 12; 65% – age 13; 58% – age 14; 30% – age 15). There was also a decrease at each age in this area. The students also noted that they would ask the teacher(s) for help if the subject was difficult to understand (57% – age 12; 56% – age 13; 53% – age 14; 42% – age 15). Although the percentages were close in range in this response, the percentages dropped as the age increased. Students also indicated that they would ask friends for help (61% – age 12; 62% – age 13; 50% – age 14; 42% – age 15). The majority of students also indicated that the school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (71% – age 12; 62% – age 13; 49% – age 14; 56% – age 15). When asked if they would be willing to tutor, students responded they would help in areas that they understand (57% – age 12; 60% – age 13; 63% – age 14; 36% – age 15). In six of the areas listed, there was a drop at the age of 15.

Grade Level

The data for questions 1–16 presented a significant difference in six of 66 possible options and was the least significant demographic influence in tutoring for middle school students. The majority of students indicated that parents would encourage their efforts if they decided to pursue tutoring (57% – grade 7; 55% – grade 8). The majority of students also preferred tutoring services to be one on one (65% – grade 7; 54% – grade 8). The students also noted that they would ask the teacher(s) for help if the subject was difficult to understand (56% – grade 7; 50%–- grade 8). Students also indicated that they would ask friends for help (58% – grade 7; 52% – grade 8). The majority of students also indicated that the school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements (65% – grade 7; 50% – grade 8). When asked if they would be willing to tutor, students responded they would help in areas that they understand (60% – grade 7; 55% – grade 8). In each of the six responses which presented a significant difference, the percentage dropped at the higher grade level.

Conclusions

Particular patterns were noted among the four demographic subgroups – gender, ethnicity, grade level, and age. Prevalent responses which occurred across the variables included the following areas.

1c. Most students I know who need tutoring feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help.

5a. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is right after school.

7b. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring, they would encourage my efforts.

7c. If I told my parents I was going to get tutoring, they would allow me to make the decision.

9b. If I were to seek help, I would prefer one-on-one tutoring. This response had a frequency rate higher than 50% in every demographic category with the exception of age 15 which was 36%.

10a. If a subject is difficult to understand, I ask the teacher(s) questions. This response had a frequency higher than 50% in all demographic categories with the exception of White students and students who were age 15.

13c. My school should let students know about tutoring on daily announcements. This response had a frequency rate higher than 50% in all demographic categories with the exception of 14-year-old students whose response rate was 49%.

14a. The subject in which I am most likely to seek tutoring is mathematics.

16a. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor in the subjects that I understand.

When the qualitative results, which included the open-ended responses to the questions marked "other", were analyzed, there were parallels to the quantitative results of the chi-square test. In the first question, students indicated on the multiple choice items that students were embarrassed to ask for tutoring services. This is noted also on the open-ended responses. Students responded with a high frequency to question six on the multiple choice answer that their friends would encourage their efforts if they decided to get tutoring. This was also demonstrated in the open-ended responses by statements that students felt their friends would give them encouragement if they chose to attend tutoring. On question seven, students indicated on the multiple choice responses that they felt their parents would encourage and support their efforts if they were to seek tutoring. This is supported by the open-ended responses that students made which indicated support from parents. There was a strong parallel with multiple choice answers and open-ended answers in question 13. Students indicated the desire in both types of responses

to have the tutoring advertised on the school's daily announcements. Whereas many of the multiple choice questions demonstrated a parallel with the open-ended responses, question 14 had a contrast in responses. On the multiple choice items, math occurred as the top answer for most of the subgroups. On the open-ended answers, Spanish (which was not a choice given) surfaced as the top response.

Gender demonstrated the largest influence of all variables. Grade level had minor implications in determining perceptions of students for tutoring services. The other two demographic variables, age and ethnicity, were tied as the second most significant influence of variables.

Implications

Student learning polls were administered at a rural, Title I middle school to determine student perceptions on tutoring services which were included in the continuous improvement process. This study analyzed the influence of demographic variables in four subgroups. Although the polls were administered in ample time to be used for school improvement planning, one of the limitations noted was the lack of collaboration among the stakeholders in analyzing the results for implementation purposes. Limited communication among the administrators, teachers, parents, and students created the lack of dissemination of information from the outcomes to all the stakeholders. This posed limitations on determining extensive strategies for tutoring services to the various subgroups.

The findings of this research revealed critical information that can be used by schools and school systems to strengthen the continuous improvement process. The design of tutoring services must not be a "one size fits all" method. Stakeholders must use student voice to determine how these services should be offered. The data revealed that, although there were

similarities in many of the responses which indicated that students share some methods over others, there are significant differences in some of the responses according to the demographic subgroups. In the area of gender the research indicated higher responses by females in most of the areas. Those items which included higher percentages in males revealed that they would seek a tutor because of poor listening habits in class. Also, if a subject is difficult to understand, a larger percentage of males stated they would not seek help even though they may fail.

In the area of ethnicity, eleven areas presented a level of significant difference. Of these eleven areas, the larger percentages occurred in eight of the items in the category of White students. The research revealed that more African American students (61%) preferred tutoring right after school compared to White students (43%). This may indicate a problem with certain students having transportation issues attending tutoring sessions at other times. The research also revealed that 64% of African American students would ask their teachers questions as compared to 49% of White students. Although only a small percentage of total students stated they would seek no help even though they may fail, African American students responded at a higher percentage that they would not ask for help than White students.

In the demographic area of age, eleven items revealed significant difference in ages. Younger students responded at a higher rate acknowledging that seeking help from a tutor showed that the student recognized a need for help. Younger students also stated that the most convenient time for the student to attend tutoring is right after school. This implies that the older students prefer a different time for tutoring and perhaps have more opportunities for transportation than younger students. It could also imply that the older students are involved in more after school activities. The data revealed that the higher percentage of students needing tutoring in English was at the age of 15. This could be easily aligned with the findings for eighth

grade students. Administrators should use this type of information to evaluate programs and specific teachers to see if there is a pattern in the responses which may indicate a problem with instructional practices within the classroom.

To improve the total process of continuous improvement, professional learning communities should include student voice as an integral component. Students can provide critical insights into their perceptions on strategies and methods which can be beneficial to their needs. Tutoring services should be offered to provide opportunities which are designed around specific needs of the students so that the destiny of struggling students can be reversed.

Recommendations

Recommended Actions for Improving the Polling Process

To maximize the potential of the polling process, this study recommends that all stakeholders, who include parents, teachers, administrators, and students, participate in information sessions to gain insights on the purpose of the polls, the development of the polls, the process of the actual polling, and the anticipated use of the results.

Recommendations for Practices

1. Background information – provide vital information concerning the polls to acquaint the parents, students, teachers, and staff of the purpose.
2. Student choice – allow the students to determine their preference of polls to include in the process.
3. Fall administration – Administer the polls at the beginning of the academic year so strategies can be implemented within the current school year.
4. Alignment of results – professional learning communities, which includes all stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, community members, parents, and

students, should analyze results to determine which strategies can be aligned within the continuous improvement plan.

Recommendation for Further Studies

This study was conducted with rural, Title I middle school students. One recommendation would be to administer the polls to students from feeder schools to plan future tutoring strategies. The administration of the polls to students from feeder schools would allow for vertical alignment among schools and grades. Further research should include students at the high school level within the same setting to analyze comparable influences. This information could be used to continue the process of planning tutoring services for rural students. This method of vertical alignment could provide strength to the continuous improvement process for an entire school district. Vertical planning within school districts across grade levels could strengthen the transition of services for all subgroups.

Further studies should include study of voice of additional subgroups such as English learners and special education populations. Additional research could also involve more investigations into parental involvement. Research questions could explore why some parents do not support tutoring services or why parents leave decisions on tutoring to students.

REFERENCES

Alabama State Department of Education (2009). *Accountability interpretive guide*. Retrieved September 3, 2009, from http://www.alsde.edu

Bennis, W. (1996). *On becoming a leader.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Birmingham-Young, _. (2000). Small school projects: Coalition of essential schools. Retrieved from http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/index.asp?siteloc=resoindex.asp?

Black, E. L., & Pritchett, C. G. (2008). Perceptions of Alabama school personnel of research-based instructional strategies to improve student achievement. *Southeastern Teacher Education Journal, 2*(2), 138.

Bloom, B. S. (1984). The 2 Sigma problem: The search for methods of group instruction as effective as one-to-one tutoring. *Educational Researcher, 13*(6), 4–16.

Borja, R. R. (2006). Market for NCLB tutoring falls short of expectations. *Education Week*, *26*(16), 5–13. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier on July 8, 2008 from web.ebscohost.om.spot.lib.auburn.edu

Boyer, S., & Bishop, P. (2004). Young adolescent voices: Student perceptions of interdisciplinary teaming. *RMLE Online*, *28*(1).

Browder, D. M., & Cooper Duffy, K. (2003). Evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities and the requirement for accountability in 'No Child Left Behind.' *The Journal of Special Education, 37*, 157–163.

Center on Education Policy. (2007). Reauthorizing the elementary and secondary act of 1965. Recommendations from the Center on Education Policy. Retrieved June 27, 2009 from http://cep-dc.org

Chrispeels, J. H., Castillo, S., & Brown, J. (2000). School leadership teams: A process model for development. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 11*(1), 20–56. Retrieved on June 22, 2009 from Academic Search Premier. ISSN: 09243453.

Comer, J., & Haynes, M. (1991). Parent involvement in schools: An ecological approach. *The Elementary School Journal* 91, 271–278

Cooper, R., Slavin, R. E., & Madden, N. A. (1998). Success for all: Improving the quality of implementation of whole-school change through the use of a national reform network. *Education and Urban Society*, 30(3), 385–408.

Creswell, J. (2009) Research design: *Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cushman, K. (2003). *Fires in the bathroom: Advice for teachers from high school students.* New York, NY: New York Press.

Daly, B., Burke, R., Hare, I., Mills, C., Owens, C., Moore, E., & Weist, M. D. (2006). Enhancing No Child Left Behind–School Mental Health Connections. *Journal of School Health*, *76*(9), 446–451. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2006.00142.x.

Damore, S., & Wiggins, K. (2006). Adult collaboration: The "glue" for school improvement. *Montessori Life*, (4), 23–30.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Race, inequality and educational accountability: The irony of 'No Child Left Behind'. *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, *10*(3), 245–260.

Day, J., Rudduck, J., & Wallace, G.(1997). Students' perspectives on school improvement. *ASCD Yearbook*, 73–91.

Dettmer, P.,Thurston, L., & Dyck, N. (2004). *Consultation, collaboration, and teamwork for students with special needs* New York, NY: Pearson Publisher.

Dickinson, T., & Erb, T.(1997). *We gain more than we give: Teaming in middle schools*. Westville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J., & Christian, L. (2009*). Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

DuFour, R., Dufour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G, (2004). *Whatever it takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Elias, M. J., Weissberg, R. P., & Patrikakou, E. N. (2007). A competence-based framework for parent-school-community partnerships in secondary schools. *School Psychology International, 58,* 540–554.

Epstein, J. (1996). Perspectives and previews on research and policy for school, family, and community partnerships. *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes*? Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fielding, M. (1999). Students as radical agents of change. Retrieved from Academic Research Premier June 25, 2009.

Fielding, M. (2004). 'New wave' student voice and the renewal of civic society. *London Review of Education*, *2*(3), 197–217. doi:10.1080/1474846042000302834.

Finn Jr., C. E., & Hess, F. M. (2004). On leaving No Child Behind. *Public Interest, 157*, 35–56. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.

Frey, A. J., Lingo, A., & Nelson, C. M. (2004). Response to intervention. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from http:// www.insswa.org/response.pdf

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. (2002). The latest ideas on school reform. *Leading and Learning for the 21st Century*, 1(3), 15–18.

Fullan, M. J. (1994). Coordinating top-down and bottom-up strategies for educational reform.

Fulton, K., Yoon, I., & Lee, C. (2005). Induction into learning communities. Retrieved June 22, 2009 from http://www.nctaf.org

Gall, M. D., Gall, J., & Borg, W. (2010). *Applying educational research.* New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.

Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. M. (1999). *The adaptive school.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers**.**

Gewertz, C. (2004). Student-designed poll shows teenagers feel lack of adult interest*. Education Week*, *24*, 6–7.

Giles, C., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). The sustainability of innovative schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities during standardized reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *42*(1), 124–156.

Goertz, M. E. (2005) Implementing the No Child Left Behind act: Challenges for the states. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(2), 73–89. doi: 10.1207/S15327930pje8002_5

Goldring, E., & Hausman, C. (1997). Empower parents for productive partnerships. *Education Digest*, *62*(6), 25. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.spot.lib.auburn.edu

Graczewski, C., Ruffin, M., Shambaugh, L., & Therriault, S. (2007). Selecting and implementing whole school improvement models: A district and school administrator perspective. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 12(1).

Graham, P. (2007). Improving teacher effectiveness though structured collaboration: A case study of a professional learning community. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 31(1). Retrieved from http://www.ebscohost.com.spot.lib.auburn.edu

Harriman, H. (2005). Perceptions of students and educators on the impact of No Child Left Behind: Some will and some won't. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *24*(1), 64–69.

Hess, F., & Petrilli, M. (2004). The politics of No Child Left Behind: Will the coalition hold? *Journal of Education*, *185*(3), 13–25.

Hilliard, A. (1990). Reconnecting students at risk to the learning process. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved July 22, 2009 from http://www.ncrel.org/info/search.htm

Hord, S. (1997). Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Southwest Educational Development Library.

Hord, S., & Hirsh, S. (2009). The principal's role in supporting learning communities. *Educational Leadership*, *66*(5), 22–23.

Huffman, J., & Jacobson, A. (2003). Perceptions of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 6*(3), 239–250.

Innes, M., Moss, T., & Smigiel, H. (2000). What do the children say?: The importance of student voice. *Research in Drama Education, 6*(2), 207–221.

Jarvis, P. (2002). An investigation into target setting and academic tutoring to promote student learning. *Pastoral Care*. Retrieved online from www.pastoralcare.org

Klein, A. (2007). States face federal review on NCLB choice, tutoring. *Education Week, 26*(25), 24.

Lake, C., (1987). *Public opinion polling: A handbook for public interest and citizen advocacy groups*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Lee, L., & Earl, L. (1998). Evaluation of the Manitoba School Improvement Program. Retrieved on June 28, 2009 from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC

Lee, L., & Zimmerman, M., (1999). Passion, action, and vision for student voice. Manitoba School Improvement Program. Retrieved from http:///www.peecworks.org/PEEC

Leren, T. (2006). The importance of student voice. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *9*(4), 363–367. doi:10.1080/13603120600895502.

Louis, K. S., & Miles, M. B. (1990). *Improving the urban high school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Marzano, R. J. (2000). *A new era of school reform: Going where the research takes us*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

McClure, P. (2005). School Improvement under No Child Left Behind. Center for American Progress.

McEwan, E. (2003). *7 Steps to effective instructional leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Merrill, D. C., Reiser, B. J., Merrill, S. K., & Landes, S. (1995). Tutoring: Guided learning by doing. *Cognition and Instruction*, *13*(3), 315–372. Retrieved from http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0737-0008%281995%2913%3A3%3C315%3ATGLBD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7

Mintrop, H., & MacLellan, A. M. (2002). School improvement plans in elementary and middle schools on probation. *The Elementary School Journal, 102*(4), 275–302.

Mitra, D. (2003). Student voice in school reform: Reframing student-teacher relationships. McGill Journal of Education, Spring, 2003.

Mitra, D. (2006). Student voice from the inside and outside: the positioning of challengers. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *9*(4), 315–328. doi: 10.1080/13603120600895379.

Mitra, D. (2009). Strengthening student voice initiatives in high schools: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Youth & Society*, *40*(3), 311–335.

Mitra, D. L. (2004).The significance of students: Can increasing "student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record*, *106*(4), 651–688.

Mitra, D. L. (2008). Amplifying student voice. *Educational Leadership,* 66(3), 20–25.

Morrisey, M. S. (2000). Professional learning communities: An ongoing exploration. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Mullen, C., & Hutinger, J. (2008). The principal's role in fostering collaborative learning communities through faculty study group development. *Theory Into Practice,* 47, 276–285.

Oldfather, P., & West, J. with White, J., & Wilmarth, J. (1999). *Learning through children's eyes: Social constructivism and the desire to learn*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Reeves, C. (2003). Implementing the No Child Left Behind act: Implications for rural schools and districts. North Central Regional Educational laboratory. Retrieved July 29, 2009 from www.ncrel.org

Reeves, D. B. (2006). *The learning leader: How to focus school improvement for better results.* Alexandra, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Richardson, J. T. E. (2005). Instruments for obtaining student feedback: A review of the literature. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 30*(4), 387–415. doi: 10.1080/0260230500099193.

Roellke, C. & Rice, J.K. (2008) Responding to teacher quality and accountability mandates: The perspective of school administrators and classroom teachers. *Leadership and Policy in Schools,* (7), 264–295. doi: 10.1080/15700760701822124. ISSN: 1744-5043.

Rosenblatt, M. (2002). Effective tutoring and school improvement. *Pastoral Care*.

Rudduck, J., & Demetriou, H. (2003). Student perspectives and teacher practices: The transformation potential. *Journal of Educational Research.*

Rudduck, J., & Fielding, M. (2006). Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review*, *58*(2), 219–231. doi:10.1080/00131910600584207.

Rudduck, J., Chaplain, R., & Wallace, G. (1996) *School improvement: What can pupils tell us?* London: David Fulton.

Rudduck, J., Wallace, G., & Day, J. (2000). *Students' voices: What can they tell us as partners in change?* (pp. 1–26). Partnerships: Shaping the future of education. London: Middlesex University Press.

Rudduck, J., Wilson, E., & Flutter, J. (1998). Sustaining pupils' commitment to learning: The challenge of Year 8. A report for Lincolnshire LEA. Cambridge: Homerton Research Unit.

Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Bryk, A., Easton, J., & Lupesscu, S. (2006). The essential supports for school improvement. Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York, NY Broadway Business Publishers.

Sherman, W. (2008) No child left behind: A legislative catalyst for superintendent action to eliminate test-score gaps? *Educational Policy, 22*(5), 675–704 doi: 10.1177/0895904807307063. Retrieved from http://epx.sagepub.com

Simpson, R., LaCava, P., & Graner, P. (2004). The No Child Left Behind act: Challenges and implications for educators. *Intervention in School and Clinic,* 40(2), 67–75.

Smyth, J. (2006). Educational leadership that fosters student voice. *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* 9(4), 279–284. doi.10.1080/13603120600894216.

Smyth, J. (2006). When students have power: Student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around 'dropping out' of school. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *9*(4), 285–298. doi:10.1080/13603120600894232.

Stone, C. A. (1997). Correspondences among parent, teacher, and students' perceptions of adolescents' learning. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *30*(6), 660.

Strom P., & Strom, R. (2006) *Learning polls.* Retrieved June 22, 2009, from http://www.learningpolls.org

Strom, P. S., & Strom, R. D. (2009). *Adolescents in the internet age.* Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Strom, P., & Strom, R. (2007). *Learning polls*. Retrieved September 27, 2009, from http://www.learningpolls.org

Strom, P., Strom, R. & Wing, C. (2008) Polling students about conditions of learning. *NASSP Bulletin*, 92(4), 292–304.

Strom, R., & Strom, P. (2007). Adolescent polling and school improvement. Retrieved from http://childresearch.net/resource/research/2007/strom2.htm

The Education Alliance: Business and Community for Public Schools. (2004). A summary of research on using student voice in school. Retrieved from http://www.educationalliance.org/Downloads/Researach/UsingStudentVoice.pd

United States Department of Education. (2002). No Child Left Behind. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/states

Vannest, K. J., Mahadevan, L., Mason, B.A., & Temple-Harvey, K.K. (2009). Educator and administrator perceptions of the impact of No Child Left Behind on special populations. *Remedial and Special Education Volume, 30*(3), 148–159. doi: 10.1177/0741932508315378. Retrieved July 22 from http://rase.sagepub.com

Vrabel, D. (1999). *Reference guide to school improvement planning for Ohio school districts.* Columbus, OH: Ohio State Department of Education.

Wang, L., Beckett, G. H., & Brown, L. (2006). Controversies of standardized assessment in school accountability reform: A critical synthesis of multidisciplinary research evidence. *Applied Measurement in Education, 19*(4), 305–328.

Wehlage, G., Rutter, R., Smith, G., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R. (1989). *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support.* Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Wing, C. (2007). Student polling in rural title I schools to inform required decision making. University of Arizona.

Yecke, C. (2003). *The war against excellence. The rising tide of Mediocrity in America's middle schools*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.

Appendix 1

Internet Tutoring Poll

LearningPolls.org | Tutoring Poll

The purpose of this poll is to find out how students at your school feel about tutoring. A common goal for tutoring is to help students gain skills that are needed to do well in a course or pass a test.

Directions: For each item, select the answer(s) that indicate how you feel. In some cases, you may select more than one answer. If an answer you want to give is not listed, write it down on the line marked 'other.' Your responses are anonymous and may be combined with those of other students at your school in a report to students, faculty, and parents.

1. Most students I know who need tutoring
   - ☐ recognize their need and will ask for help
   - ☐ deny they have a problem with the subject
   - ☐ feel embarrassed and refuse to ask for help
   - ☐ blame their difficulties on poor teachers
   - ☐ other: _____

2. More students would seek tutoring if
   - ☐ it was more convenient and available
   - ☐ teachers would offer them this option
   - ☐ they cared about academic success
   - ☐ parents were aware that they needed it
   - ☐ other: _____

3. Seeking help from a tutor
   - ☐ shows that I recognize a need for help
   - ☐ would embarrass me in front of friends
   - ☐ reflects my desire to learn and succeed
   - ☐ helps meet requirements for graduation
   - ☐ other: _____

4. When students fail a class or a test required to graduate, they should
   - ☐ automatically be assigned a tutor
   - ☐ take monthly practice tests
   - ☐ go to summer school
   - ☐ access a computer program for help
   - ☐ other: _____

5. The most convenient time for me to attend tutoring sessions is
   - ☐ right after school
   - ☐ during the evening
   - ☐ on weekends
   - ☐ at lunchtime
   - ☐ before school
   - ☐ other: _____

6. If I told my friends that I was going to get tutoring

- ☐ they would make fun of me
- ☐ they would try to talk me out of it
- ☐ they would suggest I drop the course
- ☐ they would encourage my efforts
- ☐ other: _____

7. If I told my parents that I was going to get tutoring
- ☐ they would suggest I drop the class
- ☐ they would encourage my efforts
- ☐ they would allow me to make the decision
- ☐ they would question if I really need help
- ☐ other: _____

8. The reasons I would seek a tutor are
- ☐ poor listening habits in class
- ☐ excessive absences from class
- ☐ difficulty focusing because of disruptions
- ☐ my teacher doesn't explain material well
- ☐ trouble reading or remembering materials
- ☐ not passing a section of the state test
- ☐ other: _____

9. If I were to seek help, I would prefer
- ☐ a small group setting
- ☐ one on one with a tutor
- ☐ computer program or online support
- ☐ video lessons to watch and repeat
- ☐ other: _____

10. If a subject is difficult to understand, I
- ☐ ask the teacher questions
- ☐ meet with my counselor
- ☐ ask classmates or friends for help
- ☐ seek no help even though I may fail
- ☐ other: _____

11. When I request tutoring, my teacher(s)
- ☐ arrange for help without delay
- ☐ put me off and ignore my request
- ☐ suggest checking with a counselor
- ☐ tell me that I should try harder
- ☐ other: _____

12. I prefer a tutor to be
- ☐ my teacher whose class I am struggling in
- ☐ another teacher in the same subject area

- [ ] someone from a tutoring company
- [ ] classmates who know the subject
- [ ] other:

13. My school should let students know about tutoring
- [ ] at orientation and in the handbook
- [ ] on the school Website
- [ ] on daily announcements
- [ ] other:

14. The subject(s) in which I am most likely to seek tutoring are
- [ ] mathematics
- [ ] English
- [ ] science
- [ ] social studies
- [ ] other:

15. Students should receive school reports showing
- [ ] group progress of students who receive tutoring
- [ ] gains that tutored students make in specific subjects
- [ ] number of dropouts and whether they had tutoring
- [ ] comments by students about their tutoring experience
- [ ] other:

16. I am willing to volunteer as a tutor
- [ ] in the subjects that I understand well
- [ ] to help students from families who don't speak English
- [ ] to help students with learning disabilities
- [ ] for classmates in my cooperative group
- [ ] other:

Select your grade level, gender, ethnicity, and age.
17. My grade level is:
- ( ) 5
- ( ) 6
- ( ) 7
- ( ) 8
- ( ) 9
- ( ) 10
- ( ) 11
- ( ) 12

18. My gender is:
- ( ) Female
- ( ) Male

19. My ethnicity is:
- ( ) Asian
- ( ) Black
- ( ) Hispanic

- Native American
- White
- Other

20. My age is:

- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19

School polling should allow all students to express their views and prevent anyone from voting twice. So, for your vote to count, it is necessary to enter your school code and the random individual code you have been assigned.

Please enter your school code:

Please enter your random individual code:

Submit

Appendix 2

Internet Tutoring Poll Report

STUDENT STEPS for POLLING

1 Open the ***POLLS*** file on this computer's desktop. This ***file*** has an active link you **press** to instantly bring you to the poll below.

2 Fill out the poll using the ***entry password*** below. ***entry password*** for **TUTORING** POLL**:** XXXXX

3 Near the end of the poll type in your **SCHOOL** CODE**:** XXXXX

4 Then type in your **RANDOM** INDIVIDUAL CODE**:** XXXXX

5 Press the **SUBMIT** button**.**

*Your school **thanks you** for making your views known**!!***

Appendix 3

Teacher Polling Proctor Instructions

Teacher Polling Proctor Instructions

LINK and ENTRY PASSWORD TO TAKE THE POLL

TUTORING POLL is at http://learningpolls.org/XXXX Password is: **XXXXX**

REQUIRED INSTRUCTIONS TO POLLING TEAM*:* Faculty/Polling Team can use the above to access the polls but make available to students the link and password **using a pdf file to be placed on each school computer's desktop by school IT or other faculty/staff**. The pdf file is intended for student use (sent to each team member for his/her school) and should ONLY contain the name of the poll with the active link (URL) and entry password but nothing else. Make sure this pdf is on every computer in the computer lab well before polling begins in order to make the polling an easy, quick process using the link. The second step to make polling easy will be to make sure each student receives a STUDENT STEPS FOR POLLING SHEET—see below.

Copies of the **student steps for polling sheet** will be provided to the liaison who will provide these to the schools involved. Note that for the second to final item on the poll, be sure each student enters the **School ID**. This is on the STUDENT STEPS for POLLING SHEET to be given to each student when they arrive at the polling room. ---This sheet must be provided on site to each student when they fill out their polls or else they will lose all this information if provided before they go to the polling labs.

The random individual code is entered by each student at the very end of the poll. Each student gets ONLY **one** random code during a polling session and this is on the STUDENT STEPS for POLLING SHEET they each get. The code allows them to vote on several polls but *not more than once on the same poll*. *When they try to double vote, the software disallows them.* When students are done with polling they should place the **student steps for polling sheet** in the recycle bin in the room before they leave.

Thanks for the assistance in helping your students express their views about how to improve this school's conditions of learning.

Appendix 4

IRB Approval Letter

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance
307 Samford Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849

Telephone: 334-844-5966
Fax: 334-844-4391
hsubjec@auburn.edu

May 5, 2010

MEMORANDUM TO: Ms. Marcia Veal Johnson (EFLT)

PROTOCOL TITLE: "The Inclusion of Student Voice Through the Use of Learning Polls to Strengthen Tutoring Services for Students in Rural Middle Schools"

IRB FILE NO.: 10-086 EX 1003

APPROVAL DATE: March 30, 2010
EXPIRATION DATE: March 29, 2011

The referenced protocol was approved "Exempt" by the IRB under 45 CFR 46.101 (b) (4):

> Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

You should retain this letter in your files, along with a copy of the revised protocol and other pertinent information concerning your study. If you anticipate a change in any of the procedures authorized in this protocol, you must request and receive IRB approval prior to implementation of any revision. Please reference the above IRB file number in any correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before March 29, 2011, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than March 9, 2011. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to March 29, 2011you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Research Compliance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Research Compliance.

Sincerely,

Kathy Jo Ellison, RN, DSN, CIP
Chair of the Institutional Review Board
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

cc: Dr. Sheri Downer
Dr. Paris Strom