PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SCHOOL

ASSISTANCE TEAM IN FACILITATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

IN A LOW- PERFORMING SCHOOL IN ALABAMA

Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this dissertation is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee. This dissertation contains no classified or proprietary information.

_____

Virginia Watkins Roy

Certificate of Approval:

Anita Buckley-Commander Director Classroom Improvement Alabama State Department of Education	Frances K. Kochan, Chair Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Cynthia J. Reed Associate Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology	Elizabeth Burns Assistant Professor Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

_____

Joe F. Pittman
Interim Dean
Graduate School

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM IN FACILITATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A LOW- PERFORMING SCHOOL IN ALABAMA

Virginia Watkins Roy

A Dissertation

Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn University
December 15, 2006

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SCHOOL

ASSISTANCE TEAM IN FACILITATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

IN A LOW- PERFORMING SCHOOL IN ALABAMA

_____

Signature of Author

_____

Date of Graduation

VITA

Virginia Sue (Watkins) Roy, daughter of Kenneth Stratte and Shirley (Nyquist) Watkins, was born on September 27, 1957, in Sylacauga, Alabama. She grew up in Childersburg, Alabama, graduating from Childersburg High School in 1975. She attended Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, in the fall of 1975 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education in 1979. She graduated with a Master's degree in Elementary Education at the University of Montevallo, Montevallo, Alabama in 1993. In 1997, she entered the doctoral program in administration of curriculum and instruction at Auburn University. Currently, she is a Teacher Testing Specialist with the Office of Teacher Education and Certification at the Alabama State Department of Education. She has three children, Brad, Kim and Kelly.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM IN FACILITATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A LOW- PERFORMING SCHOOL IN ALABAMA

Virginia Watkins Roy

Doctor of Education, Auburn University, December 15, 2006
(M.Ed., University of Montevallo, 1992)
(B.S., Presbyterian College, 1979)

220 Typed Pages

Directed by Frances K. Kochan

This study investigated the role and impact of an Alabama School Assistance Team in facilitating school improvement in an Alabama school. Facilitating factors and barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team in promoting positive change in a low-performing school were also identified. The perceptions explored in this study were those of the Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Team Members, Local Education Agency (LEA) personnel, and community members. Data were collected from interviews, documents and observations. A case study was conducted with one of the Alabama School Assistance Teams and the LEA site the team served. Findings indicated that 100% of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel view their role as facilitating school improvement and empowering the LEAs they serve. LEA personnel voiced two

perceptions of this role. Most respondents (60% of LEA personnel and community members) perceived the Alabama School Assistance Team as a facilitating factor in school improvement. A minority view (40% of LEA personnel) described the Alabama School Assistance Team as an external group charged with enforcing mandates and creating change. Facilitating factors that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Team to be successful in school improvement efforts included consistent, effective leadership; commitment and dedication of the Alabama School Assistant Team personnel; and excellent relational/personality/people skills demonstrated by the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel.

Barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team in being successful in school improvement efforts included socio-economic factors; resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted; relational difficulties; program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; and State Department of Education reports and mandates. Despite challenging barriers, findings suggest that the Alabama School Assistance Team made a positive impact on this school by enhancing student performance, fostering student and teacher empowerment, improving the school environment, and developing positive relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude and thanks are given to Frances K. Kochan, my major professor whose wisdom, support, and encouragement guided me through each step of this study. I am honored by the time, guidance, and sincere interest she gave to me, and the genuine desire she had to see me grow as a professional and a person.

I am also grateful to the other members of my committee. I thank Cindy Reed for her guidance, suggestions and encouragement. I appreciated Anita Buckley Commander for her insights and assistance. Their doors were always open when I had questions or needed clarification. I thank Elizabeth Burns for accepting the invitation to become part of my committee. I appreciate the time she spent to give me her insights.

I hold a special appreciation and respect for Edith A. Miller. She was a constant support as I proceeded through this work, providing strength and wisdom as we read through section drafts together.

I give thanks also to wonderful friends who provided support and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies and dissertation. I cannot begin to convey my appreciation and gratitude.

Finally, I give honor to my family and children, who were a continual source of strength and prayer. My parents and family members provided listening ears and encouragement, as well as a firm foundation of support. A very heartfelt appreciation is

extended to my children, Brad, Kim and Kelly. They were beside me each step of the way, spending countless hours in coffee shops and libraries in order to be with me as I wrote.

Without the dedication, expertise, and support of everyone, my doctoral studies and dissertation could not have been completed. I extend my deepest appreciation, love, and gratitude.

Style manual or journal used: Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition.

Computer software used: SPSS 11.5 for Windows, Windows XP, and Microsoft Word 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

MANUSCRIPT ONE

I. INTRODUCTION

As state boards of education across the nation struggle to comply with standards set forth by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), serious consideration of promising intervention strategies to improve low-performing schools and provide a quality education for all students must be explored (Education Commission of the States, 2002). In July 2002, the federal government identified 8,652 schools as low-performing, based on state definitions (NASBE, 2002). The number of low-performing schools is expected to increase in the next few years as the NCLB legislation sets a national standard for adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state assessments (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002; NASBE, 2002).

Policy makers and state boards of education must obtain information on best practices and strategies to help turn around low-performing schools. Research is needed to identify potential intervention strategies that will be successful in facilitating improvement in low-performing schools and providing a quality education for every child. The school assistance team model is one potential strategy currently being used in states such as Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas. Because of impressive school improvement gains resulting from the efforts of the school assistance team model, North Carolina Senator John Edwards has strongly encouraged “each state to replicate

North Carolina's practice of assigning state assistance teams to low-performing schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3).

This study investigated the Alabama School Assistance Team Model as an intervention strategy to facilitate positive change in low-performing schools in Alabama in order to provide a quality education for every child. It involved an in-depth case study of one school assistance team and included data from the assistance process at the state level. The role of the Alabama School Assistance Team and perceived outcomes in facilitating positive change was examined. Challenges and barriers the Alabama School Assistance Team (ASAT) faced as it attempted to assist low-performing schools were also examined.

This study is reported in a manuscript format and includes the following sections: Section II, Review of Literature, provides an overview of related literature including the challenges faced by low-performing schools; an examination of the groundbreaking *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* legislation and implications for low-performing schools; an exploration of accountability issues surrounding the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*; a discussion of promising factors that contribute to school improvement and student success; the use of the school assistance team model in improving student achievement in low-performing schools; and finally, the consideration of the Alabama School Assistance Team model.

Section III, Purpose and Overview of the Current Research, includes five sections: the Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Methodology, Data Analysis, and Research Findings. A brief overview of the research findings is also presented.

Sections IV, V, and VI introduce manuscripts that provide an in-depth exploration regarding specific segments of the findings. Conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings are included with each manuscript. Section IV, (manuscript one), explores the role and effectiveness of the Alabama School Assistance Team in facilitating positive change in a low-performing school as viewed from the perspectives of the Alabama School Assistance Team leaders, team members, LEA personnel, and community members. Section V (manuscript two) explores the barriers faced by the Alabama School Assistance Team as it attempted to promote positive change in a low-performing school. Section VI (manuscript three) explores the facilitating factors that empowered the Alabama School Assistance Team to promote positive change in a low-performing school in Alabama. Final sections include a reference list and appendices.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature exploring the current national challenge of how to facilitate student success and school improvement in low-performing schools. This review provides the reader with: (1) the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* legislation and implications for low-performing schools; (2) accountability issues surrounding the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*; (3) accountability in Alabama; (4) low-performing schools; (5) challenges threatening student and school improvement; (6) promising factors and intervention strategies that contribute to school improvement and student success; (7) the use of the school assistance team model as a school improvement intervention strategy; and finally, (8) the Alabama school assistance team model as one possible intervention strategy in achieving school improvement and student success in low-performing schools.

Background

A national push for quality education for every child has resulted in new heights of concern and is the catalyst for legislative mandates and calls for accountability at both state and national levels. On January 8, 2002, President Bush underscored the fundamental goal of having every child receive an adequate education by signing into law

the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Public Law 107-110). This Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965 (Alabama State Information: No Child Left Behind, 2002). President Bush stated, “These reforms express my deep belief in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 1). This federal act focuses attention on schools with high percentages of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and requires states to significantly improve their educational reform strategies (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation requires every state ensure that all schools perform at least at a proficient level, and contains components directly affecting low-performing schools (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). For many years, policymakers and state boards of education have wrestled with the recognition that something must be done immediately to help low-performing schools (Achieve, Inc., 2001; Holdzkom, 2001), but developing and implementing comprehensive policies and practices that will help schools improve is difficult. The National Education Association expressed concern about the dire situation of low-performing schools by stating, “The acid test of America’s commitment to giving every child the opportunity to excel is what the Nation does about low-performing schools” (NEA, 2001, p. 3).

National Plan to Improve Low-Performing Schools

NCLB legislation contains two very strong elements that directly impact low-performing schools which includes setting state standards and providing outside

assistance if needed. Specifically, the legislation requires that states adopt a single statewide system to demonstrate that all students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards achieving a state-defined "proficient" level within 12 years. A second legislative mandate requires that states provide a series of interventions to schools that fail to demonstrate AYP over time (Clarke, 2003; Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002; NASBE, 2002, Neill, 2003).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

"Holding schools accountable for the performance of all students is a cornerstone of the new ESEA" (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002, p. 3). Accountability standards hold schools, school districts, teachers, and students responsible for student performance on state tests and for other indicators, such as school dropout and graduation rates (Linn, Rothman, & White, 2001). The new NCLB legislation mandates accountability based on whether or not schools, districts and states are making AYP towards the goal of bringing 100% of their students at least to academic proficiency by the end of the 2013–2014 school year. Adequate Yearly Progress is defined as the interval of progress necessary for all groups of students to reach 100 percent proficiency by 2013–2014 (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003; NASBE, 2002).

To assess progress in meeting this goal, NCLB legislation requires states to establish expectations for AYP. Craciun and Snow-Renner (2002), authors of policy briefs for the Education Commission of the States, explain that a state may choose their methods to determine AYP. For example, a state might take the percentage of students who have failed to reach proficiency, dividing the number by 12 (the maximum number of years the federal legislation allows schools to bring all students to a proficient level).

With this example, if 60 percent of the students have not reached academic proficiency, then the state could define AYP to require that 5 percent more students must reach proficiency each year (5% x 12 years = 60%).

Progress in reading/language arts and in mathematics must be documented for all student subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficiency students, students with disabilities, and students in major ethnic and racial groups (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). The stated performance on reading and math assessments is the main indicator of whether AYP is being met, but graduation rates and at least one additional indicator for elementary schools (determined by the state) must also be included.

The AYP provisions in the NCLB law include a "safe harbor" option to help prevent over-identifying low-performing schools. With this option, schools that do not make AYP in all subgroups can be documented as making AYP if the number of students in any one underperforming subgroup decreases by at least 10 percent in a year. Aside from this "safe harbor" option, states are required to identify any schools and districts that do not make AYP for two consecutive years as "low-performing".

Challenges, Potential Problems and Opportunities with NCLB Legislation

There are many challenges and potential problems with the current NCLB Act (Neill, 2003). Neill (2003) argues that the current law could promote privatization of schools and continue the push for high-stakes testing. Also, the definition of low-performing schools can vary from state to state, mainly due to each state's definition of "proficiency" and accountability system (NASBE, 2002). Therefore, the level of performance expected of students and schools varies from state to state and a school

identified as “low-performing” in one state may not be identified as such in another state (Achieve, Inc., 2001). Due to the inconsistency of state accountability systems, state comparisons of student performance levels are not valid (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003)

Despite these challenges, some claim that the NCLB legislation will strengthen accountability by requiring States to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students (*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2002; NASBE, 2002). These statewide accountability systems must be established on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, engage in annual testing for all students in grades 3–8, and establishing annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 13 years. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures targeted toward getting them back on course to meet state standards. Schools that achieve or succeed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for State Academic Achievement Awards.

Educational Accountability

“With federal education accountability requirements defined under the NCLB legislation, all states are now moving statewide systems to meet the goal of all students achieving proficiency by the 2012–2013 school year (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2004). As one educational foundation in Alabama writes, “To create lasting

change in our public schools, we must get accountability right" (A+ Education Foundation, 2003, p. 2). Accountability holds states, schools, school districts, teachers, and students responsible for student performance on state tests and for other indicators such as school dropout and graduation rates (Jerald, 2003; Linn, Rothman, & White, 2001). Development of state accountability systems generally include planning and implementation on numerous dimensions: state policies, assessment measures, data systems, consensus on indicators, definition of adequate yearly progress, reporting design, rewards, sanctions, federal requirements, and plans for assistance to low-performing schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2004).

Two primary organizations have emerged as accountability experts, involved in assisting states and local districts in their efforts to meet accountability demands and improve student and school success (Rabon, 2002). These organizations are the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). According to Rabon (2002), the ECS focuses on statewide accountability systems while the SREB targets state and local systems. In an SREB report, five "essential characteristics" of effective state accountability systems are identified as content and student-achievement standards; testing; professional development; accountability reporting; and rewards, sanctions, and targeted assistance (Johnston, 1998).

While many are sympathetic to the extra challenges faced by low-performing schools, accountability standards must be upheld by low-performing schools as well. According to Linn, Rothman & White (2001),

> Accountability helps schools focus on improving student performance. Of course, there are many factors beyond a school's control that affect student performance. Yet accountability drives educators to examine their responsibility for student achievement. It forces schools to review their curriculum and instructional and support programs and ask what they can do to improve them, rather than allow them to throw their hands up and say the solutions are beyond their reach. At the same time, accountability creates pressure for improvement. Individuals may not like the demands accountability systems place on them, but without this pressure they might put off improvements for another day. The need for successful schools is acute, and students cannot wait. (p. 2)

The primary purpose of accountability is to assure that all schools have high quality programs and environments that assure success for all students. Doing so requires that some schools go through processes to restructure and improve them.

Accountability in Alabama

For several years, Alabama, the state in which this study occurred, has been at work to develop, implement and improve its state accountability and assessment systems. In 1995, Alabama passed its Education Accountability Plan for the state (A+ Education Foundation, 2003). This plan stated that the people of Alabama desire two basic things from their public schools: (1) high achievement for students, and (2) a safe and orderly learning environment. The Alabama State Board of Education approved a statewide assessment plan with three key components:

1. student assessments are aligned closely with state standards;

2. student test scores are reported in easy-to-understand performance levels; and
3. test scores of individual schools and districts are disaggregated by race, gender, and poverty level in an effort to identify and address gaps in achievement (A+ Education Foundation, 2003).

In the wake of NCLB legislation, the State Board has adopted an expanded Accountability System for Alabama that provides more effective guidance for school improvement and also complies with federal guidelines (A+ Foundation, 2003). The new system seeks to ensure that every public school is held accountable for the performance of all student subgroups (including race, poverty level, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency). All students are required to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) to reach proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year. Progress will be monitored by a variety of assessments administered during the school year, including new criterion-referenced tests, the SAT 10, the Alabama Writing Assessment, and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (A+ Foundation, 2003).

Historically, chronically low-performing schools in Alabama received increased federal funding. Under Alabama's new accountability system, a Rewards and Sanctions component mandates that schools must show progress or be subject to sanctions, ranging from targeted assistance to personnel changes.

The goal of Alabama's new accountability plan is to recognize all schools that meet the rigorous new accountability standards and also to provide incentives to those schools with the greatest challenges to overcome in reaching standards. Recognition and financial rewards are given to schools for meeting performance goals. A taskforce of

Alabama educators and stakeholders review student test data to determine which schools meet criteria (A+ Education Foundation, 2005).

Identifying Low-Performing Schools

Under NCLB legislation, each state must identify schools that do not meet state AYP goals as low-performing schools (Clarke, 2003; Cranciun & Snow-Renner, 2002; NASBE, 2002; Neill, 2003). When states identify low-performing schools, a variety of labels are used. Some states, including Florida and Alabama, assign letter grades to schools and give D's or F's to schools that are low-performing. Other states use terms like "academic deficient" or "underperforming" (Achieve, Inc., 2001).

The response to receiving a low-performing label appears to affect low-performing schools in different ways. The effect of being identified as a low-performing school can be very powerful (Achieve, Inc., 2001). Schools work hard to avoid the stigma of such a designation and to shed the label once it has been applied.

Experience has shown that publicity [public announcement of schools receiving a low-performing label] can do a great deal to spur school improvement, even without further action by the state (Achieve, Inc., 2001). Other educational organizations view the effect of receiving a low-performing label from a different perspective. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2002), "labeling schools as low-performing compounds the difficulties in school improvement by creating a culture of pessimism that makes far-reaching reform difficult" (p. 8).

Low-Performing Schools

In July 2002, the federal government identified 8,652 schools as low-performing, based on state definitions under the NCLB legislation (NASBE, 2002). The number of low-performing schools is expected to increase in the next few years as the NCLB legislation sets a national standard for student adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state assessments (Hardy, 2003; Reeves, 2003). While historically, states have identified between 5 percent and 10 percent of their schools as low-performing, some states are estimating that 40 percent or more of their schools will not meet AYP requirements in the upcoming years (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003). North Carolina, a state recognized for its effective state accountability system, projects that nearly 50 percent of its schools will be classified as "in need of improvement" during the 2003–2004 school year (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003). If North Carolina, having implemented a strong accountability plan for years, projects this large percentage of schools classified as 'in need of improvement," leaders in other states are clearly concerned.

Challenges Impacting Low Performing Schools

More than half of all low-performing schools identified by the federal government are located in high-poverty, urban areas (Education Week, 1999). A large number of low-performing schools also exist in rural areas, where child poverty is even greater than in urban areas (NEA, 2002; Save the Children, 2002). Approximately three-quarters of low-performing schools have student bodies in which most students qualify for the federal free-lunch program, and two-fifths of low-performing schools have minority enrollments of more than 90 percent (Education Week, 1999).

Low-performing schools often reflect the communities they serve. Typically found in lower-income rural and urban communities with small property tax bases, these schools must overcome many challenges including poverty, fewer resources, less parental and community support, attitudes related to low expectations, and high teacher turnover. According to The College Board (1999), there is a startling difference when one walks around a low-performing, poorly financed school and then travels to a school in a well-financed suburban school district. In the low-performing school, one is likely to find crumbling, out-of-date facilities; minimal use of technology; and many teachers with emergency credentials or teaching outside their area of expertise. In the more affluent school, one is more likely to find modern, well-maintained facilities, the latest technologies, up-to-date textbooks and certified teachers with ample experience.

Morale among students and faculty within low-performing schools is often low. Educators in these schools frequently argue that they need more resources to meet the more extreme student needs to compensate for the lack of home, school, and community resources. Many of these schools have a high student mobility rate, reducing the effectiveness of the curriculum (The College Board, 1999). There is usually a higher turnover rate among teachers and principals, further undermining the quality of the academic program. Because of these and other challenges, high poverty schools also have difficulty hiring and retaining qualified teachers. (Archer, 2003; NASBE, 2002, National Education Association, 2001). School board members of low-performing schools have identified the following reasons for the failure of struggling schools:

- lack of adequate funding for schools
- large classes

- too many limited English speaking students
- too many State mandates
- tests not aligned with local standards
- poor parent participation in schools
- inadequate facilities and resources
- lack of skilled and trained teachers; and
- limited enrichment opportunities (Sanbar, 2000).

One school board member representing a low-performing school stated that students who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds, attend symphonies, eat dinner with their family, conduct family discussions and activities, go on field trips, and have enriching experiences will always outperform children from less affluent backgrounds. “They (children from more affluent backgrounds) will always have an advantage over children of low socio-economic groups. It is just a fact of life. That’s just gonna happen. I mean that’s part of America” (Sanbar, 2000, p. 1).

Additionally, high-poverty schools are “often damaged, if not broken, institutions characterized by debilitating attitudes and relationships that produce alienation and social disorganization” (Balfanz, Ruby & Mac Iver, 2002, p. 134). As mentioned above, teachers in these schools often feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the lack of resources for addressing the multiple social and academic needs of their students. A reaction similar to ‘learned helplessness’ is expressed in many teachers, who appear to give up on a large segment of the student population in their school (Balfanz, Ruby & MacIver, 2002;).

Wilson and Corbett (2001) found supporting research in their studies regarding low-performing schools that significant numbers of teachers in high-poverty schools

adopt a low energy/low expectations attitude manifested by failure to push students to complete assignments; to control student behavior that disrupts the learning environment for all; to go the extra mile to help struggling students; to understand students' interests and situations and implement these factors into their lessons; and to provide a variety of classroom activities through which to learn. Kozol (1991) found parallel teacher attitudes in his study of high-poverty schools. He documented teachers often responding to initiatives to support students facing low socio-economic challenges/high-poverty schools with the response "It makes no difference. Kids like these aren't going anywhere (p. 52)." Students assigned to teachers who don't encourage, push, discipline, help, teach, or respect students struggling with low socio-economic issues often are a part of the stimulus for these students to give up and rebel, plunging the school even deeper into chaos and despair (Wilson and Corbett, 2001).

Balfanz, Ruby and MacIver (2002) state that to overcome a school climate struggling with low socio-economic issues, it is essential to nurture positive and mutually supportive interpersonal relations at the student-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-administrator, teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-administrator, and parent-to-school levels. Achieve, Inc. (2001) supports that such empowering, interpersonal relations are crucial to student and school improvement; however, struggling schools cannot achieve this on their own; outside assistance is needed. One way to create these supportive, interpersonal relationships is by implementing the school assistance team model as an intervention strategy (Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997).

Interventions

Schools/districts identified as low-performing by failing to make AYP over time face a variety of state interventions that become more drastic upon repeated failure to demonstrate improvement (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003). Intervention strategies can include written warnings, technical assistance, additional funding, improvement plans by schools and school districts, improvement plans by another entity, placement on probation, removal of accreditation, withholding of funding, reconstitution, closure, reorganization, and takeover (Education Commission of the States, 2002). NCLB legislation requires that:

- Schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years receive technical assistance from the district. These schools must also develop a school improvement plan and provide students with public school choice options if allowed under state law.
- Schools that do not make AYP for three consecutive years are required to provide supplemental education services to low-achieving, disadvantaged students. The parents of these students choose the service, which may include private tutoring.

Schools that do not make AYP for four and five consecutive years are faced with more serious sanctions. These sanctions include corrective actions such as replacing relevant staff members, appointing an outside expert to advise the school, implementing a new curriculum, or reconstitution (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002; NASBE, 2002).

Factors that Contribute to Student Success and School Improvement

As states create and implement interventions, they seek clarity and understanding about what is known, and unknown, about interventions that will make a positive impact on low-performing schools. Research into the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and school districts is just beginning to emerge. According to the Education Commission of the States (2002),

> There are two reasons for the current shortage of definitive research on state interventions. The first reason is the relative infancy of most state interventions. Since many state accountability systems that contain state interventions, such as California's Connecticut's, and Rhode Island's, are only a few years old, there simply has not been enough time to study and understand the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and districts. The second reason for the current shortage of definitive research is that many interventions are implemented in combination with other interventions, and therefore the research seldom examines the impact of a single intervention. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence that some interventions have powerful effects, the research does not yet shed light on the efficacy of particular interventions in low-performing schools and districts. (p. 19)

Emerging research exploring high poverty/high performing schools provides crucial insight and knowledge into how to facilitate student and school improvement (Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997; Murphy & Datnow, 2003). Some of this emerging insight and knowledge is provided by organizations including the Heritage Foundation, The Education Trust, and the Charles A. Dana Center of the University of Texas at

Austin (Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1999; NASBE, 2002; The Education Trust, 1999). One of the primary factors that appears to be essential in having a high quality school and improving poor schools is strong and effective school leadership (Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1999; Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997; Murphy & Datnow, 2003; NASBE, 2002; The Education Trust, 1999). It is also important to have effective leadership among the teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members and other stakeholders who direct and implement changes in curriculum, instruction, and school organization (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002; National Education Association, 2001; Olson, 2004; Reeves, 2003).

Research from Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin (1999), Ginsberg, Johnson, and Moffett (1997), NASBE (2002), and The Education Trust (1999) is consistent in identifying six other elements that facilitate school improvement:

1. raising the bar — elevating expectations, increasing academic rigor and eliminating low-level tracking;
2. increasing student engagement and motivation — adopting authentic pedagogy and providing additional support services;
3. providing focused, sustained professional development — clarifying mission and developing teachers, teachers as trainers, and mentor teachers;
4. implementing organizational and management practices — effectively managing the school site and creating schedules;
5. building linkages — forming relationships with parents, employers and the community; and

6. monitoring and accelerating improvement — implementing policies for assessment and accountability.

Mullen and Patrick (2000) conducted a study to determine strategies that supported the success of the children, the empowerment of the teachers, and the improvement of the one struggling school. The eight strategies that emerged from this study included: applying a philosophy of discipline and management; relying on and developing support systems; precipitating staff changes; creating rituals of visibility and relationship; applying Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs' Model to satisfy childrens' basic needs; designing new educational and remedial programs; implementing teacher development standards; and developing a case for Year-Round schooling.

Appalachian Educational Laboratory (AEL), serving as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, states that six key components are crucial in developing a mode of continuous learning and school improvement. These six key components include shared leadership; effective teaching; school/family/community connections; purposeful student assessment; shared goals for learning; and learning culture (Meehan & Cowley, 2002).

While these stated successful factors/strategies on school improvement have been found to be effective in some situations, they can be implemented ineffectively. Further, one strategy used in isolation is not likely to have a strong impact on student and school improvement (NASBE, 2002). It is the combination of strong school leadership exerting the ability to blend many promising strategies together and effectively implementing them within the school culture and community that appears to result in fostering high

student achievement (NASBE, 2002; Stanford, 1999; The Education Trust, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Understanding the Educational Change Processes

As school improvement interventions are implemented, educators are finding that a genuine understanding of the change process is a strong link in the success of the initiative (Fullan & Miles, 1992). True reform in low-performing schools will never be achieved until there is a significant increase in the number of people – leaders and other stakeholders – who have come to internalize and habitually act on basic knowledge of how successful change takes place. "Reformers talk of the need for deeper, second order changes in the structures and cultures of schools, rather than superficial first-order changes. But no change would be more fundamental than a dramatic expansion of the capacity of individuals and organizations to understand and deal with change (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 745).

As school improvement interventions strive to facilitate positive change in low-performing schools, an understanding of the educational change process must first be realized (Fullan, 1993, Fullan & Miles, 1992; Glickman, Hayes & Hensley, 1992). The 'old paradigm' for managing change which advocates the traditional virtues of vision, strategic planning, and strong leadership are strong starting points for change; however, the top-down, systems approach to education is not often successful in positive, sustained transformation (Helsby, 1995). Fullan (1993) encourages educators to become agents, rather than victims, of change. In a world that offers no 'silver bullets' to draw upon, the challenge for managing change lies at the institutional and individual level. Meaningful

and crucial change can only be effected from within, and this requires developing teachers' generative capacities and transforming schools into learning organizations.

According to organization theorists Bolman and Deal (1999), major organizational change inevitably generates four categories of issues. First, change affects individuals' ability to feel effective, valued, and in control. Without support, training, and chances to participate in the change process, people can obstruct improvement efforts, making positive gains virtually impossible. Second, change disrupts existing patterns, causing confusion and uncertainty. Successful change requires effective communication to reduce confusion and to realign structural patterns to support the new direction. Third, change creates conflict between "winners and losers" — those who expect to gain from the new direction and those who do not. Finally, change creates a loss of meaning, particularly for those on the receiving end. Transition rituals, mourning the past, and celebrations of the future help people release old attachments and embrace new ones.

With these four categories of change issues in mind, Bolman and Deal suggest that change agents consider multiple perspectives as they view organizational change and change initiatives. Bolman and Deal (1999) state that in their study of change efforts, they observed leaders/organizations whose strategies were limited because they were committed to one or two "frames," or mental images of how organizations work. According to Bolman and Deal (1999),

> Some managers try to produce major change by redesigning formal structures, only to find people unable or unwilling to carry out new responsibilities. Others import new people or retrain old ones, only to find new blood and new ideas get rejected or chewed up, often disappearing without a trace. Managers who

> anticipate that new roles require new skills and vice-versa have a greater likelihood of success. But change also alters power relationships and undermines existing agreements and pacts. Even more profoundly, it intrudes upon deeply rooted cultural norms and ritual behavior. Below the surface, the organization's social tapestry begins to unravel, threatening both time-honored traditions and prevailing values and practices. (p. 6)

Bolman and Deal suggest that change efforts are more likely to succeed if change agents use a comprehensive "multi-frame" approach. Four different "frames" are essential to understanding organizational change, and include the Human Resource frame, the Structural frame, the Political frame, and the Symbolic frame.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames are based on four major schools of organizational theory and research, drawing much from the social sciences of sociology, psychology, political science, and anthropology. Each frame represents a specific point of view, or perspective, of organizations and organizational change. The perspective of each frame is presented below.

The Human Resource Frame

The Human Resource frame views organizations and change from the context of the people and individuals involved. The Human Resource frame, based on the ideas of organizational social psychologists, "starts with the fundamental premise that organizations are inhabited by individuals who have needs, feelings, and prejudices" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 14). From the Human Resource view, people have good reason to resist change and change efforts. People dislike feeling anxious and incompetent. Changes in established practices and procedures threaten existing knowledge and skill,

which hinders people's ability to function with confidence and success. Bolman & Deal (1999) explain:

> When told to do something they don't understand or don't believe in, people feel puzzled, anxious, and insecure. Lacking the skills and confidence to implement new ways, they resist or even sabotage, hoping for the return of the good old days. Or, as often happens, they comply in public while covertly dragging their feet. Even if they try to do what they are told, the results are predictable dismal. (p. 7)

To facilitate success when dealing with changes that are faced through this frame, investments in change efforts call for priority investments in training. "Countless reform initiatives falter because managers neglect to spend time and money on developing necessary knowledge and skills" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 7).

Equally important, empowerment and support of the people involved in organizational change is a crucial antidote to potential barriers. From a Human Resource perspective, the key to effectiveness is to tailor change efforts to people – to develop the change initiative/efforts to enable people to get the job done while feeling good about what they are doing.

Strong individual skills and confidence as developed through the Human Resource Frame cannot guarantee success in change initiatives unless structure is also redesigned and realigned to the new initiative. For this reason, the perspective offered through the Structural Frame is also crucial in successfully viewing and implementing change initiatives.

The Structural Frame

The Structural Frame draws mainly on the discipline of sociology, emphasizing the importance of formal roles and relationships (Bolman & Deal, 1991). This frame views the structure and structural arrangements within an organization and organizational change. Structure provides clarity, predictability, and security for the organization and the people involved with the organization. Formal roles prescribe duties and outline how work is to be carried out. Policies and standard operating procedures blend diverse efforts into well-coordinated, organized programs. Formal distribution and roles of authority allows everyone to know exactly who is in charge, when, and over what areas. Change within an organization prompted through improvement efforts undermines existing arrangements, creating ambiguity, confusion, and distrust. People within an organization no longer know what is expected or what to expect from others. People become unsure and insecure about their duties, confused about how to relate to others, and clueless about who can make what decision. Clarity, security, predictability, and rationality give way to confusion, loss of control, and a sense that "politics rather than policies now rule" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p 7).

To overcome challenges, change efforts must anticipate structural issues and steps must be taken to renegotiate structural arrangements in a formal way. Clear, consistent communication with all persons involved in change efforts regarding formal patterns and policies is crucial.

The perspectives supplied through the Human Resource and Structural frames offer valuable insight. However, change efforts consistently create conflict (Fullan &

Miles, 1992). Conflict barriers and issues can be better understood through the view of the Political frame.

The Political Frame

The Political Frame draws on research developed by political scientists and views organizations as arenas in which different interest groups compete for power and limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 1991). “From a political perspective, conflict is natural” (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 8.). Change/change initiatives promote an intense tug-of-war to determine winners and losers. Some individuals and groups support the changes/ change efforts, others present strong opposition. Most stakeholders involved in a change do not like conflict, so an attempt is made to smooth things over or avoid dispute entirely. This response results in the disputes being pushed aside, simmering beneath the surface until they erupt into divisive battles. Battle lines strengthen and camps form. Coercive power often determines who wins. Often, the change agents lose and the status quo prevails.

Bolman and Deal (1991, 1999) argue that while conflict can be explosive and damaging, conflict can also be an essential source of energy, clarity, and creativity if managed carefully. “The key is creating processes of negotiation and bargaining where settlements and agreements can be hammered out” (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 8). These processes of negotiation and bargaining can be done with the creation of arenas. Arenas provide opportunities for stakeholders in a change initiative to forge divisive issues into shared agreements. Through voicing concerns, discussion, and bargaining, compromises can be worked out between the status quo and innovative ideals/change

initiatives. Successfully blending new ideals/change initiatives with existing practices is essential to positive change.

Change and change initiatives will always create division and conflict among competing interest groups. Through the Political frame, change efforts can attempt to facilitate positive gains by framing issues, building coalitions and establishing arenas in which disagreements can be forged into workable pacts.

The Symbolic Frame

A fourth frame essential in the understanding of organizational change is the Symbolic Frame, which focuses on the symbols and meaningful 'touchstones' that every culture or organization possesses. The Symbolic Frame, drawing on social and cultural anthropology, views organizations as cultures that are propelled more by rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes, and myths than by rules, policies, mandates, and managerial authority. (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Change agents must recognize and understand that, with change and change initiatives, loss occurs. "Loss is an unavoidable by-product of change" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 9). Improvements in rebuilding the expressive or spiritual side of organizations come through rebuilding the meaning of symbols, and building power into ceremonies and rituals.

Each of these four frames has its own perspective or image of reality. Only when change agents can look through the frames of all four perspectives are they likely to appreciate the depth and complexity of change initiatives. Change agents, such as school improvement initiatives, must recognize that the schools in which they are attempting change initiatives have one common element: each school has a different situation and background, faces different challenges, and needs to learn different things (Bolman &

Deal, 1991).While each frame represents a specific perspective, the collective understanding of all four frames is needed for a comprehensive understanding of change. Positive progress is more probable if change agents — intervention initiatives — use a comprehensive "multi-frame" approach (Bolman & Deal, 1999).

The Intervention of Technical Assistance to Low-Performing Schools: Various Strategies

The identification of low-performing schools is only a first step in the battle of student and school improvement (Achieve, Inc., 2001; NASBE, 2002). Once a school and/or district is identified as low-performing, the state department of education must begin the crucial second step: implementing an intervention system of comprehensive school improvement which includes proven methods to boost achievement in all schools and for all students. Different state accountability systems prescribe several kinds of interventions that may impact low performing schools in a range of ways (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Some states respond to low performance with sanctions, such as administrative takeovers or reconstitution, private management, or revocation of accreditation. The Education Commission of the States interviewed practitioners in eleven states (California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas and West Virginia) to examine methods of technical assistance to low-performing schools (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Each of the eleven states studied provides technical assistance to low-performing schools and/or school districts, although only some of them have enacted policies requiring them to do so. Most states, including

Alabama, require low-performing schools and districts to develop and implement a school improvement plan and to provide special professional development and technical assistance opportunities to teachers and administrators at low-performing schools (NASBE, 2002).

The implementation, delivery and duration of technical assistance vary from state to state. In New York, teams of administrators, curriculum specialists, experienced educators, school board members and parents conduct four-day observation visits to assess a troubled school's condition and develop a long-term plan for the school. In Connecticut, a "critical friend," designated by the state, partners with principals in low-performing schools to assist in the implementation of improvement plans over the course of one school year. North Carolina requires an entire assistance team to spend one full year at its assigned school and provide technical assistance on a daily basis. In Texas, monitoring teams conduct several one-day site visits to best determine how to help a particular low-performing school.

Through its School Transformation, Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program, Kentucky assigns a distinguished educator to spend up to two years in a school, providing assistance and helping to monitor and implement improvement plans. Kentucky's STAR program sends a distinguished educator to each low-performing school. These individuals spend up to two years at each site, helping to guide lessons and mentor staff. All 53 Kentucky schools that participated in the STAR program's first cycle in 1994 reversed a declining performance trend after two years, and 63% showed student growth beyond the expected rate for the school. In the second STAR cycle, approximately 200 schools participated, with 91% reversing their downward trend after two years.

In Massachusetts, representatives of the state conduct numerous site visits and study the deficiencies of low-performing schools, hoping to resolve the problems that hinder student achievement. In California, rather than rely on internal resources in the state department of education, the state allows teams of outside evaluators (private consultants, universities, regional educational laboratories or county offices of education) to compete for the chance to assist low-performing schools.

While information regarding the success of these state approaches is still scarce, one explanation for the positive gains lies in their comprehensive nature. Each state carefully screens, selects, trains and provides ongoing support for the technical assistance providers (Holdzkom, 2001). Each state has also emphasized the goal of building schools' and districts' abilities to identify and solve school- and district-specific problems and to track school and district progress toward achievement goals.

The Intervention of Technical Assistance to Low-Performing Schools:

School Assistance Teams

The need for quality intervention strategies to facilitate student achievement is clear. Many low-performing schools may have difficulty knowing how to increase student achievement (National Education Association, 2002; Reeves, 2003) and will need outside help to succeed..

> Low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make (necessary) changes on their own. While much of what it takes to turn around a low-performing school can occur only within the school itself and with the cooperation and commitment of the school staff, states and school districts must provide the critical impetus and

> support for the process of change. By setting high academic standards, holding all schools accountable for performance, and identifying schools that do not meet those standards, states and districts are taking important steps to raise expectations for all students. For schools that do not meet expectations, states and districts can do much to provide the support necessary to help them focus on improving teaching and learning. (State Role in Assisting Low-Performing Schools, 1998, p. 1)

Despite these overwhelming obstacles, many educational leaders and organizations believe these challenges can be overcome, and low-performing schools CAN provide a quality education for all students (A+ Education Foundation, 2003; Achieve, Inc., 2001; Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1999; Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997; The Education Trust, 1999). However, low-performing schools that are not meeting state standards are not going to make the kind of improvements they need to make by continuing the course they have always followed … these schools need to confront the challenges head-on, build on the strengths they have and dedicate themselves to a multiyear program of continuous school improvement (Mandel, 2000). Taking such steps is difficult for any school (Mandel 2000).

The Southern Regional Education Board and others have found that "not only is local leadership essential to embarking on the kind of comprehensive and far reaching restructuring initiatives that such schools need, but that external assistance is crucial" (Southern Regional Education Board, Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series, 2000, p. 1). This external assistance helps low-performing schools set priorities and establish ambitious, but realistic goals; raise awareness of what other schools in similar

circumstances have found to be positive and constructive approaches; gain access to experienced and skilled educators who have record of success in school improvement; and support on-going staff development efforts designed to implement specific curriculum and instructional changes.

The intervention strategy of a school assistance team to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools holds the potential to provide the leadership skills, support, and hands on training that low-performing schools desperately need. This intervention strategy also holds the potential to provide the crucial foundation that empowers the local district, principals, teachers, and community within the schools to maintain and expand the strategies and leadership needed to move the school beyond low-performing status (Turner, 2002).

North Carolina implements state school assistance teams as an intervention system for working with low-performing schools (NASBE, 2002). North Carolina Senator John Edwards has strongly encouraged "each state to replicate North Carolina's practice of assigning state assistance teams to low-performing schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3). Each year, the state board of education assigns teams to a small number of the state's poorest-performing schools on a mandatory basis, as well as to other low-performing schools on a voluntary basis. The assistance teams are composed of three to five members, including currently practicing teachers and staff, representatives of higher education, school administrators, and others the state board of education considers appropriate.

According to North Carolina State law (NASBE, 2002), teams assigned to a school:

- conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of all facets of the school;
- evaluate teachers and administrators;
- collaborate with the school's faculty and staff to revise (as necessary) and assist in implementing the school improvement plan;
- make recommendations for continuous improvement as the plan is implemented;
- review the school's progress; and
- make appropriate reports to the superintendent, local board of education, and state board of education on the school's progress.

The North Carolina assistance teams have been highly successful not only in helping schools reach their improvement goals, but also in moving them to exemplary status (NASBE, 2002). However, in situations where schools do not show significant improvement, the law allows the state board of education to intervene in several ways:

- removing principals in low-performing schools on the recommendation of an assistance team;
- appointing an interim superintendent if more than one-half of the schools in the district are designated as low-performing or if the assistance team makes such a recommendation based on findings that the superintendent has failed to cooperate with the assistance team or otherwise hindered the district's and/or school's ability to improve;
- assigning any of the duties and power of the local superintendent and finance officer to an interim superintendent, if appropriate; and

- suspending the power of the local board of education if it determines that the local board failed to cooperate with the interim superintendent of otherwise hindered the district's and/or school's ability to improve student performance. (North Caroline Department of Public Instruction, 2003)

The Alabama School Assistance Team Model

Alabama has been addressing the issue of assisting low-performing schools for many years. In the mid-1990s, the Alabama State Department of Education realized that the new accountability standards and ever-increasing achievement goals that were being placed on the State Department of Education (SDE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) could not be met by a hierarchical bureaucracy (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997). The Alabama State Superintendent of Education implemented a goal to change from an environment of "control and regulations" to an environment of "service and support." The State Superintendent envisioned having the State Department of Education become a service organization, facilitating the LEAs' abilities to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement. As a part of this vision, the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was developed. A major component of the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was the creation of the Alabama school assistance teams.

The stated purpose of Alabama school assistance teams is to facilitate and empower the Local Education Agencies to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement. Initially, the Alabama State Department of Education envisioned the focus of the School assistance teams as facilitating all schools in achieving

school improvement. However, in response to accountability issues and limited resources, the School assistance teams now work only with schools/systems that are not meeting accountability standards at acceptable levels (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997).

Alabama classifies schools/systems based on the level of student performance on standardized tests. This identification system is in accordance with legislation enacted in 1995 mandating the use of nationally norm-referenced tests for student assessment purposes and the implementation of a school and school system classification system (McCloskey, 2001).

Alabama places schools into one of three performance categories: Clear, Caution, and Alert. Both a school's placement and the change in its placement over time determine its eligibility for special assistance. Schools with more than half of their students in stanines 5–9 are classified as Clear. Schools with more than half of their students performing at stanines 1–3 are classified as being on Alert. Schools that fall between these two points are considered to be in Caution status. Alert 1 status schools are schools in the first year of Alert status or schools that performed at the Caution level in the prior year and have failed to adequately improve. Schools earn an Alert 2 designation if they were classified as Alert 1 during the prior year and failed to move out of Alert status. Schools that fail to move out of Caution status for a second year are also classified as Alert 2. Schools are classified as Alert 3 if after one or two years at the Alert 2 level are not demonstrating satisfactory growth (Mandel, 2000). At the present time, all schools classified as Alert 2 status receive consistent assistance by members (Team leader, Team members, and Special service teachers) of an Alabama school assistance team.

Alabama originally established the School assistance teams to serve ten geographical regions. These geographical regions are now modified to coincide with the eleven Alabama Regional Inservice Center regions. These regions are depicted in Figure 1.

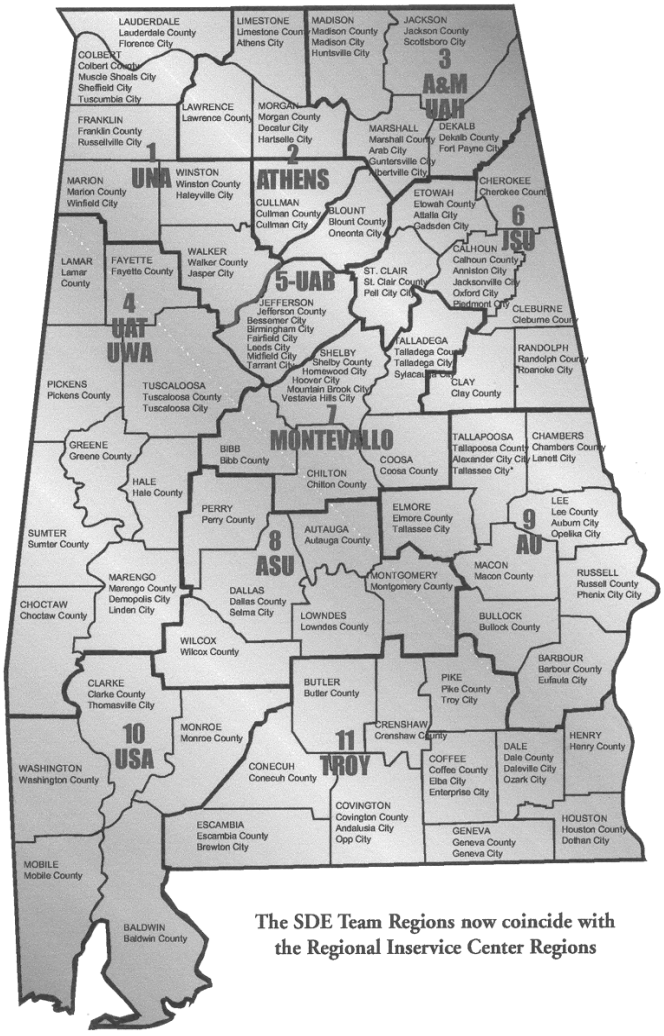

Figure 1. Alabama school assistance team Regions (Source: 2003–2004 Alabama Education Directory)

Each of the Alabama school assistance teams adheres to a mission statement that is committed to provide timely, quality service and technical assistance to LEAs to maximize their potential to provide world-class education to Alabama students. This mission statement includes serving schools by : providing leadership, expertise, and resources to help them solve their problems; recognizing and capitalizing on the diversity of schools; delivering on SDE promises to the LEAs; encouraging innovation by using imaginations and creativity to deliver quality services; communicating between and within the SDE and LEAs; providing guidance and assistance to meet compliance issues and Public Education System accountability; encouraging partnerships with businesses, the community, and parents; aiding them to increase achievement levels of students attending these schools; and encouraging high expectations of LEAs and students to develop and maintain safe and positive learning environments.

The Alabama school assistance teams are under the direction of the Director of Classroom Improvement/School assistance team Coordination at the Alabama State Department of Education. Each Alabama school assistance team is comprised of a team leader; team members; and special service teachers. Each school assistance team is guided by a team leader who has been carefully chosen because of her/his skill, knowledge, and commitment to school improvement for all children. Team leaders have a fair amount of autonomy in allocating and using the various resources at their disposal, including the special service teachers, to best assist the LEAs they serve in their region (Mandel, 2000).

Each Alabama school assistance team is comprised of three or more team members. These team members are diverse in their abilities, ranging from expertise in

instructional and administrative functions, child nutrition, teaching practices, assessment, finance, special education, technology, and other areas of need. These team members visit the Alert 2 and Alert 3 schools on a weekly basis, offering hands-on guidance, support and involvement to the principal and faculty, and assist the special service teachers, as needed.

In addition to the team members, each team includes special service teachers (SSTs) who are assigned to priority schools. Alabama SSTs are exemplary classroom teachers who have been nominated by their employing superintendents to serve in this capacity. The SSTs work closely with classroom teachers on a daily basis in an effort to increase academic achievement. They present workshops on needed content areas, model various teaching strategies through demonstration lessons, and provide technical assistance in all areas related to best practice of teaching and learning.

While the Alabama school assistance teams provide the primary support to these schools, Alert 3 schools may require an additional "intervention" team of two or more educators appointed by the Alabama State Superintendent of Education to provide more intensive assistance. In this situation, the on-site state team assumes control of the school and the state superintendent can choose to unilaterally remove a principal if such an action is necessary to turn the school around. All teachers in Alert 3 schools are also assessed using the state's Professional Employees Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) or similar instrument (Mandel, 2000). Negative evaluations can result in the removal of teachers from Alert 3 schools.

Summary

As state boards of education across the nation struggle to comply with standards set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act, effective intervention strategies to improve low-performing schools and provide a quality education for all students will be explored. Low-performing schools may be eliminated by carefully planned collaborative intervention strategies between the State Board of Education, local education agencies, and the community (Turner, 2002). The school assistance team model is a promising intervention strategy that is currently being explored in at least twenty-six states (NASBE, 2002), and holds the potential to provide the leadership, support, and hands-on training that low-performing schools need. This intervention strategy also holds the potential to provide the crucial foundation that empowers the local district, principals, teachers, and community within the schools to maintain and expand the strategies and leadership needed to move the school beyond low-performing status.

While little is presently known in educational research regarding the degree of effectiveness the school assistance team model provides for low-performing schools, this intervention strategy deserves to be studied closely. The school assistance team model holds the potential of providing the best of student and school improvement methods and should be considered as a viable intervention strategy for turning around low-performing schools. As Alabama meets the challenge of providing a quality education for all Alabama children, the Alabama school assistance team model appears to be a promising intervention strategy in improving low-performing schools in Alabama.

III. PURPOSE, OVERVIEW, FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Statement of the Problem

Despite the national recognition and urgency of implementing intervention strategies in improving low-performing schools that result in student and school achievement, little professional literature has been written on strategies to accomplish this goal (Education Commission of the States, 2002). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation mandates that all states must provide technical assistance intervention strategies to schools and systems identified as low-performing (NASBE, 2002). Because considerable leeway is allowed regarding the specific kinds of technical assistance intervention strategies to be provided to low-performing schools, many states are searching for technical assistance strategies that will facilitate school improvement.

The Alabama State Board of Education states that the Alabama School Assistance Teams are an effective method to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997). However, the concept of increasing student achievement through the use of school assistance teams is controversial. While many school systems, including ones in North Carolina and Kentucky, have documentation of student/school success through the efforts of assistance teams, many other schools/systems are skeptical. In his book, *Victory in Our Schools We Can Give Our Children Excellent Public Education,* John Stanford (1999), Superintendent of

Seattle City Schools, stated that true support and help must come from within the school system culture because school assistance teams developed by the state department are "too far removed … are not accepted or trusted in the individual school cultures" (p. 79). There are many factors or barriers, including gaining the acceptance and trust of school systems, that can prevent assistance teams from making the contribution that they may be capable of producing in low-performing schools.

Purpose of the Study

As state boards of education across the nation struggle to comply with standards set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act, promising intervention strategies to improve low-performing schools and provide a quality education for all students must be explored. Little is known about the school assistance team model as an implementation strategy in fostering success and improvement in low-performing schools; about facilitating factors that enable this strategy to be successful; and the challenges that hinder this approach from being a positive force in improving low-performing schools.

The school assistance team model is an intervention strategy that many states such as Alabama, North Carolina, Texas, and Kentucky are implementing in the quest to improve low-performing schools and provide a better education for all students. Because of the school improvement gains resulting from the efforts of the North Carolina school assistance team model, North Carolina Senator John Edwards has strongly encouraged "each state to replicate North Carolina's practice of assigning state assistance teams to low-performing schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3).

Despite the promising potential of the school assistance team model as an intervention strategy in facilitating change in low-performing schools, current educational literature provides scant research and information about this strategy. The purpose of this research was to explore the Alabama School Assistance Team model. Issues examined were the role of the Alabama School Assistance team, the obstacles and barriers that the Alabama School Assistance team faced as it struggled to assist low-performing schools; and the facilitating factors that enabled the Alabama School Assistance team to promote positive change in improving schools and student achievement.

The research questions explored in this study included:

1. What is the perceived role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in low-performing schools as viewed from the perspectives of the Alabama Team Leaders, Team Members, LEA personnel, and community leaders?

2. What are the perceived outcomes that resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in low-performing schools as viewed from the perspectives of the Alabama Team Leaders, Team Members, LEA personnel, and community leaders?

3. What are the perceived barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistant Team's school improvement efforts?

4. What are the primary factors that facilitated the ability of the Alabama School Assistant Team to promote school improvement as perceived by those involved in the process?

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry and case study methodology were implemented because, in qualitative research, the purpose is "to elicit people's perceptions, to enter their interpretive frames of reference and to understand how they see the world" (Kochan, 2002, p. 248). Merriam (1988) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that one powerful strength of qualitative research is the insight of the multiple realities and perspectives derived from individuals' experientially-based perceptions. It was crucial to obtain the perspectives of the participants involved in promoting school improvement through the school assistance team model in order to gain knowledge related to the research questions.

The participants in this study included personnel from the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams and school personnel and community members of an LEA being served by an Alabama School Assistance Team. Each of the Team Leaders of the Alabama School Assistance Teams were also involved in the study.

Data were also collected from members of the LEA being served by the school assistance team involved in the case study. This LEA site was classified as an Alert 2 school and as such, was receiving consistent assistance by members (Team Leader, Team Members, and SSTs) of this Alabama School Assistance Team.

Data Collection

Four sources of data were used in this study. The first data source was a series of in-depth interviews with the ten Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders. The second source consisted of data collected through a case study involving one of the teams.

In-depth interviews and focus groups including the Team Leader, Team Members, Special Service Teachers, and school personnel and community members from the LEA served by this team were conducted. The third data set included observations and fieldnotes. A variety of approximately 200 documents provided through the Alabama State Department of Education comprised the fourth set of data. These documents included memoranda, reports, notes and letters from LEA personnel, and team newsletters.

Eighteen individual and focus group interviews were conducted, each ranging from 45 to 70 minutes in length. Open-ended questions were used in each interview. These interviews explored the role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; its effectiveness in terms of perceived outcomes that resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; perceived facilitating factors that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Team to promote school improvement; and the barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team from successfully promoting school improvement. These individual and focus interviews are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Individual and Focus Group Interviews Conducted With the Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel and LEA Personnel

Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel		LEA Personnel
Individual Interviews:		Individual Interviews:
ASAT Leader (One Team Leader for 2 Teams)	1&2ASAT Leader 6	Central Office Personnel (1)
	ASAT Leader 7	Central Office Personnel (1)
ASAT Leader 3	ASAT Leader 8	Principal (1)
ASAT Leader 4 & 5 (One Team Leader for 2 Teams)	ASAT Leader 9	Classroom Teacher (1 Elementary)
	ASAT Leader 10	Classroom Teacher (1 Secondary)
Focus Group Interviews:		Focus Group Interviews:
ASAT Members, SSTs		Classroom Teachers (5 teachers, varied disciplines) Community Members (3)

Data Analysis

Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. In accordance with the qualitative data analysis process developed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), data from the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents, and other materials were then organized, broken down into manageable units, synthesized, organized into themes, and placed into code categories. The documents were hand-coded for key phrases, descriptors, and explanations, according to the code categories.

In addition to the hand-coding process, all interviews and fieldnotes (Microsoft Word documents) were imported into the Atlas.ti qualitative analytical computer

software. Coding and data analysis were completed using the computer software process as well as the hand-coded process.

Research Findings

The results of this study are presented in brief summary below, following the framework set forth by the research questions. Findings respective to the perceived role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in low-performing schools; perceived outcomes that resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement; the perceived barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistant Team's school improvement efforts; and the most primary factors that facilitated the ability of the Alabama School Assistant Team to promote school improvement, as perceived by those involved in the process, are explored.

A detailed summary of the study results are presented in a series of manuscripts which follow in Section IV. These manuscripts and titles are as follows: Manuscript One: *Perceptions of the Role and Effectiveness of a School Assistance Team in Facilitating School Improvement in a Low-Performing School in Alabama*; Manuscript Two: *Factors that Served as Barriers to the Capacity of an Alabama School Assistance Team to Promote Positive Change in a Low-Performing School*; and Manuscript Three: *Factors that Facilitated the Capacity of an Alabama School Assistance Team to Promote Positive Change in a Low-Performing School*

Findings from this study revealed two views regarding the role of the school assistance team. These two views are explored in greater depth in Manuscript One:

Perceptions of the Role and Effectiveness of a School Assistance Team in Facilitating School Improvement in a Low-Performing School in Alabama. The first view, reflected by the majority of respondents (100% of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel; 60% of LEA personnel (including community members), described the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as facilitating school improvement and empowering students and teachers. The second view, reflected by the minority (40% of LEA personnel) of respondents, expressed the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as an external group charged with enforcing mandates and creating change.

Findings included in Manuscript One also present five perceived positive outcomes resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. These five outcomes included school improvement (removal from Caution, Alert 1, Alert 2, or Alert 3 status); teacher empowerment; student empowerment; close working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel and LEA personnel; and improved school environment. No negative outcomes were reported in the findings.

Five factors serving as barriers to preventing the Alabama School Assistance Team from promoting school improvement in a low-performing school were identified in the study findings. These barriers included socio-economic issues; resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted; relational difficulties; program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; and State Department of Education reports and mandates. These barriers are explored in detail in Manuscript Two: *Factors that Served as Barriers to the Capacity of an Alabama School Assistance Team to Promote Positive Change in a Low-Performing School.*

Finally, there were three factors identified that facilitated the Alabama School Assistance Team's ability to promote school improvement in a low-performing school. These are presented in Manuscript Three: *Factors that Facilitated the Capacity of an Alabama School Assistance Team to Promote Positive Change in a Low-Performing School*. These facilitating factors were leadership; commitment and dedication of Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel; and relational skills/personalities of Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel.

Discussion and Further Research

This study is a first step in raising issues about improving low-achieving schools through the implementation of school assistance teams in Alabama. Findings from this study show that this Alabama School Assistance Team appeared to achieve its goal of facilitating a low-performing school in becoming a stronger learning environment to provide a better education for Alabama students.

Two perceived roles, or perspectives, of the Alabama School Assistance Teams emerged from the data: the majority of stakeholders (100% of ASAT personnel; 100 % of community members; 60% of LEA personnel) view the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as being a facilitating factor in the improvement of student achievement and school improvement; a minority of stakeholders (40% of LEA personnel) view the Alabama School Assistance Team as being a force to be feared, a force that is coming into the schools to mandate change.

This second view of the Alabama School Assistance Team by a minority of LEA personnel as a fearsome force is not totally ungrounded. According to *Turning Around*

Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders (1998), Alabama is one of twenty-three states with the power to reconstitute schools or districts. In some situations, the problems in a school may be so entrenched or so extreme that none of the intervention strategies produce the necessary improvement. In such a situation, where the school atmosphere is "so poisonous the teachers couldn't teach and the pupils couldn't learn" (pg. 44), a state department of education may make the difficult decision to reconstitute, which could include removing faculty and staff and starting over with a new administration, almost all new faculty, and a new educational vision. However, at this time, no schools have been reconstituted in Alabama. Yet, the LEA sites that are identified as schools targeted for support by the Alabama School Assistance Teams believe that they are "one step away from state take-over" (Alabama LEA Central Office respondent) and often adopt a defensive stance when school improvement efforts are offered.

Despite this enormous initial hurdle of overcoming a fear of the state department and a defensive stance from the LEA personnel, findings show that the Alabama School Assistance Team studied has been successful in its efforts to work with LEA sites in developing a stronger school and improving student achievement. The majority of the stakeholders viewed the Alabama School Assistance Team as a facilitating factor in school improvement, making a positive impact on low-performing schools by increasing school improvement (schools classified as Alert 2 or Alert 3 status improving their standing); fostering teacher empowerment; increasing student empowerment; building and facilitating positive working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance team personnel and LEA personnel; and facilitating an improved school environment.

The Alabama School Assistance Team achieved these gains by implementing core values such as (1) being very committed to their role of facilitating school improvement and empowering LEA students/personnel; and (2) building a foundation for student and school success by conveying the role of the school assistance team in facilitating school improvement to the LEAs they served.

Barriers, including socio-economic issues, resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted, relational difficulties, program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams, and State Department of Education reports and mandates, posed very strong challenges to the Alabama school assistance team members who try to promote positive change. As educational organizations attempt to facilitate positive change in low-performing schools, they must have an understanding of the educational change process (Fullan, 1993, Fullan & Miles, 1992; Glickman, Hayes & Hensley, 1992). To facilitate positive change is to encounter barriers and challenges. Until educators help to deepen the way they think about change, and effectively understand the change process, successful education initiatives or reform will never be totally achieved (Fullan & Miles, 1992).

The ‘old paradigm’ for managing change which advocates the traditional virtues of vision, strategic planning, and strong leadership are strong starting points for change; however, the top-down, systems approach to education is not often successful in positive, sustained transformation (Helsby, 1995). Fullan (1993) encourages educators to become agents, rather than victims, of change. In a world that offers no ‘silver bullets’ to draw upon, the challenge for managing change lies at the institutional and individual level. Meaningful and crucial change can only be effected from within, and this requires

developing teachers' generative capacities and transforming schools into learning organizations.

Alabama school assistance team personnel attempted to facilitate meaningful and crucial change in the LEAs they served by utilizing certain steps and strategies to overcome barriers. These steps and strategies included: (1) understanding that mistrust and resistance is a natural response to change and improvement efforts; (2) providing endless support, empowerment, patience, praise, constructive suggestions and collaboration to the LEA students and personnel; and (3) overcoming relational difficulties with effective "people skills."

Finally, findings indicated that certain factors appeared to support and facilitate the capacity of the Alabama school assistance team to promote positive change in the low-performing school they were supporting. These facilitating factors were identified as leadership, commitment and dedication of the Alabama school assistance team personnel, and relational skills/personalities of Alabama school assistance team personnel. The findings also serve as a basis for the following statements:

1. Consistent, effective, and supportive leadership is crucial on all levels of educational administration: school, system, and state to assure school assistance team success.
2. While effective leadership is imperative on all education system levels, supportive leadership by the LEA principal (school level) can be a major key in the success of a school assistance team's efforts.
3. Excellent relational/people/communication skills of personnel can facilitate a school assistance team's efforts.

4. Commitment and dedication to school improvement by school assistance team members can facilitate school improvement efforts.

This study is a first step in examining the value of improving low-achieving schools through the implementation of school assistance teams in Alabama. Further research studies might include more in-depth investigation with the case study assistance team personnel to explore: (a) factors that enabled these participants to create such a powerful team; (b) factors that enabled this case study assistance team to gain acceptance in the LEAs they served; and (c) strategies this case study assistance team employed to foster a partnership relationship with the LEA personnel. Subsequent research might also explore factors impacting school assistance team dynamics/team effectiveness including: (a). assistance team leadership development opportunities/academies for school assistance team personnel; and (b) strategies/coalitions school assistance teams can implement to build the resources, support, materials, and services for schools and communities plagued by low socio-economic conditions.

While these findings are not generalizable to other settings, considering them may be helpful to Alabama and other states implementing the school assistance team model in improving student and school progress, especially in low-performing schools. It is also hoped that these findings can assist in developing a knowledge base about how to improve identified low-performing schools through the implementation of school assistance teams. It is the responsibility of each state to assure low-performing schools receive the assistance they need so that each child can reach his/her full potential (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). School assistance teams appear to be one avenue for making this goal a reality.

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM IN FACILITATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL IN ALABAMA

Abstract

This case study investigated the perceived role and effectiveness of an Alabama School Assistance Team in facilitating school improvement in a low-performing school. Data were collected from interviews, documents and observations. The perceptions explored in this study were those of the Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Team Members, Local Educational Agency (LEA) personnel, and community members. Research findings indicate that 100% of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel view their role as facilitating school improvement and empowering the LEAs they serve. Most of the other respondents (60% of LEA personnel and community members) perceived the Alabama School Assistance Team as facilitating school improvement. A minority view (40% of LEA personnel) described the Alabama School Assistance Team as an external group charged with enforcing mandates and creating change. Findings suggest that the Alabama School Assistance Team helped improve the school by enhancing student performance, fostering student and teacher empowerment, improving the school environment, and developing positive relationships.

Introduction

The perceived need for public school reform is reaching new heights of concern and is the catalyst for legislative mandates and calls for accountability at both state and national levels. On January 8, President Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* into law. The Act, which embodies President Bush's education reform plan, sent to Congress on January 23, 2001, is the "most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965" (Alabama State Information: No Child Left Behind, 2002, p. 1). Bush stated, "These reforms express my deep belief in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America" (Alabama State Information: No Child Left Behind, 2002, p. 1). This federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act focuses on improving schools with high percentages of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and has required most states to significantly change their public educational policies and practices.

As a result of this legislation, each state has to commit itself to developing a rigorous public education system that allows no child to fall between the cracks, and for "the first time in history, state policymakers have clearly articulated the 'world-class' standards they expect students, schools, and districts to achieve" (NASBE, p. 4). However, even as these "world-class" standards are implemented, and as students, schools, and districts are evaluated by state assessment systems linked to these new standards, state departments of education are finding that thousands of schools and children are not meeting acceptable standards of achievement.

Each state will face a serious challenge over what it will do to turn around low-performing schools (Achieve, Inc. 2001). The National Education Association (NEA, 2001) writes, "The acid test of America's commitment to giving every child the opportunity to excel, is what the Nation does about low-performing schools" (p. 3).

Policymakers at all levels appear to be recognizing that something must be done immediately to assist these low-performing schools. Achieve, Inc. (2001) suggests that turning low-performing schools around requires clear ways of identifying schools that need assistance, providing these schools with appropriate assistance, and stepping in and taking tough action when schools continue to fall behind.

The Alabama School Assistance Team Model

Low-performing schools are an issue that Alabama has been addressing for many years. In the mid-1990s, the Alabama State Department of Education stated that the new accountability standards and ever-increasing achievement goals that were being placed on the State Department of Education (SDE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) by the Alabama legislature could not be satisfied by the then current hierarchical bureaucracy (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997). The Alabama State Superintendent of Education Ed Richardson voiced a need to change the current State Department of Education's environment of "control and regulations" to an environment of "service and support." The State Superintendent envisioned the State Department of Education becoming a service organization, facilitating the LEAs' abilities to overcome educational obstacles and fostering higher student achievement. Through this vision, the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was developed. A major component of the

Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was the creation of the Alabama School Assistance Team Model.

Alabama is not alone in instituting a school assistance team model to provide collaborative, "hands-on" support and guidance to low-performing schools. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2000), there is a growing focus on the valuable contribution of state assistance to low-performing schools in achieving higher student achievement. The Kentucky Highly Skilled Educators' Programs served 66 schools with direct, intensive assistance in 1999–2000 (SREB, 2000). Kansas NEA's Quality Performance Accreditation Assistance Cadre is the "first team ever organized by an NEA state affiliate to directly assist struggling public schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3). Ginsberg (1997) acknowledges school assistance teams as the major factor in the improvement of school success in Texas schools. North Carolina Senator John Edwards has strongly encouraged "each state to replicate North Carolina's practice of assigning state assistance teams to low-performing schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3).

When compared to school assistance team initiatives in other states, the Alabama School Assistance Team model appears to be serving more LEA sites with less funding. "The Kentucky Highly Skilled Educators program was funded at $6.2 million and served 66 schools with direct, intensive assistance in 1999–2000" (SREB, 2000, p. 10). "North Carolina's Assistance Team program provided 55 schools direct assistance with a total of $7 million in 1999–2000" (p. 10). The Alabama School Assistance Teams are "allocated $6 million on an annual basis" (Mandel, 2000, p. 18). State average expenditures per school are noted in Figure 1.

STATE	AVERAGE EXPENDITURE PER SCHOOL
North Carolina	$127,273
Kentucky	$93,939
Alabama	$39,215

Figure 1. State Average Expenditures of School Assistance Teams Per School

Purpose and Organized Structure

The stated purpose of Alabama School Assistance Teams is to facilitate and empower the Local Education Agencies to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement. Initially, the Alabama State Department of Education envisioned the focus of the School Assistance Teams as facilitating all schools in achieving school improvement. However, in response to accountability issues and limited resources, the School Assistance Teams now work only with schools/systems that are not meeting accountability standards at acceptable levels as determined by state policies (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997).

Alabama classifies schools/systems based on the level of student performance on standardized tests. This identification system is in accordance with legislation enacted in 1995 mandating the use of nationally norm-referenced tests for student assessment purposes and the implementation of a school and school system classification system (McCloskey, 2001).

Alabama places schools into one of three performance categories: Clear, Caution, and Alert. Both a school's placement and the change in its placement over time determine its eligibility for special assistance. Schools with more than half of their students in stanines 5–9 are classified as Clear. Schools with more than half of their students performing at stanines 1–3 are classified as being on Alert. Schools that fall between these two points are considered to be in Caution status. Alert 1 status schools are schools in the first year of Alert status or schools that performed at the Caution level in the prior year and have failed to adequately improve. Schools earn an Alert 2 designation if they were classified as Alert 1 during the prior year and failed to move out of Alert status. Schools that fail to move out of Caution status for a second year are also classified as Alert 2. Schools are classified as Alert 3 if after one or two years at the Alert 2 level, they are not demonstrating satisfactory growth (Mandel, 2000). At the present time, all schools classified as Alert 2 status receive consistent assistance by members (Team Leader, Team Members, and Special Service Teachers) of an Alabama School Assistance Team.

Alabama originally established the School Assistance Teams to serve ten geographical regions. These geographical regions are now modified to coincide with the eleven Alabama Regional Inservice Center regions. The original ten geographical regions are depicted in Figure 2.

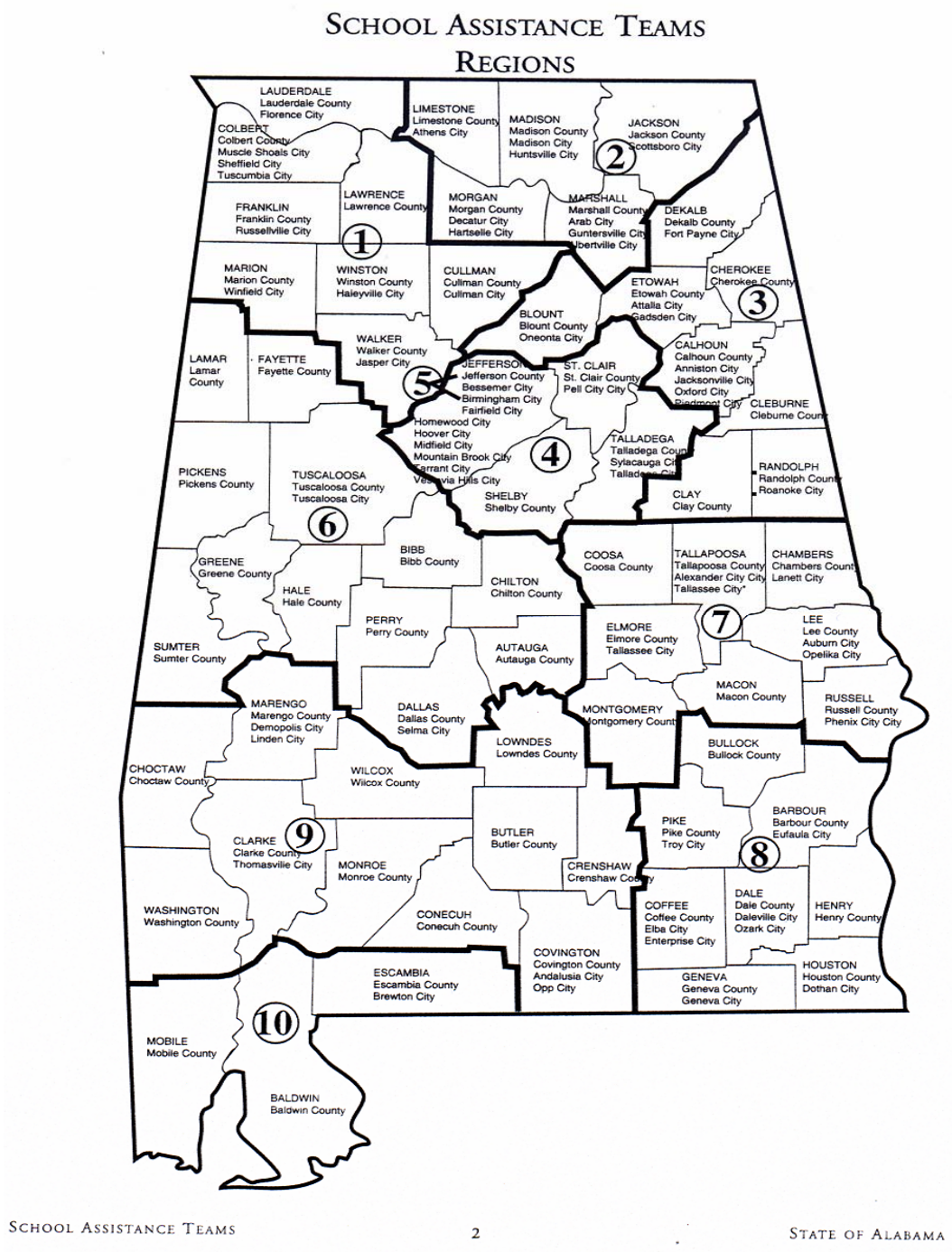

Figure 2. Alabama School Assistance Team Regions (Source: 2002–2003 Alabama Education Directory).

Each of the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams adheres to the following mission statement:

> We commit to provide timely, quality service and technical assistance to LEAs to maximize their potential for providing world-class education to Alabama students and ensuring the survival of public schools.
>
> We will:
>
> - Provide leadership, expertise, and resources to help customers solve their problems
> - Recognize and capitalize on the diversity of schools
> - Deliver on our promises
> - Encourage innovation by using our imaginations … not our memories … to deliver quality services
> - Communicate between and within the SDE and LEAs
> - Provide guidance and assistance to meet compliance issues and Public Education System accountability
> - Encourage partnerships with businesses, the community, and parents
> - Increase achievement levels of students attending these schools
> - Encourage high expectations of LEAs and students to develop and maintain safe and positive learning environments. (Alabama State Department of Education School Assistance Team poster)

The Alabama School Assistance Teams are under the direction of the Director of Classroom Improvement/ School Assistance Team Coordination for the Alabama State

Department of Education. Each Alabama School Assistance Team is guided by a Team Leader who has been carefully chosen because of her/his skill, knowledge, and commitment to school improvement for all children. Team Leaders have a fair amount of autonomy in allocating and using the various resources at their disposal (Mandel, 2000).

Each Alabama School Assistance Team is comprised of three or more Team Members. These Team Members are diverse in their abilities, ranging from having expertise in instructional and administrative functions, child nutrition, teaching practices, assessment, finance, special education, technology, and other areas of need. These Team Members visit the Alert 2 and Alert 3 schools on a weekly basis, offering hands-on guidance, support and involvement to the principal and faculty, and assist the Special Service Teachers described below.

In addition to the Team Members, each team includes Special Service Teachers (SSTs) who are assigned to priority schools identified as Alert 2 schools. Alabama SSTs are exemplary classroom teachers who have been nominated by their employing superintendents to serve in this capacity, generally serving for up to three years. They are paid their regular salary plus a $5,000 supplement. During this time, the SSTs work full-time for the Alabama Department of Education, returning to their original classroom position after the appointment as an SST has ended. The SSTs work closely with classroom teachers on a daily basis in an effort to increase academic achievement. They present workshops on needed content areas, model various teaching strategies through demonstration lessons, and provide technical assistance in all areas related to best practices of teaching and learning.

While the Alabama School Assistance Teams provide the primary support to these schools, Alert 3 schools may require an additional "intervention" team of two or more educators appointed by the Alabama State Superintendent of Education to provide more intensive assistance. In this situation, the on-site state team assumes control of the school and the state superintendent can choose to unilaterally remove a principal if such an action is necessary to turn the school around. All teachers in Alert 3 schools are also assessed using the state's Professional Employees Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) or similar instrument (Mandel, 2000). Negative evaluations can result in the removal of teachers from Alert 3 schools.

Overview and Purpose of the Study

Despite the national recognition and sense of urgency about providing assistance in improving low-performing schools, little professional literature has been written on strategies to accomplish this goal. Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act now directs how a state develops its state intervention system for low-performing schools, but the federal law provides considerable leeway in the kinds of technical assistance that states provide for low-performing schools (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002).

The Alabama State Board of Education espouses that the Alabama School Assistance Teams are a practical, effective method to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools. However, the concept of increasing student achievement through the use of school assistance teams is controversial. While many school systems, including ones in North Carolina and Kentucky, have documentation of student/school success

through the efforts of an assistance team, many other schools/systems are skeptical. In his book, *Victory in Our Schools We Can Give Our Children Excellent Public Education,* John Stanford (1999), Superintendent of Seattle City Schools, stated that true support and help must come from within the school system culture because school assistance teams developed by the state department are "too far removed … are not accepted or trusted in the individual school cultures" (p. 79). There are many factors or barriers, including gaining the acceptance and trust of school systems, which can prevent assistance teams from making the powerful contribution they may be capable of producing.

Goodlad (1990) stated that it would make sense to identify the characteristics that are part of a good school and then endeavor to assist all schools so that they can have these same characteristics. In the same way, it would make sense to identify positive characteristics of an effective assistance team so that all assistance teams (from other states as well as Alabama) can try to emulate the positive characteristics needed to facilitate student success in low-performing schools.

This study was conducted to examine the Alabama School Assistance Team Model in Alabama. It compiled the perspectives of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel, LEA personnel and LEA community members regarding (1) the role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in high priority schools, and (2) the perceived effectiveness of the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in high priority schools. The research questions examined were:

1. What is the perceived role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in high priority schools as viewed from the perspectives of the Alabama Team Leaders, Team Members, LEA personnel, and community leaders?

2. What are the perceived outcomes resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in high priority schools as viewed from the perspectives of the Alabama Team Leaders, Team Members, LEA personnel, and community leaders?

Methodology

Descriptive studies help us understand organizations and organizational change from the perspectives of those engaged in it (Kochan, 1996). For this reason, a qualitative case study was used to engage in this research study.

The participants included personnel from the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams; and school personnel and community members of an LEA being served by an Alabama School Assistance Team. Each of the Team Leaders of the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams was interviewed individually. Then, an in-depth case study was conducted with one of the Alabama School Assistance Teams.

Data were collected from members of the LEA being served by the school assistance team involved in the case study. This LEA site was classified as an Alert 2 school and; as such, was receiving consistent assistance by members (Team Leader, Team Members, and SSTs) of this Alabama School Assistance Team.

Data Collection

Four sources of data were used in this study. The first data source included a series of in-depth interviews with the ten Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders. The second data source consisted of data collected through a case study involving one of the teams. In-depth interviews and focus groups including the Team Leader; Team Members; Special Service Teachers; and school personnel and community leaders from the LEAs served by this team were conducted. The third data source included observations and fieldnotes. A variety of approximately 200 documents provided through the Alabama State Department of Education comprised the fourth set of data. These documents included memoranda, reports, notes and letters from LEA personnel, and team newsletters.

____ individual and ____focus group interviews were conducted. They ranged from 45 to 70 minutes in length. They contained open-ended questions that explored the role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams and its effectiveness in terms of outcomes resulting from its school improvement efforts. The guiding questions used in each interview were:

1. What is the role of a School Assistance Team?
2. What is your specific role within the School Assistance Team?
3. If you had unlimited resources available to you, how would you create a School Assistance Team? Which team designs or strategies would you consider?
4. How is the School Assistance Team perceived by the school/system?

5. What are the most significant perceived outcomes that have resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams?

Participants were asked permission for the researcher to tape-record the interviews. If permission was granted, the individual and focus group interviews were tape-recorded. If permission was not granted, extensive notes were made.

Data Analysis

Interview tape-recordings and fieldnotes were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. In accordance with the qualitative data analysis process developed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents and other materials were then broken down into manageable units, synthesized, organized into themes, and placed into code categories. The documents were hand-coded for key phrases, descriptors, and explanations, according to the code categories.

In addition to the hand-coding process, all interviews and fieldnotes (Microsoft Word documents) were imported into the Atlas.ti qualitative analytical computer software. Coding and data analysis were completed using the computer software process as well as a hand-coded process.

The emerging themes from the research data were grouped according to the general research questions and include (1) the role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in facilitating school improvement in high priority schools, (2) perceived effectiveness in terms of outcomes resulting from the efforts of one Alabama School Assistance Team in facilitating school improvement, and (3) perceived outcomes of the School Assistance Team's efforts. Representative quotes are presented to convey the flavor of these perceptions.

Role of the Alabama School Assistance Team

The first issue addressed in this study was the perceived role of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Findings suggest that there are two perceptions of this role. The majority of respondents (100% of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel; 60% of LEA personnel and community members) view the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as facilitating school improvement and empowering students and teachers. Some respondents (40% of LEA personnel and community members) viewed the role and of the Alabama School Assistance Team differently. They saw the school assistance team as a group whose main function is to enforce mandates and change.

The Alabama School Assistance Team as Facilitator of School Improvement and the Empowerment of Students and Teachers

The vision for the Alabama School Assistance Teams is to help the LEAs overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997). School Assistant Team leaders, members, and SSTs appear to embrace this vision, and are very clear about their role. An Alabama School Assistance Team member captured the essence of this attitude by saying:

> What do I see as the role of a School Assistance Team? Well, I believe that our role is that of helping schools improve … help learning occur … assist teachers in finding better ways of teaching … improve the school's capacity for student achievement … also identifying things — not only what can be improved — but what the students, teachers, school are doing RIGHT…."

In a similar vein, a central office personnel respondent said, "My understanding of the role of the School Assistance Team is to assist our school … our teachers … our

students … especially our students. Help our school become stronger so that student achievement is higher."

This facilitating role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as a positive factor in school improvement is also reflected in the majority of the responses of school and community participants. An example of this attitude is displayed in an excerpt from a letter written to an Alabama School Assistance Team by the LEA that this team served:

> I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and Team __ for all of the wonderful ideas, teacher training support, and small group instruction that you did this school year for _____ school. When we first learned that 'THE STATE PEOPLE' would be coming in, I know that you realized that we would be uncomfortable and unsure of what this meant. However, we were pleasantly surprised. We sincerely appreciate the extra help Team __ was able to give us, and although our SAT scores are not in, and who knows what they will reveal, I personally know that our children have made educational gains. Please convey our special thanks to _____ and _____ for their help. Both ladies worked diligently with our staff and students. We looked forward to their visits each week. They truly exemplify the word 'professional.'

In addition to viewing the School Assistance Team as facilitating school improvement, the majority (over 60%) of LEA teacher respondents supported the view that the Alabama School Assistance Team also facilitated the empowerment of teachers and students. A typical comment was, "the school assistance team is here to help us … be better and stronger teachers … help our students to be stronger students…." One teacher from an LEA being supported by an Alabama School Assistance team said:

> She (the Special Services Teacher) makes me feel so good! I've always felt that I am an excellent teacher, but she confirms it. I expected her to come in and tell me everything that I was doing wrong, but she pointed out things that make me a great teacher. I know that teachers need to be continually improving, and I want to learn more and better teaching methods. I'll listen to her suggestions, because she believes in me.

The Alabama School Assistance Team as a Group to Enforce Mandates and Change

While all of the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel, all of the community members, and the majority of the LEA personnel view the Alabama School Assistance Team as facilitating school improvement and empowering others, other respondents hold a different perspective. A minority (40%) of the LEA personnel view the Alabama School Assistance Team as a group whose main function is to enforce mandates and change. A school principal stated,

> I know that the State Department is just doing their job. But, they have to understand…. I'm going to do what is best for my students and my teachers, even if that choice is not the most popular with other schools or the State Department. I totally respect that the State Department has to do their job, but please don't keep expecting my kids to perform like _____ City students, and please don't keep making them feel like failures because they can't.

A teacher from a participating LEA supported this perception of the Alabama School Assistance Team as a group that enforces mandates and change by replying, "The School Assistance Team's role? Well, they're part of the State Department … they come in and tell us what to do."

Some LEA respondents voiced a fear of the Alabama School Assistance Team and the Alabama State Department of Education by stating comments such as, "Well, when the State Department comes in, it can't be good!" One LEA personnel respondent described his understanding of the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as a fear of "having the power to bulldoze-over schools."

Most Important Perceived Outcomes of the Efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams

The second purpose of this study was to identify the effectiveness of the team in terms of perceived outcomes that resulted from their efforts to facilitate school improvement. There were no perceived negative outcomes that resulted from their efforts, although some respondents had a negative view of the role of the School Assistance Teams. The most often cited outcomes resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams were: improved school performance (schools classified as Alert 2 or Alert 3 status improving their standing); student empowerment; and teacher empowerment. Other positive outcomes included close working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance Teams and LEA personnel, and an improved school environment. The role and function of the Alabama School Assistance Team perceived by most respondents and the most significant perceived outcomes appear to be closely aligned, as depicted in Figure 3.

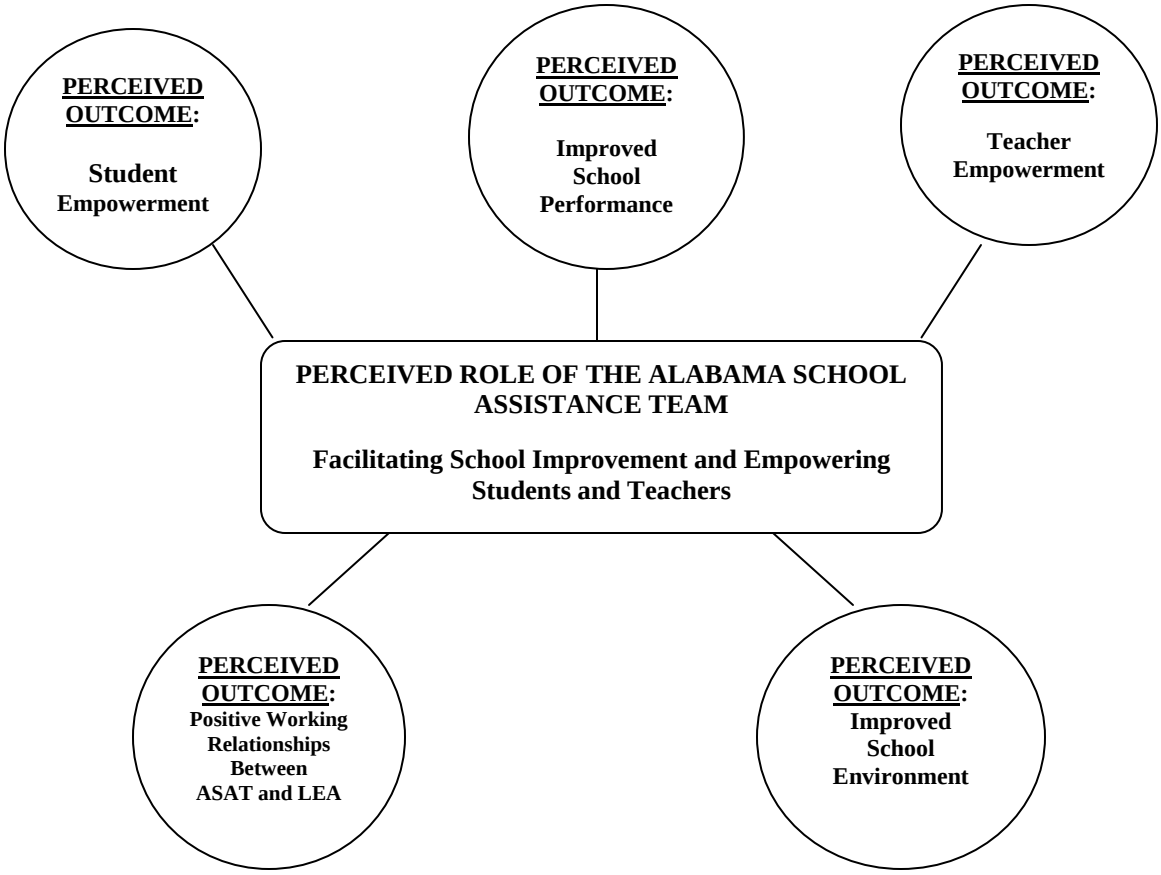

Figure 3. Perceived Roles and Outcomes of the Efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team.

Improved Student Performance

One goal of the Alabama School Assistance Teams is to assist schools classified on Alert 2 or Alert 3 status to improve their standing. Many respondents referred to this goal when they mentioned school improvement as an outcome resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Responses such as "We've moved to CLEAR this year!", "I really think that our school will move to Alert 1 or Caution … we and the

people (from the Alabama School Assistance Team) have really been working with the students" were examples of comments offered regarding school improvement.

Achieving this goal of helping schools improve and achieve higher status standings was illustrated in a memo from an Alabama School Assistance Team Leader to School Assistance Team and LEA:

> This year, Area __ includes two Alert 3 schools, nine Alert 2 schools, eight Alert 1 schools, eighteen Caution schools, one Alert 1 system and one Caution system. The remainder of our 152 schools and 14 school systems are CLEAR. Those who are not Clear at this time are working diligently to join the rest of you in that status for 2001–2002! Congratulations to _____Elementary School for moving from Alert 2 to CLEAR status during the 1999–2000 school year! All _____ County Schools are now on CLEAR status."

In a June 27, 2002, press release entitled *First Look at Alabama Schools' Academic Status Released*, the Alabama State Department of Education distributed information on the academic status of the state's schools and school systems, focusing on schools with Alert 3 status and schools/systems already classified as Caution or Alert who were attempting to improve their standing. An excerpt from this press release stated:

> Seven schools received Alert 3 status last school year. The results of their 2002 spring assessments are: four schools achieved Clear status, two schools achieved Caution status, and one school remained at the Alert 3 status level.

In all, 103 schools and four systems that were classified in 2001 with Caution or Alert status participated in the assessment option. The results of those schools and systems are:

School Summary

- Improved Academic Status 59
  - Moved to Caution 10
  - Moved to Clear 49
- Met Improvement Goal (Status Unchanged) 13
- Did Not Meet Improvement Goal 31

System Summary

- Improved Academic Status 1
  - Moved to Caution 0
  - Moved to Clear 1
- Met Improvement Goal (Status Unchanged) 2
- Did Not Meet Improvement Goal 1

Teacher Empowerment

A second positive perceived outcome resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams is teacher empowerment. Teacher empowerment is defined and measured in terms of teachers' power to be a part of decisions regarding teaching and learning (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Sweetland and Hoy (2000) state that teacher empowerment is of pivotal importance in school effectiveness.

Teacher empowerment appears to be a result of the interaction between the ASAT and the teachers within the LEA being assisted. Many respondents from the Alabama School Assistance Teams voiced their goal of supporting the LEA teachers by stating their job was "supporting and assuring the classroom teachers that they are already doing

a lot of things correctly" (Alabama School Assistance Team Leader) and working together with the LEA classroom teacher as a team to explore new and effective ways of teaching and learning.

Many LEA classroom teachers expressed gratitude for the encouraging support, advice, and practical help (e.g. assistance in implementing new teaching strategies, model lessons) they received from the Alabama School Assistance Team. One classroom teacher commented, "The SST and I taught a class together … she demonstrated a different way of asking questions to my students. I'm going to use this questioning method in future lessons." Another teacher commented that she had been helped much more by the "state ladies" than by anything else (other school improvement strategies).

Documenting this outcome of teacher empowerment is a letter that was written to an Alabama School Assistance Team from a classroom teacher:

> Thank you seems like such small words to express how thankful I am to you. From the moment we met in September, you were such an inspiration to me. Your ideas, your kind words, demonstrations, speeches, and sometimes even just your presence kept me going. I hope one day I can be the same source of inspiration for another. Please keep in touch, and thank you again.

Student Empowerment

Student empowerment was another outcome cited by stakeholders as being a result of the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. An Alabama School Assistance Team Member thought carefully on the aspect of the positive outcomes resulting from the support offered by an assistance team and stated, "It is really a good feeling to see students become more confident … more sure of themselves. Everyone

needs a ‘cheerleader’ behind them! If we can be a catalyst to making the students (and teachers) realize their strengths and gifts, I can’t imagine a better success!”

A classroom teacher described how her students responded to the interaction of the Alabama School Assistance Team: “The other week, the state department person came into my parenting class … she read a book to my students to demonstrate how to read to children. My students were totally involved.” This teacher went on to say that the state department person listened and encouraged the students, affirming the students’ abilities.

Another Alabama classroom teacher commented,

> She (the SST) really tried to talk to my students … one-to-one. She made them feel important … like they could really do it. I think it meant a lot to my students, because it was “someone from the outside,” you know? It was like my students felt that the SST wouldn’t be making the effort unless she genuinely thought they really had the ability.

In a similar vein, another classroom teacher remarked, “Look at this student’s work … he put a lot of effort into this report. I tell him every day that he can do good work, but it helps to hear it from someone else too (the SST).”

Positive Working Relationships Among The Alabama School Assistance Teams and LEA Personnel

According to the responses from the participants, positive working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance Teams and LEA personnel was another outcome resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Many Alabama School Assistance Team respondents mentioned the joy of working with the LEA

personnel as a team, focusing on improving student achievement. One Alabama Team Leader commented, "I love going out to _____ school! I always make it a goal to go into the classrooms and greet the teachers. Many of these teachers just make my day … they seem so pleased to see me! They are always anxious to show me new improvements that have been made." As one LEA central office respondent commented, **"**Over, and over, and over, and over again she (Alabama School Assistance Team member) stressed that she was there to HELP us … be part of a team together."

Many of the LEA classroom teachers mentioned "a working partnership" as a positive outcome of the effort of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Several teachers mentioned how they felt a part of the 'team' to improve student achievement and school improvement. One classroom teacher stated,

> I have really benefited from the state department's interaction with my classroom. But I guess I'm different…. I don't feel defensive when they come. The SST is really a help to me. We have a really good working relationship. I call her, she calls me. If I have a problem, or need something, I really feel O.K. with talking with her about it. And that's what it takes … developing close relationships with the state department people.

Improved School Environment

An improved school environment was another perceived outcome resulting from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. This improved school environment included both an improved physical environment and a more positive emotional school environment as well. Many respondents mentioned improved school surroundings as a result of the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Following suggestions

offered by the Alabama School Assistance Team, teachers commented on how they tried to improve the physical surroundings of the school. Documented within an Alabama School Assistance Team newsletter was a reference to the improvement in the physical school environment: "School hallways are clean and decorated with bulletin boards projecting positive messages."

A more positive emotional school environment was cited by many stakeholders as a result of Alabama School Assistance Team efforts. An LEA central office respondent stated:

> These students aren't dumb … they know 'something's up' when strange new people come into their classrooms. They already know that the school needs to improve. But if the kids see good things happening between the teachers and the SST, they'll notice. It makes kids happy to see the teachers energized. And when the teachers and kids are happy, you'll see improvement!

In a memo from an Alabama School Assistance Team leader, the following words portray an improved school environment:

> Two members of the School Assistance Team were standing in the hallway conferencing, when three students approached them; two juniors and a senior. The children indicated that two of them had aspirations to go to college, and one into the military. They then said they wanted to thank Mrs. _____, Mrs. ____, and Mrs. _____ (they called them by name) for coming to their school. They went on to say that last year the school was in chaos with teachers and students spending most of their time in the hallways, and nobody was trying to teach them. They further said that this year the teachers were doing some teaching because they

"never knew when the ladies from the state were going to be there." They said they were getting more individual attention. They thanked them for presenting their teachers with gifts that made them happy. They told them that since they'd come, the school even looked nicer. Needless to say, our folks were astounded and elated. Their quintessential motivation to persevere in the face of adversity had been the possibility of making a difference in the lives of the children. They learned that they had "from the mouths of babes" (Alabama State Department of Education documents).

Discussion

This study identified the role and impact of the Alabama School Assistance Teams as perceived by the stakeholders involved: the Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Members, SSTs, LEA personnel and community members. While there are two perceived roles of the Alabama School Assistance Teams, the majority of stakeholders (100% of ASAT personnel; 100 % of community members; 60% of LEA personnel) view the role of the Alabama School Assistance Team as being a facilitating factor in the improvement of student achievement and school improvement. A minority of stakeholders (40% of LEA personnel) view the Alabama School Assistance Team as being a force to be feared, a force that is coming into the schools to mandate change.

This second view of the Alabama School Assistance Team by a minority of LEA personnel as a fearsome force is not totally ungrounded. According to *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders* (1998), Alabama is one of twenty-three states with the power to reconstitute schools or districts. In some

situations, the problems in a school may be so entrenched or so extreme that none of the intervention strategies produce the necessary improvement. In such a situation where the school atmosphere is "so poisonous the teachers couldn't teach and the pupils couldn't learn" (pg. 44), a state department of education may make the difficult decision to reconstitute, which could include removing faculty and staff and starting over with a new administration, almost all new faculty, and a new educational vision. However, this has not happened and at this time, no schools have been reconstituted

The LEA sites that are identified as schools targeted for support by the Alabama School Assistance Teams know that they are "one step away from state take-over" (Alabama LEA Central Office respondent). As another LEA respondent stated:

> Even though the Alabama State Department of Education has done wonderful things, there will always be a fear of the ASDE by the schools being assisted. That negative 'stigma' will always be present … any action or person associated with the state department will always be perceived as negative. That's just the way it is … the ASDE is 'King', and as such, they have the capability of making 'heads roll'….

Other LEA personnel recognize that a defensive stance and resistance toward the Alabama School Assistance Team (ASDE) is the first, and most difficult, hurdle to overcome before improvement can be achieved. One LEA teacher commented, "The ASDE is really trying to help us … I respect and appreciate that. But I know that they get a ton of resistance from the schools that they are trying to help. Sometimes you CAN'T overcome that resistance. But it's a start … a good one."

Alabama School Assistance Team leaders, members, and SSTs appear to recognize and understand this defensive stance from the LEAs that they are trying to support. One team leader commented:

> The school assistance team personnel must make sure that any constructive suggestions are given with a lot of praise — the teachers being assisted are very vulnerable. The teachers must be assured that they are doing a lot of things correctly. We use our "80/20 Rule": we give 80% praise and 20% constructive suggestions.

Despite this enormous initial hurdle of overcoming a defensive stance from the LEA personnel, findings show that the Alabama School Assistance Team studied has been successful in its efforts to work with LEA sites in developing a stronger school and improving student achievement. The majority of the stakeholders viewed the Alabama School Assistance Team as a facilitating factor in school improvement, making a positive impact on low-performing schools by increasing school improvement (schools classified as Alert 2 or Alert 3 status improving their standing); fostering teacher empowerment; increasing student empowerment; building and facilitating positive working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance team personnel and LEA personnel; and facilitating an improved school environment.

New regulations resulting from the No Child Left Behind legislation mandates that each state identify and take steps to improve low-performing schools. NASBE (2002) states that no low-performing school can reverse the negative trend by themselves…something outside the school itself must provide support. According to *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders* (1998),

> Providing low-performing schools with technical assistance and support for improvement is an important part of state and local accountability measures. Chronically low-performing schools usually have little capacity to turn themselves around. In order for these schools to be held accountable for results, states and districts must intervene to help schools focus on learning, and align resources, professional development, and other aspects of school operations with that focus. While this can be done, in part, by setting district policies to meet that priority, chronically low-performing schools often require the kind of assistance that can only come from external intervention. (p. 43)

The original goal of the Alabama School Assistance Teams was to be a source of service and support to Alabama schools (Alabama State Department of Education documents). Findings from this study show that this Alabama School Assistance Team appears to be achieving its goal of facilitating low-performing schools in becoming stronger learning environments to provide a better education for Alabama students.

Implications

While these findings may not be generalizable to other settings, considering them may be helpful to other states who are implementing the school assistance team model in improving student and school improvement, especially in low-performing schools. It is also hoped that these findings can assist in developing a knowledge base (Kochan, 1996) in how to improve identified low-performing schools through the implementation of school assistance teams.

The findings of this study also serve as a basis for the following statements:

1. The Alabama School Assistance Team personnel understand and are very committed to their role of facilitating school improvement and empowering LEA students/personnel.
2. The Alabama School Assistance Team's view of their role, in this study, was successfully conveyed to the LEA being served, which was reflected in the findings: sixty percent of LEA personnel were not only supportive of the Alabama School Assistance Team, but also identified five benefits that resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team: increasing school improvement; building teacher empowerment; increasing student empowerment; building and facilitating positive working relationships between the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel and LEA personnel; and facilitating an improved school environment.
3. The Alabama School Assistance Team was successful in conveying the role of a school assistance team in facilitating school improvement to the LEAs that they served. Considerations for states implementing the school assistance team model include:
    - School assistance team personnel (e.g. team leaders, team members, special service teachers, others) need to have their roles clearly defined. School assistance team personnel must be 100% committed to the team role(s) and the ultimate goal of facilitating school improvement.

- School assistance team personnel need regular scheduled times to meet together with LEA personnel in order to discuss questions, challenges and needs. While a school improvement effort may often be discouraging and slow, these meeting times can provide support, resources, and encouragement to the participants.
- School assistance team personnel need to consistently explain their role(s) in a positive and supportive manner to the LEA personnel they are serving.
- School assistance team personnel need to emphasize words such as collaboration, partnership and teamwork as they collaborate with LEA personnel.

4. When an external organization enters a school setting to promote student and school improvement, there is initial defensiveness (Ginsberg, Johnson & Moffett, 1997; National Education Association, 2001; Stanford, 1999). The Alabama School Assistance Team was able to overcome this initial defensiveness of the LEA being served, and facilitate school improvement.

These outcomes were quite powerful; yet compared to other states, Alabama School Assistance Teams are underfunded. Legislative members should consider the Alabama school assistance team model very carefully, as it appears to be cost effective. Furthermore, legislative members need to reconsider current allocations to provide adequate resources so the Alabama School Assistance Teams can work with additional schools.

Further Research

This study is a first step in raising issues about improving low-achieving schools through the implementation of school assistance teams in Alabama. Further studies are being conducted to explore (a) the factors that enable the Alabama School Assistance Teams to promote positive change in low-performing schools; and (b) factors that serve as barriers to the Alabama School Assistance Teams' ability to promote positive change in low-performing schools.

Other research considerations include further investigation with the team personnel in the case study assistance team to explore: (a) factors that enabled these participants to create such a powerful team; (b) factors that enabled this assistance team to gain acceptance in the LEAs they served; and (c) strategies this assistance team employed to foster a partnership relationship with the LEA personnel.

Additional research considerations include exploring differences (e.g. gender; age; years of teaching/administrative experience; individual approaches to teaching and learning) between LEA personnel who were supportive of the Alabama School Assistance Team and LEA personnel who were resistant to the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team.

Conclusion

"All children can learn. Public education should enable all children to achieve their unique potential. Education holds the key for children to reach their potential intellectually, physically and emotionally" (Cole, 1995, p. 1). As each state responds to No Child Left Behind mandates and explores strategies or "keys" to improve these low-

performing schools, serious consideration should be given to the school assistance team model. This strategy appears to be a cost-effective and powerful method for aiding schools.

Further research into the value of the school assistance team model within Alabama and in all states incorporating this approach should be conducted. Low-performing schools are often schools with limited resources and great student needs (NEA, 2001). It is the responsibility of each state to assure that these schools receive the assistance they need so that each child can reach their full potential (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). School Assistance Teams appear to be one avenue for making this goal a reality.

V. FACTORS THAT SERVED AS BARRIERS TO THE ABILITY OF AN ALABAMA SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM TO PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE IN A LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL

Abstract

This case study investigated the perceived barriers that hindered an Alabama School Assistance Team's effectiveness in improving student performance in a school classified as low performing. Data were collected from interviews, documents and observations. The perceptions examined were those of Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Team Members, Local Education Agency personnel, and community members. Findings indicate that the most important perceived barriers were socio-economic factors; resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted; relational difficulties; program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams (ASAT); and State Department of Education reports and mandates. Supporting educational research regarding the impact of social-economic issues and change theory on school improvement initiatives were explored. Despite challenging barriers, findings suggest that the ASAT made a positive impact on a low-performing school by increasing school improvement and building student and teacher empowerment. Findings appear to validate the effectiveness of the ASAT team in facilitating school improvement in low-performing schools.

Introduction

The passage of the 2001 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 2001) — commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation — addresses a national concern about student achievement and low-performing schools. This legislation contains two main components that directly affect both problems. The first component specifies that states must adopt a single statewide system to document that all students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) over a twelve year period. The second specifies that school districts must ensure research-based technical assistance is provided to schools that fail to meet their AYP goals for two consecutive years (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). While NCLB legislation mandates that each state must provide state assistance to low-performing schools, there is flexibility in the intervention strategies that states may implement (NASBE, 2002).

Partially due to the passage of NCLB, states are showing a new interest in assisting low-performing schools to improve achievement (Southern Regional Education Board 2000, NASBE 2002). The impact of the school assistance team model has been so effective in North Carolina that North Carolina Senator John Edwards has encouraged "each state to replicate North Carolina's practice of assigning state assistance teams to low-performing schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3). The North Carolina assistance teams have been highly successful not only in helping schools reach their improvement target, but in moving them to exemplary status.

Currently, little research exists about the impact or relationship of the school assistance team model on student and school improvement in low-performing schools.

> There are two reasons for the current shortage of definitive research on state interventions. The first reason is the relative infancy of most state interventions. Since many state accountability systems that contain state interventions, such as California's Connecticut's, and Rhode Island's, are only a few years old, there simply has not been enough time to study and understand the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and districts. The second reason for the current shortage of definitive research is that many interventions are implemented in combination with other interventions, and therefore the research seldom examines the impact of a single intervention. (p. 19, Education Commission of the States, 2002)

Socio-economic Factors: The Strongest Barrier to Student and School Improvement in Low-Performing Schools

Socio-economic issues have long been recognized as a major barrier to student achievement and school improvement (Ginsberg, Johnson & Moffett, 1997; Mandel, 2000; NEA, 2001; SREB, 2000; U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Poverty and socio-economic status are the most consistently associated indicators of poor academic achievement and school failure (Land & Legters, 2002). Schools in low socio-economic areas have $1,139 less per student than schools in higher socio-economic areas (Education Trust, 2001). NASBE (2002) states:

> In schools where the need for improvement is greatest, resources to support school improvement, such as high-quality staff, high-quality buildings, and high-quality instructional materials, are often scarce (p. 5).

In addition, morale among students and faculty within low-performing schools is often low (College Board, 1999). Due to the lack of resources in the community, educators in these schools often argue that they need more resources to meet the more extreme needs of their students. Many of these schools have a high student mobility rate, reducing the effectiveness of the curriculum. There is usually a higher turnover among teachers and principals, further undermining the quality of the academic program. Because of these and other challenges, high poverty schools also have difficulty hiring and retaining qualified teachers (Archer, 2003; NASBE, 2002, National Education Association, 2000).

Students living in chronic poverty are placed at risk by the challenges they face on a daily basis. These students are more likely to have parents who are not healthy, both emotionally and physically, and this leads to other strains, such as increased parental irritability and depressive symptoms, more contentious interactions with parents, and fewer parent-supported learning opportunities in the home. Furthermore, the neighborhoods in which these students live are often "characterized by social disorganization: crime, many unemployed adults, and neighborhoods not monitorig the behavior of adolescents" (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 66). Sampson and Morenoff (1977) state that there are few neighborhood resources supporting students' development and well-being (i.e., few youth programs, playgrounds, health care facilities, parks, afterschool programs or sports leagues). Students living below the poverty threshold are 1.3 times more likely than nonpoor students to experience emotional or behavioral problems, learning disabilities, and developmental delays. They are two times more likely

than nonpoor students to be poorly prepared for grade level work, to be held back a grade, or to be expelled or suspended from school (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan).

Unfortunately, high-poverty schools are "often damaged, if not broken, institutions characterized by debilitating attitudes and relationships that produce alienation and social disorganization" (Balfanz, Ruby & Mac Iver, 2002, p. 134). Teachers in these schools often feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the lack of resources for addressing the multiple social and academic needs of their students. A reaction similar to 'learned helplessness' is expressed in many teachers, who appear to give up on a large segment of the student population in their school (Balfanz, Ruby & MacIver, 2002).

Similarly, Wilson and Corbett (2001) found in their studies regarding high-poverty schools that significant numbers of teachers in high-poverty schools adopt a low energy/low expectations attitude manifested by failure to push students to complete assignments; to control student behavior that disrupts the learning environment for all; to go the extra mile to help struggling students; to understand students' interests and situations and implement these factors into their lessons; and to provide a variety of classroom activities through which to learn. Kozol (1991) found parallel teacher attitudes in his study of high-poverty schools. He described teachers often responding to initiatives to support students facing low socio-economic challenges/high-poverty schools with the response "It makes no difference. Kids like these aren't going anywhere" (p. 52). Students assigned to teachers who don't encourage, push, discipline, help, teach, or respect students struggling with low socio-economic issues often are a part of the stimulus for these students to give up and rebel, plunging the school even deeper into chaos and despair (Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

Balfanz, Ruby and MacIver (2002) state that to overcome a school climate struggling with low socio-economic issues, it is essential to nurture positive and mutually supportive interpersonal relations at the student-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-administrator, teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-administrator, and parent-to-school levels. Achieve, Inc. (2001) supports that such empowering, interpersonal relations are crucial to student and school improvement; however, struggling schools cannot achieve this on their own; outside assistance is needed. One way to create these supportive, interpersonal relationships is by implementing the school assistance team model (Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997).

The School Assistance Team Model as a Change Agent in Facilitating Positive Change in Low-Performing Schools

As states begin to conceptualize and consider the school assistance team model as a possible avenue to improve low-performing schools, they realize the potential of these teams as 'external change agents' who could serve as facilitators, coaches, mentors and resource providers in schools experiencing instructional challenges. Ginsberg, Johnson, and Moffett (1997) describe the purposes of school support teams [school assistance team] as:

> Powerful catalysts for significant change in our state's public schools. School Support Teams are not intended to monitor or investigate schools. They are intended to encourage schools to consider their own policies, programs, and practices in a manner that results in high-quality decision making about the need to continue, modify, or redirect efforts. School Support Teams are not intended to

provide solutions or answers. Instead, they are expected to help schools grapple with difficulty questions so that their capacity for solving educational problems is increased. School Support Teams are not intended to change schools; rather, they are intended to facilitate change by helping schools initiate and organize their own change efforts.

In order to facilitate positive change in low-performing schools, support or school assistance teams must have an understanding of the educational change process (Fullan, 1993, Fullan & Miles, 1992; Glickman, Hayes & Hensley, 1992). Until educators help to deepen the way they think about change, and effectively understand the change process, successful education initiatives or reform will never be achieved (Fullan & Miles, 1992). The 'old paradigm' for managing change which advocates the traditional virtues of vision, strategic planning, and strong leadership are strong starting points for change; however, the top-down, systems approach to education is not often successful in positive, sustained transformation (Helsby, 1995). Fullan (1993) encourages educators to become agents, rather than victims, of change. In a world that offers no 'silver bullets' to draw upon, the challenge for managing change lies at the institutional and individual level. Meaningful and crucial change can only be effected from within, and this requires developing teachers' generative capacities and transforming schools into learning organizations.

The School Assistance Team Model

In the mid-1990s, the Alabama State Department of Education took steps to move away from the then-current hierarchical bureaucracy, and change the current State

Department of Education's environment of "control and regulations" to an environment of "service and support (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997)" The State Superintendent, Ed Richardson, envisioned the State Department of Education becoming a service organization, facilitating the LEAs' abilities to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement. Through this vision, the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was developed. A major component of the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was the creation of the Alabama School Assistance Teams.

Twenty-six states currently assign a form of external team to assist low-performing schools (NASBE, 2002). According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2000), there is a new focus on the valuable contribution of state assistance to low-performing schools in achieving higher student achievement. In a dissertation study completed at the University of North Carolina, Turner (2002) explored the impact of the school assistance team model in low-performing schools in North Carolina. Results of this study indicated significant agreement that state team intervention was needed in all of the participating schools. Further, teachers agreed that state assistance team core strategies were effective in improving school performance and student achievement.

The Kentucky Highly Skilled Educators programs served 66 schools with direct, intensive assistance in 1999–2000 (SREB, 2000). Kansas' new Quality Performance Accreditation Assistance Cadre is the "first team ever organized by an NEA state affiliate to directly assist struggling public schools" (NEA, 2001, p. 3). Ginsberg (1997) acknowledges school assistance teams as the major factor in the improvement of school success in Texas schools.

Alabama School Assistance Team Structure and Procedures

The stated purpose of Alabama School Assistance Teams is to facilitate and empower the Local Education Agencies to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement (Alabama State Department Director of Classroom Improvement/School Assistance Team Coordinator). Initially, the Alabama State Department of Education envisioned the School Assistance Teams as facilitating all schools in achieving school improvement. However, in response to accountability issues and limited resources, the School Assistance Teams now work only with schools/systems that are not meeting accountability standards at acceptable levels (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997).

Alabama classifies schools/systems based on the level of student performance on standardized tests. This identification system is in accordance with legislation enacted in 1995 mandating the use of nationally norm-referenced tests for student assessment purposes and the implementation of a school and school system classification system (McCloskey, 2001).

Alabama places schools into one of three performance categories: Clear, Caution, and Alert. Both a school's placement and the change in its placement over time determine its eligibility for special assistance. Schools with more than half of their students in stanines 5–9 are classified as Clear. Schools with more than half of their students performing at stanines 1–3 are classified as being on Alert. Schools that fall between these two points are considered to be in Caution status. Alert 1 status schools are schools in the first year of Alert status or schools that performed at the Caution level in the prior year and have failed to adequately improve. Schools earn an Alert 2 designation if they

were classified as Alert 1 during the prior year and failed to move out of Alert status. Schools that fail to move out of Caution status for a second year are also classified as Alert 2. Schools are classified as Alert 3 if after one or two years at the Alert 2 level are not demonstrating satisfactory growth (Mandel, 2000). At the present time, all schools classified as Alert 2 status receive consistent assistance by members (Team Leader, Team Members, and Special Service Teachers) of an Alabama School Assistance Team. Alabama originally established the School Assistance Teams to serve ten geographical regions. These geographical regions are now modified to coincide with the Alabama Regional Inservice Center regions.

Each of the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams adheres to a mission statement that is committed to provide timely, quality service and technical assistance to LEAs to maximize their potential for providing world-class education to Alabama students and ensuring the survival of public schools. In addition, this mission statement includes the following components of service: provide leadership, expertise, and resources to help customers solve their problems; recognize and capitalize on the diversity of schools; deliver on SDE promises to the LEAs; encourage innovation by using imaginations and creativity to deliver quality services; communicate between and within the SDE and LEAs; provide guidance and assistance to meet compliance issues and Public Education System accountability; encourage partnerships with businesses, the community, and parents; increase achievement levels of students attending these schools; and encourage high expectations of LEAs and students to develop and maintain safe and positive learning environments.

The Alabama School Assistance Teams are under the direction of the Director of Classroom Improvement/School Assistance Team Coordination at the Alabama State Department of Education. Each Alabama School Assistance Team is comprised of a Team Leader; Team Members; and Special Service Teachers. Each School Assistance Team is guided by a Team Leader who has been carefully chosen because of her/his skill, knowledge, and commitment to school improvement for all children. Team Leaders have a fair amount of autonomy in allocating and using the various resources at their disposal (Mandel, 2000).

Each Alabama School Assistance Team is comprised of three or more Team Members. These Team Members provide expertise in instructional and administrative functions, child nutrition, teaching practices, assessment, finance, special education, technology, and other areas of need.

In addition to the Team Members, each team includes Special Service Teachers (SSTs) who are assigned to priority schools identified as Alert 2 schools. Alabama SSTs are model classroom teachers who have been nominated by their employing superintendents to serve in this capacity, generally serving for up to three years, and are paid their regular salary plus a $5,000 supplement. The SSTs work closely with classroom teachers on a daily basis in an effort to improve academic achievement. They provide many services and resources, such as presenting workshops on needed content areas, modeling various teaching strategies through demonstration lessons, and providing technical assistance in all areas related to best practice of teaching and learning. Team Members visit the Alert 2 and Alert 3 schools on a weekly basis, offering hands-on

guidance, support and involvement to the principal and faculty, and assist the Special Service Teachers as needed.

While the Alabama School Assistance Teams provide the primary support to these schools, Alert 3 schools may require an additional "intervention" team of two or more educators appointed by the Alabama State Superintendent of Education to provide more intensive assistance. In this situation, the on-site state team assumes control of the school and the state superintendent can choose to unilaterally remove a principal if such an action is necessary to turn the school around. All teachers in Alert 3 schools are also assessed using the state's Professional Employees Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) or similar instrument (Mandel, 2000). Negative evaluations can result in the removal of teachers from Alert 3 schools.

When compared to school assistance team initiatives in other states, the Alabama School Assistance Team model appears to be serving more LEA sites with less funding. According to the SREB (2000), the "Kentucky Highly Skilled Educators program was funded at $6.2 million and served 66 schools with direct, intensive assistance in 1999–2000" (p. 10). "North Carolina's Assistance Team program provided 55 schools direct assistance with a total of $7 million in 1999–2000" (p. 10). Mandel (2000) states that the Alabama School Assistance Teams are "allocated $6 million on an annual basis" (p. 18). Alabama School Assistance Teams serve approximately 153 schools with a $6 million allocation.

Statement of the Problem

The Alabama State Board of Education has implemented the Alabama School Assistance Team model as a practical, effective method to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools. However, the concept of increasing student achievement through the use of school assistance teams is controversial. While many school systems, including ones in North Carolina and Kentucky, have documentation of student/school success through the efforts of an assistance team, many other schools/systems are skeptical. In his book, *Victory in Our Schools We Can Give Our Children Excellent Public Education,* John Stanford (1999), Superintendent of Seattle City Schools, stated that true support and help must come from within the school system culture because school assistance teams developed by the state department are "too far removed … are not accepted or trusted in the individual school cultures" (p. 79). There are many factors or barriers, including gaining the acceptance and trust of school systems, which can prevent assistance teams from having the powerful contribution that they may be capable of producing.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the national recognition and urgency about the need to provide assistance in improving low-performing schools, little professional literature has been written on strategies to accomplish this goal. The purpose of this study was to collect and examine the varied perspectives of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel, LEA personnel and LEA community members regarding the most important barriers that prevented the Alabama School Assistance Team from being effective in its school improvement efforts.

It is part of a broader study that examined their role, effectiveness, and the factors that facilitated their success. The research question examined was: What were the perceived barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team's school improvement efforts?

Methodology

Data Collection

Four sources of data were used in this study. The first data source included a series of in-depth interviews with the eight Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders. The second source consisted of in-depth interviews and focus groups that included the Team Leader; Team Members; Special Service Teachers; and school personnel and community members from the LEA served by this team. The third data set included observations and fieldnotes. A variety of approximately 200 documents provided through the Alabama State Department of Education comprised the fourth set of data. These documents included memoranda, reports, notes and letters from LEA personnel, and team newsletters.

Eighteen individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted, each ranging from 45 to 70 minutes in length. Open-ended questions were used in each interview. The interviews explored the role of the Alabama School Assistance Teams, effectiveness in terms of perceived outcomes that resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams, perceived facilitating factors that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Teams to promote school improvement, and barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team's ability to promote school improvement.

Individual and focus group interviews ranged from 45 to 70 minutes in length with open-ended questions that explored the barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Team in promoting school improvement. The questions used in each interview to address barriers included:

1. What is your specific role within the School Assistance Team?
2. What factors serve as barriers at the school level?
3. What factors serve as barriers at the system level?
4. What factors serve as barriers at the state level?
5. What do you perceive/identify as barriers that prevent the School Assistance Team from promoting change?

Data Analysis

Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. The interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents and other materials were then organized, broken down into manageable units, synthesized, organized into themes, and placed into code categories, as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). For example, replies from the respondents quickly fell into code categories, such as socio-economic problems, difficulties with relationships, and complications with resistant attitudes. The documents were hand-coded for key phrases, descriptors, and explanations, according to the code categories. In addition to the hand-coding process, all interviews and fieldnotes (Microsoft Word documents) were imported into the Atlas.ti qualitative analytical computer software.

Barriers to School Assistance Teams' Success in School Improvement

Participants perceived five barriers to School Assistance Team success. These barriers were: socio-economic issues; resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted; relational difficulties; program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; and State Department of Education reports and mandates. These barriers are described in the sections that follow.

Socio-Economic Issues

Findings indicate that the greatest barrier to the effectiveness of the Alabama School Assistance Team was the impact of socio-economic factors on student learning. All ASAT leaders and members acknowledged socio-economic issues as the first and largest hurdle that low-performing schools/systems must overcome as they struggle to improve student and school performance. Among these socio-economic issues were the limited resources of the school and community and the people's beliefs about the impact of poverty on the students. An ASAT leader commented, "These schools are already fighting an uphill battle … they don't have the resources, the advantages, the support that other, more affluent, schools have." Members of the ASAT supported this concern, identifying socio-economic issues including students having limited educational experiences (reading together at home, visiting libraries), opportunities, and resources for students attending low-performing schools.

All LEA personnel respondents also voiced the issue of the low-socioeconomic status of communities and students as the strongest barrier to student/school achievement and improvement.. An LEA central office personnel participant offered:

> The biggest challenge to overcome problems and improve school improvement is socio-economics. Socio-economics is the major issue. Remember that these schools are in depressed areas … these people just do not have the same opportunities and 'things taken for granted' that other schools do. Most of the kids have had no exposure to reading … how can their parents read aloud to them when they can't read THEMSELVES? These kids don't come to school with experiences that other kids take for granted.
>
> Socio-economics impact in ways that many people cannot understand. How important is reading to your kid if you can't even put food on the table? How important is a library card if you don't have a car to get there? Schooling doesn't seem quite such a high priority when you are worried about finding enough food and figuring out how to find money to cover basic needs such as electricity and water.

Despite the overwhelming challenges that socio-economic issues present in students' personal lives, socio-economic issues also present huge challenges to the schools/systems responsible for providing a quality education for these children. These schools/systems must not only work with what they perceive as insufficient experiences these students bring to the school setting, but they must also provide educational experiences with the same expectations, assessment, and accountability standards as schools/systems from higher socio-economic areas with fewer resources. An LEA central office personnel respondent voiced concern regarding assessment/accountability standards by stating:

> Certainly SAT scores must be a strong assessment tool of school progress/ improvement, but there must be other factors that contribute to the final decision … kids in poor areas JUST ARE NOT GOING TO TEST as well as kids from higher socio-economic areas.

LEA teachers and an LEA principal expressed frustration regarding the expectations, assessment, and accountability standards that were held equally for all schools, despite socio-economic differences. An LEA principal commented:

> I understand that there must be benchmarks /standards/accountability…but, you know, I wonder if it's really fair. I mean, _____ [school system] students don't bring the same things to the table as do students from _____ [school system]. Lots of our students' parents just got laid off from _____ [company/employer] … how important can school work be when you are worrying about your parents and money? I know that _____ [school system] students have worries too … problems that worry them as much as my students … but they are different. Is it really fair to have the same benchmarks?

LEA personnel stated that socio-economic issues impacted everything regarding the student and the school experience: personal life, mindset and goals, parental support, resources, hiring and retaining competent administration and teachers, morale, and physical attractiveness of the school environment,

Schools/systems in low socio-economic areas must face the additional challenge of providing and retaining competent administration and teachers. An LEA principal voiced these same concerns, adding unique challenges that socio-economics create in basic school concerns: "All these factors come into play … even hiring teachers is not

easy. This isn't the easiest school to teach in … many teachers leave if they get the chance. And new teachers … this school wouldn't be their first choice."

LEA teachers supported the stated socio-economic concerns, adding other factors as low morale [students, teachers, and administration], low parental support, less resources and opportunities. Two LEA teachers stressed the impact of socio-economic issues on the mindset and goals of the LEA students by stating, "Our students are great … but they have different goals than, like ____ [school system] students. There aren't a lot of students planning on going to college … it's just a different mindset."

Resistant Attitudes of LEA Personnel Being Assisted

The second most important perceived barrier that hindered the success of the Alabama School Assistance Team model in being effective in school improvement efforts was the resistant attitudes of the LEA personnel being assisted by an Alabama School Assistance Team. These resistant attitudes were reported in two forms: (1) the initial mistrust, defensive stance, and low morale of LEA personnel; and (2) resistance of ASAT's improvement efforts by LEA personnel.

Initial Mistrust, Defensive Stance, and Low Morale of LEA Personnel

ASAT leaders, members, and SSTs explained that a "mistrust of the Alabama School Assistance Team is always present" (ASAT leaders, members, SSTs) when a team first attempts to support a struggling school. This initial mistrust, as described by ASAT personnel, is usually manifested in a defensive stance, cautiousness, or hesitation of LEA personnel when working with the ASAT personnel. "You can see in their faces that they don't trust us," stated one ASAT member.

The ASAT personnel appear to understand that this initial mistrust and defensive stance is "a natural reaction to an outside group coming in to offer help" (ASAT leaders, members, SSTs). In addition, ASAT personnel commented that schools receiving assistance [from ASATs] have been struggling for some time … low confidence, low morale, and low expectations among the LEA personnel and students are common.

In attempt to facilitate trust and break through initial defensive stances, the ASAT personnel often include "local practitioners": teachers and administrators of the school system being served. While this attempt is successful in some situations, this action can produce "rivalry and one-up-manship among the 'previous colleagues-turned-ASAT-personnel' and LEA personnel'" (ASAT team leader). Sometimes these teachers and administrators are "no longer viewed as _____ [school system] personnel…they are now viewed as 'State Ladies or State Gentlemen'" (ASAT leader, members, SSTs).

LEA personnel recognize that this initial mistrust and defensive stance is not only present, but is also projected whenever an ASAT first comes into the schools to offer support and assistance. One LEA central office personnel participant commented about the acceptance of the ASAT personnel [SST], the power of the Alabama State Department of Education, and how this power is often feared by schools that are struggling:

> Just the fact that the SST is 'one of those people' will be a tough wall to tear down. Even though the Alabama State Department of Education has done wonderful things, there will be a fear of the ASAT [personnel] by the schools being assisted. These low-performing schools aren't being rewarded

here…they're getting HELP from the ASDE…the ASDE is 'King', and as such, they have the capability of making 'heads roll'…

An LEA principal addressed the low morale/low confidence issue of the LEA personnel by stating:

> You see, the person from the state department that comes in the most — that is usually a SST— has to be really, really good with people … they have to have really good people skills. You see, schools can be very cautious and suspicious … they — the students and teachers — have usually been given a hard time, and they don't trust very easily. They won't trust someone coming in 'just like that'.

LEA teachers also acknowledged an initial mistrust of the ASAT and defensive stance projected at ASAT school improvement efforts. One LEA teacher stated "I just don't trust them [ASAT personnel] … I'm the teacher here, not them! How do they know what is best for me and my kids?" Another LEA teacher commented:

> I don't trust the state department at all! They just come in, tell me what to do when they don't know anything about me, how I teach, my students, or the school. Or the community. They think they have all the answers … but it's not that easy.

Resistance of Alabama School Assistance Team's Improvement Efforts by LEA Personnel

In addition to resistant attitudes when the ASAT began its efforts, there was also resistance to developing school improvement efforts as the team continued its work. Resistance of ASAT's support efforts can render school improvement impossible (ASAT Leader). ASAT personnel expressed concern regarding the "brick walls encountered whenever suggestions and help were offered" (ASAT leaders, members, SSTs). LEA

teachers and personnel would "play along, but not buy into" school improvement efforts. Even more challenging, other resistant actions included ASAT personnel being undermined by administration, and ASAT personnel being asked to leave classes by teachers (ASAT leader, members, SSTs). Such demonstrations of resistance to ASAT school improvement efforts by LEA personnel were documented in ASAT newsletters. One such documentation stated:

> Of the 10 Alert 2 schools in which Team ___ has been working this year, this school has been one of our greatest challenges. The SSTs assigned to this school…have encountered great resistance from faculty and staff in a school where the students have had strong control, and school wide events such as the honors day assembly have been punctuated by activities like 'booing' the honorees. Our personnel have intermittently been undermined by the administration, asked to leave classes by teachers, and unjustly maligned in an article which appeared in the _____ County Education Association newsletter (a counselor at this school is the president of this association). (Alabama State Department of Education Documents/Team Newsletter)

This resistance to ASAT school improvement efforts by LEA personnel was acknowledged by LEA teachers. While only a few LEA teachers were resistant to ASAT efforts (a majority of LEA teachers were very supportive of ASAT personnel), the teachers that were resistant made school improvement gains extremely difficult. Some teachers would not openly resist improvement efforts, but would not follow through on suggestions and help offered by the ASAT personnel. One teacher commented, "I'll be good and listen to them [ASAT personnel], but I'm not going to do what they say." Other

teachers were vocal about their refusal to work with ASAT personnel, and made comments such as "I'm not going to do what they say, and I'll tell them so" and "I'm just not going to do anything."

LEA central office personnel acknowledged resistance to ASAT school improvement efforts by LEA personnel, but did not condone or support such resistant/ noncompliant actions.

Relational Difficulties

Relational difficulties were perceived by respondents as a third barrier that hindered the capacity of the Alabama School Assistant Team to promote change in low-performing schools. Within the context of this study, relational difficulties were defined as difficulties in the relating, communicating, teamwork, and "connecting" skills of the stakeholders involved. Relational difficulties also included personality and "people skills."

Both ASAT and LEA personnel acknowledged the negative impact of relational difficulties on student and school improvement initiatives. "Without a genuine working relationship between the school assistance team and the LEAs, no true gains will be made, " stated an ASAT leader. The importance of the development of a working relationship was supported by an LEA teacher when she stated, "I know that I can be really defensive and nontrusting, but they [ASAT personnel] have to earn my trust first, you know? The kids' trust too. Don't just come in, stand over my shoulder, and tell me what to do."

LEA personnel would not accept school improvement efforts of the ASAT and develop a working relationship if the ASAT personnel were perceived in the following ways:

- Not understanding background, history, and dynamics of school, students, personnel, and community before attempting school improvement efforts
- Cold, arrogant attitude
- "Seem to know everything"
- Attempt school improvement efforts without first respecting voice of LEA personnel and fostering a collaborative partnership with teachers, and administration
- Viewing the school and students as a "project"; not conveying genuine concern and caring
- Harsh, military manner of implementing school improvement initiatives (LEA personnel).

An LEA administrator expressed concern over negative relational issues between ASAT personnel and LEA personnel, stating that "it is up to the ASAT personnel to be the leaders in developing a positive working relationship." He further said,

> The ASDE can't come in and be harsh and hard core…dispensing hard and fast medication. The ASDE has to give the 'shot' [assistance, suggestions from SSTs, ect.] GENTLY. Give the suggestions after a lot of acceptance and appreciation for the good things the teachers/school is doing. It's like giving a 'shot': if you pound the medicine [support, suggestions] in too fast and harsh, that muscle [the

acceptance, working relationship, of the LEA personnel/school] is just going to tighten up and resist.

Similarly, an LEA principal expressed the importance of ASAT personnel being 'the first' to initiate positive relationships. This principal shook his head at the difficulty of this challenge, stating "The ASAT people, the SSTs, must almost use a backdoor technique: not be all in their face and almighty."

ASAT personnel appeared to understand and accept that relational difficulties "were part of the challenge" (ASAT members) of school improvement efforts. An ASAT leader explained the following strategies that her team implemented to facilitate trust-building and partnership development between ASAT and LEA personnel:

> Trust-building is crucial to the success of the assistance team to be able to make a difference, and this trust-building depends on the people skills and personality of the SST. The SST is very careful to establish and begin building this trust. What is seen, what is observed will be held in confidence — the SST will not tell the principal, or other LEA personnel what she/he sees or observes. Once the trust is there, the classroom teacher will 'buy in', and progress and improvement is possible.
>
> We always use our "80/20 Rule" (or a "spoonful of sugar"): SSTs must give 80% praise and 20% constructive suggestions. The SST must make sure that any constructive suggestions are given with a lot of praise — the teachers being assisted are very vulnerable. The teachers must be assured that they are doing a lot of things correctly. The SST must have a genuinely nice and caring personality. Often, it is encouraged for educational leaders to be assertive and

> confident — this is true; however, if the SST is too assertive and overly confident, the classroom teacher will not 'open up' or trust them. The classroom teacher will TOLERATE the SST, but will not open up. The classroom teacher must see the genuine caring attitude and concern of the SST. Once the trust is there, the classroom teacher will 'buy in', and progress and improvement is possible. Again, for the success in improvement of the LEA, the SAT must have good SST's: they must have good practitioner skills; but more importantly, good people skills, and a genuine, committed, caring personality.

LEA central office personnel appeared to associate the importance of people skills and the development of a working relationship between ASAT personnel and LEA personnel. One LEA central office respondent stated,

> The ASAT person(s) must be really great with people skills. They can't be cold, arrogant, or 'seem to know everything.' It would really help if they could convey to us that they really care. Too often, they just come in, do something, then leave. We don't feel that they care about us. Come to us knowing something about us first — then maybe we can begin to trust you.

Program Structure of the Alabama School Assistance Team

The fourth barrier impeding school improvement efforts initiated by the Alabama School Assistance Team was the program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Team. Barriers connected to the program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Team included (1) inconsistency of Special Service Teacher (SST) placement within an LEA site, and (2) lack of funding.

Inconsistency of Special Service Teacher (SST) Placement Within an LEA Site

Due to varying circumstances, sometimes the placement of an SST was changed from one LEA site to another site. Usually this change was made because of funding constraints, or because of the need of a specific SST's skills in another LEA site. Occasionally, a particular LEA site would prove to be especially challenging in school improvement efforts, and SST placements were changed in an attempt to provide the best teamwork opportunities for both the SST and the LEA site (ASAT leader). Changing LEA placement sites of SSTs appeared to be distressing to participating LEA sites in the following ways:

- damaging to school improvement efforts if SST leaves after one year: every year brings a different SST, different rules, different requirements;
- difficult for LEA teachers to bond with new SSTs — not all teachers can "start over" developing a working relationship with multiple SSTs.

Voicing the challenges presented by this barrier, an LEA central office respondent stated:

> I know that the state department has to make decisions based on their information, but — it would really help if they could keep the same special service teacher in place for more than one year. We had an excellent special service teacher that really bonded with us … but they [State Department of Education] changed it. That really hurt our school improvement efforts.

An LEA teacher stated,

> But we usually only keep an SST only one year — that really hurts. You just develop a really good relationship, then it's over, you know? It does bother me, but my personality is the type that I AM going to be able to develop a working

> relationship with the next SST — that's just the way I am. But I know a lot of teachers aren't the same way I am — they may finally develop a good working relationship with an SST, but when that SST leaves, that teacher is not going to 'open herself/himself up' to getting close to another SST.

Another LEA teacher commented,

> I know that they [SSTs] are trying, but I just haven't gotten into a good working relationship with the one [SST] that comes out here now. Well, they change them every year! Every year. It's a different person, different rules, and different things that they want us to do. And how's that supposed to help anything? Everything's always changed around!

Lack of Funding

Funding issues was a common response as a barrier; however, no comments or suggestions were offered as to how this barrier could be resolved. This barrier appeared to be viewed by the respondents as impacting the effectiveness of the school assistance team initiative, but it "was just a fact of life." Inconsistent funding promoted the following difficulties:

- inadequate number of personnel on Alabama School Assistance Teams;
- inadequate Alabama School Assistance Team personnel with the needed expertise to the LEA sites in need (SSTs attempting to provide assistance "out of their subject area" are not going to be as effective);
- inadequate time in the LEA sites for the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel to facilitate genuine school improvement; and the

- inability to assign a SST to a specific LEA site for longer than one year, if needed (ASAT leader, ASAT members).

State Department of Education Reports and Mandates

The fifth perceived barrier hindering the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Team in being successful in school improvement efforts included concerns regarding the State Department of Education reports and mandates. Concerns within this barrier included consequences resulting from State Department of Education reports and mandates: labeling of low-performing schools, improvement gains "just missing the bottom line" not being recognized, and enforced paperwork and change.

Labeling of Low-Performing Schools

Information to the public regarding school progress is crucial; yet "labeling schools" can be very negative, both to student/school morale and student/school improvement (NASBE, 2002). An LEA principal supported this statement in his comments:

> I know that maybe things have to be put on T.V. and newspapers, but it really, really hurts to be labeled a school that's not making it. The students take this to heart. How can we improve if we are put down first? The students really feel inferior to other schools. We played a basketball game with _____ [a school not identified as low-performing] the other night — we beat them, but it didn't matter. Parents and students from _____ were making comments like 'Well, they maybe beat us in sports, but they can't do anything academically.' That really, really hurts my students — they never forget that.

An LEA teacher made a similar observation stating, “How are they [students] supposed to improve if they are living under a ‘dumb label’?”

Experience has shown that publicity [public announcement of schools receiving a low-performing label] can do a great deal to spur school improvement, even without further action by the state (Achieve, Inc., 2001). Other educational organizations view the effect of receiving a low-performing label from a different perspective. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2002), “labeling schools as low-performing compounds the difficulties in school improvement by creating a culture of pessimism that makes far-reaching reform difficult” (p. 8).

Improvement Gains “Just Missing the Bottom Line”

As state departments of education respond to NCLB mandates in implementing accountability systems and standards, certain levels of achievement must be achieved by students and school systems (NASBE, 2002). However, “just missing the bottom line” can be devastating to students and schools struggling to achieve performance standards. One LEA central office respondent said,

> I know that the State Department of Education has to look at the ‘bottom line,’ but it does hurt when we see how much improvement has been made — we’ve made tremendous progress — but it falls just short of ‘the line.’ Then it’s as if we made no progress at all.

ASAT personnel recognized this barrier, and were very sensitive to recognize and celebrate all improvement gains. However; “just missing the mark” was painful to ASAT personnel as well. In a memorandum directed to ASAT personnel, an ASAT Leader stated,

_____County High School was actually quite close to remaining Alert 2. We are all heartsick that both that school and _____[school] slipped to Alert 3, but we will redouble our efforts during _____[year]. As you can see, we again have challenges, but, we can meet them! (Alabama State Department Documents/Team Memorandum)

Enforced Paperwork and Change

Mandated changes and paperwork from the State Department of Education to LEA schools being assisted was another component within this barrier. An LEA central office respondent stated, "I know we need to follow rules and regulations — this is important to school and student improvement. But forcing change and new paperwork on us all the time just doesn't help." LEA teachers commented on mandated changes and rules causing frustration as the school attempted student/school improvement efforts.

Documentation from ASAT communication supported the challenge of excessive paperwork. An ASAT memorandum addressed excessive paperwork, stating "We must be willing to do whatever is necessary to alleviate this problem [excessive paperwork]. Teaching and learning are being adversely affected by this problem." (Alabama State Department of Education documents/ASAT memorandum)

Discussion and Implementations

This study identified five perceived barriers that hindered the Alabama School Assistance Teams' effectiveness in creating school improvement in identified Alabama schools, as perceived by the stakeholders involved: the Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Members, SSTs, LEA personnel and community members. These barriers

included socio-economic issues; resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted; relational difficulties; program structure of the Alabama School Assistance Teams; and State Department of Education reports and mandates. These five barriers may be grouped into categories of socio-economics, attitudes, relationships, and structures. These categories are distinct groups; yet they are interrelated and connected, as depicted in the figure below.

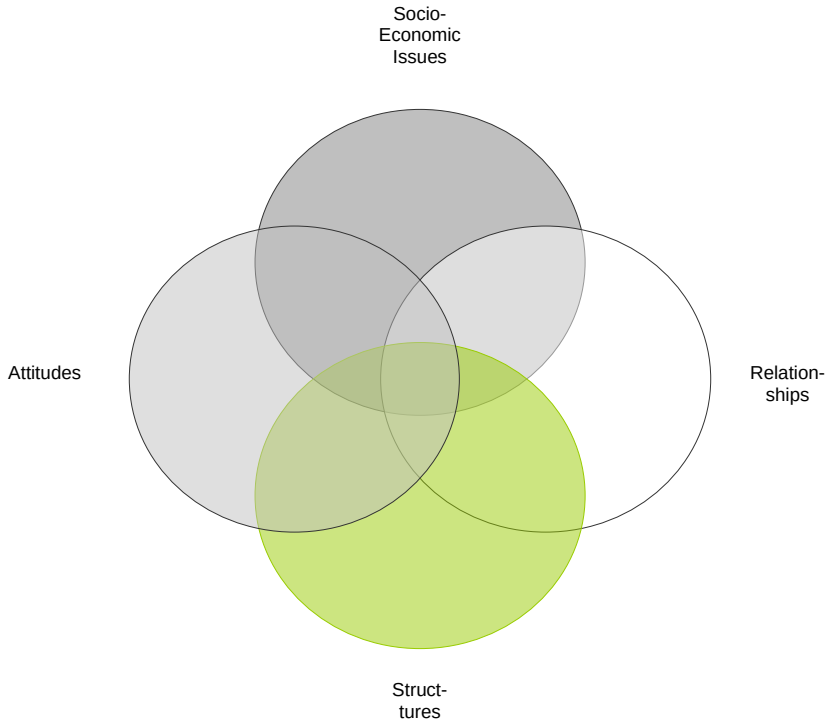

Figure 4. Barrier Categories Hindering the Effectiveness of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in School Improvement Efforts

Each of these barrier categories will be explored in the following sections. Actions and strategies implemented by the school assistance team to overcome the barriers included in these categories are offered.

Socio-Economic Issues

Research date revealed two issues resulting from low socio-economic factors impacting on student achievement and school improvement: (1). Limited resources of school and community, and (2) defeated attitudes promoted by low-socioeconomic issues.

Limited Resources of School and Community

As documented by ASAT and LEA personnel, schools serving communities plagued by low socio-economic conditions do not have the resources, advantages, and support that other, more affluent schools possess. ASAT personnel recognized the negative impact that reduced resources, materials, and services placed on the morale and educational readiness of students. ASAT personnel voiced agreement with current educational strategies to strengthen school and community resources that included the research, development, and implementation of special grants, programs, and partnerships that would provide support, materials, and services to the students, school, and community. ASAT personnel encouraged the state department of education (SDE) to consider special provisions in the area of recruiting and retaining quality teachers, especially to struggling schools that are being assisted by ASAT personnel. On-going professional development for teachers in low-performing schools was sought. Pilot partnerships with university colleges of education were considered, realizing that the colleges of education could assist in school improvement efforts as well as provide

ongoing research/assessment on partnerships and improvement initiatives. ASAT personnel discussed the advantage of visiting university classes to discuss teaching and learning in low-performing schools, and seeking placement opportunities for Laboratory Experience and Internship students in LEAs being assisted.

Defeated Attitudes Promoted by Low-socioeconomic Challenges

While limited resources of school and community is often considered the first, and most tangible, impact of low socio-economics, data appeared to suggest that the defeated attitudes promoted by low-socioeconomic challenges presented a major obstacle to overcome. As illustrated in data results depicted earlier, schools, school personnel, community members, parents and students often develop a defeated attitude when struggling with the challenges that low socio-economic issues bring to school improvement initiatives. Concern over jobs, finances, and many other immediate problems often pushes the need for genuine educational commitment and support to the background. Since Rosenthal and Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968), numerous researchers have examined the hypothesis that a teacher's expectations of how a student will perform influence that student's performance (e.g., low teacher expectations lead to low student performance regardless of the student's actual ability) (Land & Legters, 2002). Teachers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often expect the students to perform poorly, due to the many challenges these students face (Kozol, 1991; Land & Legters, 2002; National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002). A deepening understanding of this "low-expectations" risk by the teachers and communities that serve these students is crucial, for these schools, teachers,

and communities are the most obvious sites of intervention for educational improvement (Land & Legters, 2002).

Studies of high-poverty, high achieving schools document that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds can and do achieve economic success (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002). Specific attitudes and practices adopted by teachers, schools, and communities that foster student success include: teachers setting high expectations for every student and not accepting excuses for failure; teachers altering their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students; teachers creating an environment of mutual respect and understanding; teachers using data (formative assessments) to guide instruction; and teachers collaborating with teachers/staff within and across departments and grade levels regarding academic goals and strategies (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002). Teachers, especially those from low-performing, high-poverty schools, often do not fully recognize these practices and attitudes, much less know how to implement them into their classrooms. Outside assistance is often needed to help identify challenges, provide guidance, and help develop solutions (Achieve, 2001).

The Alabama School Assistance Teams provided the foundation for empowering teachers to recognize and adopt positive attitudes and practices in their classrooms. In facing and combating the challenge of defeated attitudes promoted by low socioeconomic factors, the ASAT personnel implemented several strategies. As a starting point for collaboration on recognizing/adopting positive attitudes and practices, ASAT personnel conveyed personal interest and concern for the best welfare of the LEA students, personnel, and the future of the school. As was stated by ASAT personnel, “People don’t

care how much you know until they know how much you care". The ASAT personnel conveyed a sincere desire to work with the LEA personnel as a unified team in school improvement efforts. Together, LEA personnel and ASAT personnel discussed the background, history, challenges and dynamics of the students, personnel, school, and community, championing the educational successes and initiatives. ASAT personnel suggested/modeled positive learning/teaching strategies while gathering and valuing LEA personnel ideas and perspectives on best ways to facilitate student and school performance. Together, LEA personnel and ASAT personnel collaborated on planning and decision-making. ASAT personnel facilitated the development of a school improvement plan, ensuring that this plan included short-term goals that were easily measured, attainable, and celebrated. All achievements, large and small, were recognized and celebrated.

Resistant Attitudes

Resistant attitudes of LEA personnel being assisted often hindered the ASAT efforts in school improvement initiatives. These resistant attitudes were reported in two forms: (1) the initial mistrust, defensive stance, and low morale of LEA personnel; and (2) resistance of ASAT's improvement efforts by LEA personnel.

School improvement initiatives are commonly met with distrust and "resistance," described as intransigence, entrenchment, fearfulness, reluctance to buy in, complacency, unwillingness to alter behaviors, and failure to recognize the need for change (Fullan & Miles, 1992). These traits are usually attributed to teachers and staff members. Fullan and Miles (1992) warn that these 'resistant' attitudes and behaviors must be understood as natural responses to transition. During transitions from a familiar to a new state of affairs,

individuals must normally confront the loss of the old and commit themselves to the new. Individuals must unlearn old beliefs and behaviors and learn new ones and move from anxiousness and uncertainty to stabilization and coherence. To achieve significant change, a period of intense personal and organizational learning and problem-solving must be successfully forged. "People need support for such work, not displays of impatience" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 748).

Successful change includes an understanding of resistance and an appreciation for risk-taking. Anxiety, difficulties, and uncertainty are intrinsic to all successful change. Fullan and Miles (1992) encourage change agents to facilitate a climate where risk-taking is encouraged and 'safe.' "People will not venture into uncertainty unless there is an appreciation that difficulties encountered are a natural part of the process. And if people do not venture into uncertainty, no significant change will occur" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 749).

ASAT personnel utilized certain steps and strategies to overcome the initial mistrust and resistance of the LEA personnel when school improvement initiatives were first implemented. Understanding that it is a natural response for LEA personnel to be defensive and untrusting of ASAT assistance, ASAT personnel diligently sought ways to develop trust and facilitate morale. Before starting the assistance program, ASAT personnel become knowledgeable of the LEA site, students, personnel, and community. ASAT personnel reassured LEA personnel that the ASAT was there to join in the improvement of student and school progress, not to make judgments or criticisms. ASAT personnel recognized and acknowledged areas that the LEA personnel/teachers were already handling in a positive and effective way. The ASAT personnel "listened, listened,

and listened," knowing that LEA personnel needed to first "vent" negative feelings before teamwork trust and collaboration could begin. Ideas and perspectives regarding effective student learning from the LEA teachers/staff were valued and implemented into groundwork improvement plans and decisions. When suggesting new teaching strategies, the ASAT personnel implemented the "80/20 Rule": 80% praise and 20% constructive suggestions. The ASAT personnel provided a "safe environment" for the LEA personnel to step out and try new teaching strategies, without the threat of failure or criticism. The ASAT immersed themselves in the classroom activities and the interaction with students; they did not merely "sit back and observe from a distance."

The ASAT personnel suggested further strategies that would be helpful in overcoming LEA resistance in school improvement initiatives. It would be very advantageous to arrange a "Welcoming Party" at the beginning of an assistance initiative to help ASAT personnel gain acceptance in the school culture. LEA central office personnel and principal should be aware that LEA teachers will be more receptive and trusting of the assistance team if the LEA central office and school principal FIRST demonstrate trust and commitment to both the ASAT and improvement efforts. This support will go far to dispel the common reaction of "The State Department in coming in…just do what needs to be done and endure."

Relationships

The third barrier category, relationships, encompasses difficulties in the relating, communicating, teamwork, and 'connecting' skills of the stakeholders involved: ASAT personnel and LEA personnel. Relational difficulties also included personality and "people skills." Management of successful change proceeds best when it is carried out

by a *cross-role group* (administration, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders) (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Learning to trust one another, work with one another, and problem-solve together takes time, patience, and effort. External support can be a strong catalyst of crucial support and empowerment; however, Fullan and Miles (1997) also suggest that sustained, successful change efforts are most likely when the local support (i.e., a district office, community) is closely engaged with the changing school to provide continued collaboration and empowerment.

The ASAT personnel and LEA personnel did not forge an easy initial path in building a working partnership. Personalities, people-skills, expectations, trust, and problem-solving abilities threatened to nullify any positive gains sought by the school assistance team initiative. ASAT personnel had to facilitate LEA personnel in how to collaborate together and work collectively toward student and school improvement. ASAT personnel also were very aware that 'pockets of success' were not enough; while they were pleased with the successes in empowering the teachers and students, the LEA personnel would have to learn how to continually gather collaborative support from the community and district office to produce positive, sustained change.

Structures

The final barrier category, structures, includes challenges resulting from decisions mandated by the Alabama State Department of Education (i.e., Special Service Teacher assignment within an LEA site; reports and mandates; labeling of low-performing schools; improvement gains "just missing the bottom line" not being recognized; and enforced paperwork and change), as well as issues impacting the decisions of the Alabama State Department of Education (i.e., lack of funding). Fullan and Miles (1997)

offer that education reform is as much a political as an educational process, and this reality has both negative and positive aspects. Political timelines are often at a variance with the timelines for education reform, resulting in vague goals, unrealistic schedules, a preoccupation with symbols of reform (i.e., new legislation, task forces, commissions), and shifting priorities as political pressures intensify and ease. Bolman and Deal (1999) state that symbols are essential for success – they crystallize images and attract/generate political power and financial resources. Symbols can also provide personal and collective meaning and give people faith and confidence when they are facing unclear goals and complex situations. Symbols are essential for galvanizing visions, acquiring resources and carrying out concerted action. When symbols and substance (true support and change) are congruent, the combination is powerful. However, Fullan and Miles (1997) argue, reform often fails because politics often favors 'symbols over substance.' Substantial change in real-life situations requires a lot of hard and sustained work, not quick promises and "Band-Aids." After several experiences with the preference of symbolic change over substantive change, people become very cynical and opposed to new change initiatives. Fullan and Miles (1997) conclude that symbolic change does not have to be without substance; the best examples of effective symbols are grounded in rituals, ceremonies, and other events in the daily life of an organization.

Findings included data supporting the frustration of LEA personnel fearing the decisions and "Band-Aids" mandated by the Alabama State Department of Education. LEA personnel feared the support offered by the ASAT was merely a symbol; true support, help, and empowerment would not materialize. Recognition of gains made by the students and school; respecting the need for a particular SST to remain at an LEA

instead of being reassigned; utilizing the suggestions and voice of the LEA personnel and students were all ways in which the ASAT/Alabama State Department of Education could attempt to prove that the symbols they offered provided true substance.

Further Research

This study is a first step in raising issues about improving low-achieving schools through the implementation of school assistance teams in Alabama. Further research into the value of the school assistance team model within Alabama and in all states incorporating this approach should be conducted. Low-performing schools are often schools with limited resources and great student needs (NEA, 2001). It is the responsibility of each state to assure that these schools receive the assistance they need so that each child can reach their full potential (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002).

Other research considerations include further investigation with the team personnel in the case study assistance team to explore: (a) factors that enabled these participants to create such a powerful team; (b) factors that enabled this case study assistance team to gain acceptance in the LEAs they served; and (c) strategies this case study assistance team employed to foster a partnership relationship with the LEA personnel.

Conclusion

Despite the many barriers that often hinder the Alabama School Assistance Teams' efforts, the work to support schools in improving student and school

improvement must continue. LEA personnel respondents expressed the crucial importance of "continuing the battle for the children," by stressing:

> Other schools and other communities and other families might have 'more.' But give me a child with a strong determination and attitude — a child's determination and attitude is more important than material advantages any day. Yet, sometimes the teacher has to help instill this strong determination and attitude in the child … we may be the only person that this child has to provide this encouragement. We will always have children in our schools who do not have the same advantages, resources, and experiences as other children. .. but these children still possess a BRAIN and a future, as does any child. We owe our children the best education possible … NO MATTER WHAT.

In support of 'continuing the battle for the children' in the face of socio-economic issues and other barriers, and LEA central office personnel participant stressed the importance of the efforts of the ASAT:

> The School Assistance Team model is a good investment to school improvement. Definitely, yes! They have worked their hearts out. There are so many challenges facing our schools, but the empowerment and encouragement that the Alabama School Assistance Team provides can make all the difference!

As each state responds to No Child Left Behind mandates and explores strategies to improve low-performing schools, serious consideration should be given to the school assistance team model. State/school assistance teams provide the leadership and the guided training that low-performing schools desperately need (Turner, 2002). This intervention strategy appears to be a cost-effective and powerful method for aiding low-

performing schools in Alabama, and may prove to be one catalyst for motivation in the improvement of low-performing schools and providing a quality education for all children a reality. While the findings in this study may not be generalizable to other settings, considering them may be helpful to other states implementing the school assistance team model in improving student and school improvement, especially in low-performing schools. It is also hoped that these findings can assist in developing a knowledge base in how to improve identified low-performing schools through the implementation of school assistance teams.

FACTORS THAT FACILITATED THE CAPACITY OF AN ALABAMA SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM TO PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE IN A LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL

Abstract

This study investigated the perceived factors that enabled an Alabama School Assistance Team to be effective in helping improve a low performing school. A case study was conducted with the Alabama School Assistance Teams and a Local Education Agency (LEA) site served by them. Data were collected from interviews, documents and observations. The perceptions explored in this study were those of the Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders, Team Members, LEA personnel, and community members. Findings indicate that the most prominent factor in enabling the Alabama School Assistance Team to be successful was consistent, effective leadership. Other important perceived facilitating factors included: commitment and dedication of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel; and relational skills/personalities of Alabama School Assistance Team personnel.

Introduction

The U.S. Congress has committed itself legislatively to building a rigorous public education system that fosters success for all children. This commitment has most recently

been reflected in the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 2001) – commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This legislation contains two main components that directly affect student achievement and low-performing schools. The first component specifies that states must adopt a single statewide system to document that all students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) over a twelve month period. The second specifies that school districts must ensure that research-based technical assistance is provided to schools that fail to meet their AYP goals for two consecutive years (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). While NCLB legislation mandates that each state must provide state assistance to low-performing schools, there is flexibility in the intervention strategies that states may implement in doing so (NASBE, 2002).

Partially due to the passage of NCLB, states are displaying a new interest in assisting low-performing schools to improve achievement (Southern Regional Education Board 2000, NASBE 2002). Many strategies are being implemented to assist schools to improve. A major issue in assuring that these strategies create successful schools is fostering their capacity to change so that all children will learn at high levels of achievement. This requires that school personnel have a thorough understanding of the change process (Fullan, 1993, Fullan & Miles, 1992; Glickman, Hayes & Hensley, 1992).

School Improvement and the Educational Change Process

True reform in low-performing schools will never be achieved until there is a significant increase in the number of people – leaders and other stakeholders – who have come to internalize and habitually act on knowledge of how successful change takes

place. “Reformers talk of the need for deeper, second order changes in the structures and cultures of schools, rather than superficial first-order changes. But no change would be more fundamental than a dramatic expansion of the capacity of individuals and organizations to understand and deal with change (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 745).

The ‘old paradigm’ for managing change which advocates the traditional virtues of vision, strategic planning, and effective leadership are strong starting points for change; however, the top-down, systems approach to education is not often successful in positive, sustained transformation (Helsby, 1995). Fullan (1993) encourages educators to become agents, rather than victims, of change. In a world that offers no ‘silver bullets’ to draw upon, the challenge for managing change lies at the institutional and individual level. Meaningful and crucial change can only be effected from within, and this requires developing teachers’ generative capacities and transforming schools into learning organizations.

According to organization theorists Bolman and Deal (1999), major organizational change inevitably generates four categories of issues. First, change affects individuals’ ability to feel effective, valued, and in control. Without support, training, and chances to participate in the change process, people can obstruct improvement efforts, making positive gains virtually impossible. Second, change disrupts existing patterns, causing confusion and uncertainty. Successful change requires effective communication to reduce confusion and to realign structural patterns to support the new direction. Third, change creates conflict between “winners and losers” – those who expect to gain from the new direction and those who do not. Finally, change creates a loss of meaning,

particularly for those on the receiving end. Transition rituals, mourning the past, and celebrations of the future help people release old attachments and embrace new ones.

With these four categories of change issues in mind, Bolman and Deal (1999) suggest that change agents consider multiple perspectives as they view organizational change and change initiatives. These authors have found that leaders/organizations whose strategies were limited because they were committed to one or two "frames," or mental images of how organizations work. They write:

> Some managers try to produce major change by redesigning formal structures, only to find people unable or unwilling to carry out new responsibilities. Others import new people or retrain old ones, only to find new blood and new ideas get rejected or chewed up, often disappearing without a trace. Managers who anticipate that new roles require new skills and vice-versa have a greater likelihood of success. But change also alters power relationships and undermines existing agreements and pacts. Even more profoundly, it intrudes upon deeply rooted cultural norms and ritual behavior. Below the surface, the organization's social tapestry begins to unravel, threatening both time-honored traditions and prevailing values and practices. (p. 6)

Bolman and Deal (1999) suggest that change efforts are more likely to succeed if change agents use a comprehensive "multi-frame" approach. Four different "frames" are essential to understanding organizational change, and include the Human Resource frame, the Structural frame, the Political frame, and the Symbolic frame.

The Four Frames are based on four major schools of organizational theory and research, drawing much from the social sciences of sociology, psychology, political

science, and anthropology. Each frame represents a specific point of view, or perspective, of organizations and organizational change. The perspective of each frame is presented below.

The Human Resource Frame

The Human Resource frame views organizations and change from the context of the people and individuals involved. The Human Resource frame, based on the ideas of organizational social psychologists, "starts with the fundamental premise that organizations are inhabited by individuals who have needs, feelings, and prejudices" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 14). From the Human Resource view, people have good reason to resist change and change efforts. People dislike feeling anxious and incompetent. Changes in established practices and procedures threaten existing knowledge and skill, which hinders people's ability to function with confidence and success. Bolman & Deal (1999) explain:

> When told to do something they don't understand or don't believe in, people feel puzzled, anxious, and insecure. Lacking the skills and confidence to implement new ways, they resist or even sabotage, hoping for the return of the good old days. Or, as often happens, they comply in public while covertly dragging their feet. Even if they try to do what they are told, the results are predictable dismal. (p. 7)

To facilitate success when dealing with changes that are faced through this frame, investments in change efforts call for priority investments in training. "Countless reform initiatives falter because managers neglect to spend time and money on developing necessary knowledge and skills" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 7).

Equally important, empowerment and support of the people involved in organizational change is a crucial antidote to potential barriers. From a Human Resource perspective, the key to effectiveness is to tailor change efforts to people – to develop the change initiative/efforts to enable people to get the job done while feeling good about what they are doing.

Strong individual skills and confidence as developed through the Human Resource Frame cannot guarantee success in change initiatives unless structure is also redesigned and realigned to the new initiative. For this reason, the perspective offered through the Structural Frame is also crucial in successfully viewing and implementing change initiatives.

The Structural Frame

The Structural Frame draws mainly on the discipline of sociology, emphasizing the importance of formal roles and relationships (Bolman & Deal, 1991). This frame views the structure and structural arrangements within an organization and organizational change. Structure provides clarity, predictability, and security for the organization and the people involved with the organization. Formal roles prescribe duties and outline how work is to be carried out. Policies and standard operating procedures blend diverse efforts into well-coordinated, organized programs. Formal distribution and roles of authority allow everyone to know exactly who is in charge, when, and over what areas. Change within an organization prompted through improvement efforts undermines existing arrangements, creating ambiguity, confusion, and distrust. People within an organization no longer know what is expected or what to expect from others. People become unsure and insecure about their duties, confused about how to relate to others, and clueless about

who can make what decision. Clarity, security, predictability, and rationality give way to confusion, loss of control, and a sense that "politics rather than policies now rule" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p 7).

To overcome challenges, change efforts must anticipate structural issues and steps must be taken to renegotiate structural arrangements in a formal way. Clear, consistent communication with all persons involved in change efforts regarding formal patterns and policies is crucial.

The perspectives supplied through the Human Resource and Structural frames offer valuable insight. However, change efforts consistently create conflict (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Conflict barriers and issues can be better understood through the view of the Political frame.

The Political Frame

The Political Frame draws on research developed by political scientists and views organizations as arenas in which different interest groups compete for power and limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 1991). "From a political perspective, conflict is natural" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 8). Change/change initiatives promote an intense tug-of-war to determine winners and losers. Some individuals and groups support the changes/change efforts, others present strong opposition. Most stakeholders involved in a change do not like conflict, so an attempt is made to smooth things over or avoid dispute entirely. This response results in the disputes being pushed aside, simmering beneath the surface until they erupt into divisive battles. Battle lines strengthen and camps form. Coercive power often determines who wins. Often, the change agents lose and the status quo prevails.

Bolman and Deal (1991, 1999) argue that while conflict can be explosive and damaging, conflict can also be an essential source of energy, clarity, and creativity if managed carefully. "The key is creating processes of negotiation and bargaining where settlements and agreements can be hammered out" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 8). These processes of negotiation and bargaining can be done with the creation of arenas. Arenas provide opportunities for stakeholders in a change initiative to forge divisive issues into shared agreements. Through voicing concerns, discussion, and bargaining, compromises can be worked out between the status quo and innovative ideals/change initiatives. Successfully blending new ideals/change initiatives with existing practices is essential to positive change.

Change and change initiatives will always create division and conflict among competing interest groups. Through the Political frame, change efforts can attempt to facilitate positive gains by framing issues, building coalitions and establishing arenas in which disagreements can be forged into workable pacts.

The Symbolic Frame

A fourth frame essential in the understanding of organizational change is the Symbolic Frame, which focuses on the symbols and meaningful 'touchstones' that every culture/organization possesses. The Symbolic Frame, drawing on social and cultural anthropology, views organizations as cultures that are propelled more by rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes, and myths than by rules, policies, mandates, and managerial authority (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Change agents must recognize and understand that, with change and change initiatives, loss occurs. "Loss is an unavoidable by-product of change" (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 9). Improvements in rebuilding the expressive or

spiritual side of organizations come through rebuilding the meaning of symbols, and building power into ceremonies and rituals.

Each of these four frames has its own perspective or image of reality. Only when change agents can look through all four perspectives are they likely to appreciate the depth and complexity of change initiatives. Change agents must recognize that the organizations in which they are attempting change initiatives have one common element: each organization has a different situation and background, faces different challenges, and needs to learn different things (Bolman & Deal, 1991). While each frame represents a specific perspective, the collective understanding of all four frames is needed for a comprehensive understanding of change. Positive progress is more probable if change agents use a comprehensive "multi-frame" approach (Bolman & Deal, 1999).

According to Bolman and Deal, as the four frames are utilized in viewing organizational change and change efforts, reactions to each frame will become apparent. Each frame encounters specific reactions to change efforts. However, these reactions provide an opportunity to implement facilitating strategies/leadership actions to overcome obstruction and promote positive change. Presented below in Tables1- 4 are the four frames, potential reactions that may be encountered with each frame, and suggestions for facilitating strategies/leadership actions.

Table 1

The Human Resource Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/Leadership Actions

THE HUMAN RESOURCE FRAME	
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING FACTORS/LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
• Anxiety • Uncertainty • People feel incompetent and needy.	• Training to develop new skills • Participation and involvement • Psychological support • View people as the heart of the organization • Responsive to needs and goals to gain commitment and loyalty • Support and empowerment • Listen to the people • Empower people through participation in change efforts • Enlist/provide resources people need to do the job well • Confront when appropriate, but in a supportive climate

(Adapted from Bolman and Deal, 1991, 1997, 1999)

Table 2

The Structural Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/Leadership Actions

STRUCTURAL FRAME	
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
• Loss of clarity and stability • Confusion • Chaos	• Communicating, realigning, and renegotiating formal patterns and policies • Clarify organizational goals • Manage the external environment • Develop a clear structure appropriate to task and environment • Clarify lines of authority • Focus on task, facts and logic, not emotions and personality

(Adapted from Bolman and Deal 1991, 1997, 1999)

Table 3

The Political Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/Leadership Actions

THE POLITICAL FRAME	
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
• Disempowerment • Conflict between winners and losers	• Create arenas where issues an be renegotiated and new coalitions formed • Understand how important interest groups are, each with a separate agenda • Understand conflict and limited resources • Recognize major constituencies and develop ties to their leadership • Build power bases and use power carefully • Create arenas for negotiating differences and collectively deciding reasonable compromises • Articulate what different groups have in common and help identify external "enemies" for groups to fight together

Adapted from Bolman and Deal (1991, 1997, 1999).

Table 4

The Symbolic Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/Leadership Actions

THE SYMBOLIC FRAME	
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
• Loss of meaning and purpose • Clinging to the past	• Create transition rituals: mourn the past, celebrate the future • View vision and inspiration as critical; people need something to believe in • Understand that people will give loyalty to an organization that has a unique identity and makes them feel what they do is really important • Symbolism, ceremony and ritual is crucial to communicate a sense of organizational mission • Rely on organizational traditions and values as a base for building a common vision/culture that provides cohesiveness and meaning • Be visible and energetic

The School Assistance Team Model as an Agent in Facilitating Positive Change in Low-Performing Schools

One method for creating effective change in low performing schools has been the creation of school assistance teams. The purpose of a school assistance team, sometimes called support teams, can be stated:

> School Support Teams will be powerful catalysts for significant change in our state's public schools. School Support Teams are not intended to monitor or investigate schools. They are intended to encourage schools to consider their own policies, programs, and practices in a manner that results in high-quality decision-making about the need to continue, modify, or redirect efforts. School Support Teams are not intended to provide solutions or answers. Instead, they are expected to help schools grapple with difficult questions so that their capacity for solving educational problems is increased. School Support Teams are not intended to change schools; rather, they are intended to facilitate change by helping schools initiate and organize their own change efforts. (Ginsberg, Johnson, & Moffett, 1997, p. 37.)

The School Assistance Team Model in Alabama

In the mid-1990s, the Alabama State Department of Education took steps to move away from the then-current hierarchical bureaucracy, and change the current State Department of Education's environment of "control and regulations" to an environment of "service and support (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997)" The State Superintendent envisioned the State Department of Education as becoming a service organization, facilitating the LEAs' abilities to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement. Through this vision, the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was developed. A major component of the Alabama State Department 21st Century Project Team was the creation of the Alabama School Assistance Teams.

Alabama School Assistance Team Structure and Procedures

The stated purpose of Alabama School Assistance Teams is to facilitate and empower the Local Education Agencies (LEA) to overcome educational obstacles and achieve higher student achievement (Alabama State Department Director of Classroom Improvement/School Assistance Team Coordinator). Initially, the Alabama State Department of Education envisioned the focus of the School Assistance Teams as facilitating all schools in achieving school improvement. However, in response to accountability issues and limited resources, the School Assistance Teams now work only with schools/systems that are not meeting accountability standards at acceptable levels (Alabama State Department of Education, 1997).

Alabama classifies schools/systems based on the level of student performance on standardized tests. This identification system is in accordance with legislation enacted in 1995 mandating the use of nationally norm-referenced tests for student assessment purposes and the implementation of a school and school system classification system (McCloskey, 2001). Alabama places schools into one of three performance categories: Clear, Caution, and Alert. Both a school's placement and the change in its placement over time determine its eligibility for special assistance.

Schools with more than half of their students in stanines 5–9 are classified as Clear. Schools with more than half of their students performing at stanines 1–3 are classified as being on Alert. Schools that fall between these two points are considered to be in Caution status. Alert 1 status schools are schools in the first year of Alert status or schools that performed at the Caution level in the prior year and have failed to adequately improve. Schools earn an Alert 2 designation if they were classified as Alert 1 during the

prior year and failed to move out of Alert status. Schools that fail to move out of Caution status for a second year are also classified as Alert 2. Schools are classified as Alert 3 if, after one or two years at the Alert 2 level, they are not demonstrating satisfactory growth (Mandel, 2000). At the present time, all schools classified as Alert 2 status receive consistent assistance by members (Team Leader, Team Members, and Special Service Teachers) of an Alabama School Assistance Team. Alabama originally established the School Assistance Teams to serve ten geographical regions. These geographical regions are now modified to coincide with the Alabama Regional Inservice Center regions.

Each of the ten Alabama School Assistance Teams adheres to a mission statement that is committed to provide timely, quality service and technical assistance to LEAs to maximize their potential for providing world-class education to Alabama students and ensuring the survival of public schools. In addition, this mission statement includes the following components of service: provide leadership, expertise, and resources to help customers solve their problems; recognize and capitalize on the diversity of schools; deliver on SDE promises to the LEAs; encourage innovation by using imagination and creativity to deliver quality services; communicate between and within the SDE and LEAs; provide guidance and assistance to meet compliance issues and Public Education System accountability; encourage partnerships with businesses, the community, and parents; increase achievement levels of students attending these schools; and encourage high expectations of LEAs and students to develop and maintain safe and positive learning environments.

The Alabama School Assistance Teams are under the direction of the Director of Classroom Improvement/School Assistance Team Coordination at the Alabama State

Department of Education. Each Alabama School Assistance Team is comprised of a Team Leader; Team Members; and Special Service Teachers. Each School Assistance Team is guided by a Team Leader who has been carefully chosen because of her/his skill, knowledge, and commitment to school improvement for all children. Team Leaders have a fair amount of autonomy in allocating and using the various resources at their disposal (Mandel, 2000).

Each Alabama School Assistance Team is comprised of three or more Team Members. These Team Members provide expertise in instructional and administrative functions, child nutrition, teaching practices, assessment, finance, special education, technology, and other areas of need.

In addition to the Team Members, each team includes Special Service Teachers (SSTs) who are assigned to priority schools identified as Alert 2 schools. Alabama SSTs are model classroom teachers who have been nominated by their employing superintendents to serve in this capacity, generally serving for up to three years, and are paid their regular salary plus a $5,000 supplement. The SSTs work closely with classroom teachers on a daily basis in an effort to improve academic achievement. They provide many services and resources, such as presenting workshops on needed content areas, modeling various teaching strategies through demonstration lessons, and providing technical assistance in all areas related to best practices of teaching and learning. Team Members visit the Alert 2 and Alert 3 schools on a weekly basis, offering hands-on guidance, support and involvement to the principal and faculty, and assist the Special Service Teachers as needed.

While the Alabama School Assistance Teams provide the primary support to these schools, Alert 3 schools may require an additional "intervention" team of two or more educators appointed by the Alabama State Superintendent of Education to provide more intensive assistance. In this situation, the on-site state team assumes control of the school and the state superintendent can choose to unilaterally remove a principal if such an action is necessary to turn the school around. All teachers in Alert 3 schools are also assessed using the state's Professional Employees' Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) or a similar instrument (Mandel, 2000). Negative evaluations can result in the removal of teachers and administrators from Alert 3 schools.

Statement of the Problem

The Alabama State Board of Education has implemented the Alabama School Assistance Team model as a practical, effective method to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools. School Assistant Teams have an extremely important role in providing the guidance, support, and encouragement that will help schools step beyond tradition and comfort and pursue research-proven approaches for improving teaching and learning throughout the school.

Although some states, such as North Carolina have reported great success using school assistance teams to improve student learning (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006), there is scant research about the relationship of the school assistance team model to student and school improvement in low-performing schools.

There are two reasons for the current shortage of definitive research on school assistance team interventions. The first reason is the relative infancy of most state

interventions. Since many state accountability systems that contain state interventions, such as those in California, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, are only a few years old, there simply has not been enough time to study and understand the impact of state interventions on low-performing schools and districts. The second reason for the current shortage of definitive research is that many interventions are implemented in combination with other interventions, and therefore the research seldom examines the impact of a single intervention (p. 19, Education Commission of the States, 2002).

The increase in states using school assistance teams, the drive to provide aid to low performing schools, and the increase in public scrutiny related to student achievement, make it imperative that research into factors that enhance or hinder change efforts be examined. This study sought to conduct such an examination.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that facilitated an Alabama School Assistance Team efforts to increase student performance in a low-performing school. It is part of a broader study that examined the role, and effectiveness of this team, and the barriers that impacted their school improvement efforts. The research question examined was: What are the primary factors that facilitated the ability of the Alabama School Assistance Team to promote school improvement as perceived by those involved in the process?

Data Collection

Four sources of data were used in this study. The first data source was in-depth interviews with the ten Alabama School Assistance Team Leaders. The second source consisted of data collected through a case study involving one of the teams. In-depth interviews and focus groups including the team leader, team members; special service teachers and school personnel and community members from the LEA served by this team were conducted. The third data set included observations and notes. A variety of approximately 200 documents provided through the Alabama State Department of Education comprised the fourth set of data. These documents included memoranda, reports, notes and letters from LEA personnel, and team newsletters.

Eighteen individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted, each ranging from 45 to 70 minutes in length. Open-ended questions were used in each interview. The questions explored the actions that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Teams to promote school improvement.

Data Analysis

Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. In accordance with the qualitative data analysis process developed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, documents and other materials were then organized, broken down into manageable units, synthesized, organized into themes, and placed into code categories. The documents were hand-coded for key phrases, descriptors, and explanations, according to the code categories.

In addition to the hand-coding process, all interviews and fieldnotes (Microsoft Word documents) were imported into the Atlas.ti qualitative analytical computer

software. Coding and data analysis were completed using the computer software process as well as the hand-coded process.

Factors that Facilitate School Assistance Team Success

Participants perceived three primary factors that facilitated the success of the School Assistance Team. They were: consistent, effective, and supportive leadership; strong interpersonal skills; and demonstrated dedication and commitment. Although they are presented as separate and distinct, it is important to note that they appear to be interactive in nature.

Consistent, Effective, and Supportive Leadership

The most often mentioned facilitating factor that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Team model to be effective in school improvement efforts was consistent, effective, and supportive leadership. A representative comment was "The one main factor that facilitates success on the school, system, and state level is consistent, good leadership." In addition to strong administrative capabilities, "consistent, good leadership" was defined as consistently placing student achievement and school improvement as a top priority, thus implementing/supporting any programs or initiatives that would facilitate this top priority. While effective leadership is crucial to school improvement on all three levels — school, system, and state — research findings most frequently cited the school level (LEA principal leadership) with the system level (central office leadership) as the second most important type of leadership, followed by leadership at the state level Alabama State Department of Education.

School Level Leadership

Consistent, effective, and supportive leadership at the school (LEA principal) level is perceived as crucial to school improvement. According to one Alabama School Assistance Team Leader, LEA principals take one of two views regarding the support offered by the Alabama School Assistance Teams: (1) some view it as a "life-line" – providing needed assistance, materials, expertise, and guidance in developing a school improvement plan and making wise data-driven decisions crucial to school improvement; or; (2) others are wary of the school assistance team and show outward resistance and defensiveness towards it. Data indicate that strong LEA leadership supports the Alabama School Assistance Team school improvement efforts in numerous ways.

1. *The LEA principal is the key to the Alabama School Assistance Team being accepted by the school and personnel.* An Alabama School Assistance Team leader commented, "The principal of the LEA makes a big difference: if they support the School Assistance Team and the Special Service Teachers, it is easier for the rest of the school to accept the support and help. LEA teachers indicated that if the principal was "in favor of the school assistance team, I'll try to be, too."
2. *The LEA principal must endorse the Alabama School Assistance Team and demonstrate to the school/personnel that all school improvement efforts will be supported*. A typical comment to explain the role of a principal in endorsing the Team was, "The principal's trust and endorsement of the school assistance team must always be gained FIRST … his/her

endorsement of the school assistance team is critical to gain the trust of the school personnel."

3. *The LEA principal and Alabama School Assistance Team personnel must work together as a team. This teamwork partnership can then be extended to include teachers and other LEA personnel*. A central office personnel participant stated:

> It's absolutely crucial that the principal and the school assistance team/Special Service Teachers work together as a team. I think it would be good if the principal would arrange a 'welcoming party' to help the school assistance team/ Special Service Teachers gain acceptance into the school culture. But these gestures have to be sincere, not just 'going through the motions.' It needs to be a 'Welcome to Our Home and Family/Staff'… a personal level. All of the staff/faculty MUST be involved: counselors, coaches, everyone. The SSTs must be introduced to the PTA … the main road to the community.

System-Level Leadership

Consistent, effective, and supportive leadership at the school system level (central office) is also perceived as critical to the success of the Alabama School Assistance Teams' success in school improvement efforts. This leadership appears to center around giving priority to, or endorsing, the school improvement efforts. Much like the LEA principal/ LEA personnel relationship, the central office personnel's verbal endorsement of the Alabama School Assistance Team can be a deciding factor in the acceptance of the

team by the LEA principal/LEA site. Comments offered by the Alabama School Assistance Team leaders, members, and SSTs supported this view. One team member commented, "If we can go into an LEA site with the backing of the central office, there is a strong chance the principal will be supportive of us as well." A central office personnel member stated:

> I've always tried to encourage the principals that; 'O.K., the State Department is in here … but that's really O.K.… We now have access to the SSTs — we need to use them! These SSTs are extra EYES, extra BRAINS … they can help us improve! The SSTs have resources, knowledge and research-based techniques to improve instruction!'

State-Level Leadership

It appears that consistent, effective, and supportive leadership at the state level was an important factor in the Alabama School Assistance Team' s success. The team leaders, team members, and SSTs look to the State Department of Education for knowledge, guidance, advice, and mentoring support. One team leader commented, "_____ (an Alabama State Department of Education personnel member) often comes by my office, just to see how things are going … asking if there is anything he/she can do to help." Another team member commented, "Sometimes our role in the school assistance team gets very discouraging … we often hit many brick walls. We need all the leadership, support, and advice we can get!"

If the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel — team leaders, team members, and SSTs — receive strong leadership, knowledge, and mentoring support from the state department of education, they are better equipped to facilitate school

improvement in low-performing schools. As school assistance team members and SSTs voiced, “We (the School Assistance Team) can help make a difference in the schools because of the guidance, encouragement, and leadership of our team leader!”

Excellent Relational Skills of the Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel

The second most important perceived factor that enhanced the Alabama School Assistance Teams success was the excellent interpersonal skills of the team members. These relational/interpersonal skills allowed the ASAT personnel to “build the foundation of school improvement” with the LEA personnel in two critical arenas. First, these skills enabled the team to diffuse initial feelings of failure by LEA staff and students and lessen their defensiveness toward the team. Secondly, the ability of School Assistance Team members to interact positively with LEA personnel helped to initiate a “bonding process” and that established partnership relationship between ASAT personnel and LEA personnel.

Overcome Initial Defensiveness and Diffuse Initial Feelings of Failure

It appears that the potential success of school improvement efforts were dependent upon the interpersonal skills of the ASAT which continually worked to “get everyone on board.” The ASAT personnel were successfully able “win over” most people in the LEA site: central office personnel; the LEA principal; all LEA faculty and staff; and community members. Because of this, an Alabama School Assistance Team leader commented,

> Members of a school assistance team must be hired very carefully. Potential school assistance team members must be excellent practitioners, but most importantly; they must have excellent personal skills. People skills cannot always

be taught. I'd rather hire someone with excellent people skills and teach them classroom/practitioner skills than hire someone who is an excellent practitioner, but has no people skills.

Alabama School Assistance Team leaders, members, and SSTs recognized and understood the initial defensive stance from some of the LEA members, and the need for effective communication and people skills to overcome it. As the ASAT personnel explained, "that first tough hurdle of breaking through the defensive stance and being accepted by the LEA (central office personnel, LEA principal, faculty, staff, and community members) must be successfully jumped before any progress in school improvement can be made." A member of the ASAT team said that such a stance can be a "brick wall" hindering school improvement efforts. ASAT team members also indicated that their success in breaking through this wall demanded a lot of understanding and time. Strategies to disarm this defensive stance included assuring the LEA personnel that they (the ASAT) were there to HELP — success for the students would be success for all. Other strategies included providing expertise, moral support, and recognition of the efforts/strengths of the staff and students.

In addition to an initial defensive stance of some LEA personnel, the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel also found that they had to use their interpersonal skills to help LEA members overcome a feeling of failure. Team leaders, members, and SSTs described the importance of overcoming this feeling by carefully listening, conveying concern and understanding, and looking for ways to empower the LEA personnel. The ASAT personnel stated that they tried to become a "catalyst to making the

students (and teachers) realize their strengths and gifts" (ASAT members and SSTs). An Alabama School Assistance Team leader stated,

> The school assistance team personnel must make sure that any constructive suggestions are given with a lot of praise — the teachers being assisted are very vulnerable. The teachers must be assured that they are doing a lot of things correctly. We use our "80/20 Rule": we give 80% praise and 20% constructive suggestions.

LEA personnel commented about this vulnerability and "feeling of failure." An LEA personnel respondent said, "The personality of the school assistance team is important … in reaching out to the school which is already defensive and 'cowed'." One central office personnel respondent stated,

> This ASAT representative has a great personality … this is the most important thing because the school being assisted has a strong feeling of failure. As wonderful as it may be to be receiving assistance, there is a stigma attached … we're not making it on our own … what's wrong with us?

LEA teachers admitted to the difficulty of "accepting help." One teacher commented, "I DO appreciate the help … it's just that it makes me feel kind of like a failure. Aren't I a good teacher?" However; despite initial feelings of uncertainty and failure, many teachers expressed appreciation for the support and encouragement offered by the ASAT personnel. One teacher stated,

> It really, really helped when the SST made the effort to let me know that she cares for me … and my students. She listened — really listened — to me when I talked.

I know that she has a job to do, but she makes me and my students feel like 'important people,' not just a 'job to complete.'

The Bonding Process

A second outcome of the ASAT's strong interpersonal skills is that they were able to initiate a bonding process with the LEA group that led to a partnership relationship between them. An ASAT leader stated, "The personalities of the school assistance team personnel is very, very important — the potential for a bond with the LEA depends on the people skills, the personality of that ASAT person." An ASAT member (SST) acknowledged, "It makes such a difference when the teacher and I work as a 'team' … that is when real progress is made."

An LEA central office personnel respondent commented, "The most crucial facilitating factor is the PERSONALITY of the school assistance team assisting the school. If the SST (or other team member) and the school personnel don't "bond," then there will not be much meaningful progress made." LEA teachers commented on "personalities of the SSTs" as being a vital element in a working relationship. One LEA teacher remarked, "If the SST is 'all-knowing' and uppity … I'm just not going to work with her. I'll be good and listen to what she says, but I won't do it." Other LEA teachers commented on the "wonderful personalities" of the SSTs: the open and accepting attitude of the SSTs; the eagerness to help the teachers and students; listening patiently to concerns and fears, and laughter.

Commitment and Dedication of the Alabama School Assistance Team Personnel

The third most often cited perceived factor leading to the success of the Alabama School Assistance Team was their commitment and dedication to school improvement

efforts. Excerpts from state department documents (team letter memos) included the following statements:

> This year two of our Alert 2 schools have provided a tremendous challenge to Team ___, both due to the general resistance of their faculties, and some particularly offensive behavior by certain faculty members. Through all, the school assistance team members who have been assigned to these schools remained patient and service-oriented, and returned each day with a smile and renewed enthusiasm.

Another state department document (letter written by a team leader) stated, "They (school assistance team personnel) have enhanced the image of the department, thus improving the way we are received by the LEAs. The high caliber and strong work ethic of these employees is difficult to replicate."

This ASAT commitment to student and school improvement efforts was recognized by LEA personnel as well. Representative comments by LEA teachers included "They (ASAT personnel, SSTs) don't give up, even when things aren't easy. They really want our students to achieve". An LEA central office personnel participant commented on the day-to-day commitment to school improvement as demonstrated by ASAT personnel:

> They have worked their hearts out. There are so many challenges facing our schools, but the empowerment and encouragement that the Alabama School Assistance Team provides can make all the difference!

State department documents, comments made by LEA personnel, and comments made by ASAT personnel highlighted characteristics of the commitment and dedication demonstrated by Alabama School Assistance Team personnel:

- Demonstrating high caliber skills and a strong work ethic
- Becoming actively involved with students, lessons and learning
- Implementing the "80/20 Rule": 80% encouragement support, praise; 20% constructive suggestions
- Displaying professional demeanor
- "Working their hearts out"
- Working on "their own time" when needed
- Continuing their work, even when LEA personnel went home
- Preparing materials for teachers, such as attractive achievement test review folders and "Stress Survival Kits" prior to achievement test administration
- Planning/implementing a pre-achievement test school-wide assembly — motivating and supporting students, teachers and the principal.

Discussion

This study identified three perceived factors that enabled an Alabama School Assistance Team to be effective in school improvement efforts. These factors were: consistent, effective, and supportive leadership; strong interpersonal skills; and demonstrated dedication and commitment. Although these were presented as separate and distinct factors, they are all part of a whole. Since they were all present in this setting, it

is not known whether it was necessary to have all elements in place to garner success. Nor are the interactions between them well understood. What IS known is that in combination, they helped to create success.

The most commonly noted facilitating factor in this situation was strong leadership. This finding is consistent with research findings about successful change in schools (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). A significant, positive correlation exists between effective school leadership and positive student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). "If there is one ingredient essential to the success of any organization, it is leadership" (Lessinger & Salowe, 2001, p. 161). While strong leadership was essential at each the school, system, and state level, the LEA principal's leadership appeared to have the most direct impact upon the dynamics of the LEA personnel and ASAT personnel. The role of the principal in creating school success is also consistent with general research findings (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Lambert, 1998; Sparks, 2000).

Since effective leadership was provided on the school level (LEA principal), system level (central office), and state level (state department of education), it is difficult to know if they must all be present for success to occur, or what the interactions are between them. It may be that the fact that the strong leadership the school assistance team personnel received from the state department placed them in a unique position to empower and facilitate stronger leadership on all levels: student, teacher, principal, central office, and state. The importance of leadership at all three levels and the possible interactions between them bear further research.

Excellent relational/personality/people skills demonstrated by the Alabama School Assistance Team personnel were a second facilitating factor that enabled the team to be effective in school improvement efforts. Excellent relational skills have been identified as a top priority for team members in assistance teams in both the educational arena (Ginsberg,) and the business arena (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). Donaldson states that strong working relationships develop and grow when "leaders themselves demonstrate trustworthiness, openness, and affirmation" (p. 59).

Alabama School Assistance Team personnel demonstrated strong relational/personality/people skills when working with the identified LEA sites they supported. These relational/personality/people skills enabled the Alabama School Assistance team personnel to overcome initial resistant stances and feelings of failure by the LEA personnel, and begin developing a working partnership. A letter written from an LEA site supported by an Alabama School Assistance Team included the following words to an Alabama School Assistance Team leader:

> I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and Team ___ for all of the wonderful ideas, teacher training support, and small group instruction that you did this school year for _____. When we first learned that 'THE STATE PEOPLE' would be coming in, I know that you realized that we would be uncomfortable and unsure of what this meant. However; we were pleasantly surprised. We sincerely appreciate the extra help Team ___ was able to give us, and although our SAT scores are not in, and who knows what they will reveal, I personally know that our children have made educational gains.

Please convey our special thanks to _____ (SST) and _____ (SST) for their help. Both ladies worked diligently with our staff and students. We looked forward to their visits each week. They truly exemplify the word 'professional.'

Commitment and dedication of ASAT personnel to school improvement efforts was the third important perceived facilitating factor that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Team model to be effective in school improvement efforts. School improvement efforts require change, and resistance is inevitable (Fullan & Miles, 1992). However; Fullan and Miles (1992) argue, that although change involves resistant attitudes and behavior, these attitudes and behaviors need to be viewed as natural responses to transition. During the needed transitions from a familiar situation (struggling, low-performing school) to a new state of affairs (successful school), individuals must normally confront the loss of the old and commit themselves to the new; unlearn old beliefs and behaviors and learn new ones; and move from anxiousness and uncertainty to stabilization and coherence. Lasting change demands time, patience, understanding, and support. To provide the time, patience, understanding, and support that true change and school improvement demands (Fullan, 2001), school assistance team members need to demonstrate genuine commitment and dedication to school improvement efforts.

The three identified facilitating factors that enabled the Alabama School Assistance Team model to be effective in creating school improvement – leadership, relational skills, and commitment - span across the four categories/frames that Bolman and Deal suggested for change agents to consider when they view organizational change

and change initiatives. Presented below in Tables1- 4 are the four frames developed by Bolman and Deal. In each of the four frames, Bolman and Deal identified potential reactions that may be encountered, as well as suggestions for essential strategies/actions. Findings from the research were consistent with these potential reactions and essential strategies/actions explored by Bolman and Deal. I have added the actions taken by stakeholders involved in this study side by side with the findings of Bolman and Deal as a means of creating a holistic view of the case study.

As depicted in the Human Resource frame, school improvement efforts affected LEA personnel members' ability to feel effective, valued, and in control. The presence of ASAT personnel "on their turf" caused LEA personnel to question their abilities and progress. Feelings of failure, incompetence, anxiety, and uncertainty were common. Without the powerful actions and strategies incorporated by ASAT personnel as documented below, LEA personnel may have obstructed improvement efforts, making positive gains impossible.

Table 1

The Human Resource Frame: Reactions and Essential Strategies/ Actions

THE HUMAN RESOURCE FRAME		
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING FACTORS/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Bolman & Deal)	FACILITATING FACTORS/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Research Findings)
● Anxiety ● Uncertainty ● People feel incompetent and needy.	● Training to develop new skills ●Participation and involvement ● Psychological support ●View people as the heart of the organization ●Responsive to needs and goals to gain commitment and loyalty ●Support and empowerment ●Listen to the people ●Empower people through participation in change efforts ●Enlist/provide resources people need to do the job well ●Confront when appropriate, but in a supportive climate	● Provide leadership training to develop new skills (ASAT personnel, LEA personnel, principal). Because LEA principal leadership is a key factor in school improvement, develop leadership/mentorship programs and academies. ●Participation and involvement of ASAT personnel with LEA classrooms, students, school and community ● Psychological support (encouragement, guidance, patience, affirmations, new solutions to changes) ●View people as the heart of the organization ●Responsive to needs and goals to gain commitment and loyalty ●Support and empowerment (of LEA personnel, students) ●Listen to the people (Allow LEA personnel to "vent;" respect and implement ideas/perspectives of LEA personnel) ●Empower people through participation in change efforts (Include LEA personnel in each step of the improvement process) ●Enlist/provide resources LEA need to do the job well (teaching resources, "Stress Survival Kits") ●Provide constructive suggestions when appropriate, but in a supportive climate ("80/20 Rule: 80% encouragement, support, praise; 20% constructive suggestions)

Adapted from Bolman and Deal (1991, 1997, 1999).

Viewing the school improvement efforts through the Structural frame, change initiatives initiated by ASAT personnel disrupted existing patterns and traditions in the school, causing confusion and uncertainty. While LEA personnel genuinely desired student and school improvement, changes implemented to alter "the way things were always done" caused chaos. To begin building a solid foundation to replace the current confusion, ASAT personnel implemented strategies noted below, such as clarifying goals and steps toward student and school improvement, and reminding the LEA personnel that student and school achievement was going to be achieved by the combined teamwork and expertise of all involved.

Table 2

The Structural Frame: Reactions and Essential Strategies/leadership Actions

THE STRUCTURAL FRAME		
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING FACTORS/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Bolman & Deal)	FACILITATING FACTORS/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Research Findings)
● Loss of clarity and stability ● Confusion ● Chaos	● Communicating, realigning, and renegotiating formal patterns and policies ● Clarify organizational goals ● Manage the external environment ● Develop a clear structure appropriate to task and environment ● Clarify lines of authority ● Focus on task, facts and logic, not emotions and personality	● Enhancing image/perception of the Alabama State Department of Education and mission of the ASAT ● Clarify goals and steps toward student and school improvement ● Clarify that ASAT personnel are there to facilitate student and school improvement in a teamwork capacity with LEA personnel, not to "judge." ● Increase SDE visibility: whenever possible, SDE administration visit EA sites to promote sincerity of school improvement efforts

Adapted from Bolman and Deal (1991, 1997, 1999).

LEA personnel felt a sense of distrust and resentment toward ASAT personnel, as examined through the Political frame. Through the LEA personnel's eyes, questions such as "Who did the ASAT personnel think they were? How could they (ASAT personnel) just invade their school and announce what would be the best for the students, school, and community? What made the ASAT personnel the 'ones with the answers,' and the LEA personnel 'the ones doing everything wrong?'" To overcome such power struggles, ASAT personnel applied actions as noted in the table below, such as being aware that LEA personnel would be initially distrustful of anyone associated with "the state department."

Table 3

The Political Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/leadership Actions

THE POLITICAL FRAME		
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Bolman & Deal)	ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Research Findings)
● Disempowerment ● Conflict between winners and losers	● Create arenas where issues an be renegotiated and new coalitions formed ● Understand how important interest groups are, each with a separate agenda ● Understand conflict and limited resources ● Recognize major constituencies and develop ties to their leadership ● Build power bases and use power carefully ● Create arenas for negotiating differences and collectively deciding reasonable compromises ● Articulate what different groups have in common and help identify external "enemies" for groups to fight together	● LEA central office personnel and principals be aware that LEA teachers/staff/students will be more receptive and accepting of ASAT personnel if the administration demonstrates acceptance of team and improvement efforts ● ASAT personnel be aware that LEA personnel often distrust initial efforts simply because the team is part of "the state department." ● ASAT personnel emphasize a teamwork relationship with the LEA personnel

Adapted from Bolman and Deal (1991, 1997, 1999).

Viewing the school improvement initiatives through the Symbolic frame demonstrates that LEA personnel feel a loss of meaning and purpose when others intervene and change is made. They may feel that this is THEIR school, THEIR students and changing the way 'things are done' may feel painful to the people involved. LEA personnel, students, parents, and community members may cling to the past as they feel that new initiatives are replacing old traditions. To ease the pain and struggle of the transition from "what was familiar and cherished" to new practices, as well as protecting

positive traditions, ASAT personnel attempted many strategies, as shown in the table below.

Table 4

The Symbolic Frame: Reactions and Facilitating Strategies/Leadership Actions

THE SYMBOLIC FRAME		
REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Bolman & Deal)	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Research Findings)
● Loss of meaning and purpose ● Clinging to the past	● Create transition rituals: mourn the past, celebrate the future ● View vision and inspiration as critical; people need something to believe in ● Understand that people will give loyalty to an organization that has a unique identity and makes them feel what they do is really important ● Symbolism, ceremony and ritual is crucial to communicate a sense of organizational mission	● Provide a "Welcome to Our School" party at the beginning of improvement efforts for the ASAT personnel ● ASAT personnel become knowledgeable of LEA/community before starting assistance efforts. Every LEA site is unique in its individual situation, demographics, strengths, and needs. ● Recognize the victories and successes that the LEA site has already accomplished ● Respect the LEA school and community culture

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

REACTIONS TO CHANGE EFFORTS	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Bolman & Deal)	FACILITATING STRATEGIES/ LEADERSHIP ACTIONS (Research Findings)
	● Rely on organizational traditions and values as a base for building a common vision/culture that provides cohesiveness and meaning ● Be visible and energetic	● ASAT personnel assure LEA central office personnel, principal, teachers, staff, and students that you are there to HELP – the focus is a combined partnership in facilitating best instruction and educational experiences for the students. ● Celebrate ALL accomplishments and goals ● ASAT personnel remain committed and positive, especially when things are very challenging

Adapted from Bolman and Deal (1991, 1997, 1999)

These four frames help provide multiple perspectives of findings and a more complete view of the school improvement process that occurred. While these findings may not be generalizable to other settings, considering them may be helpful to other states who are implementing the school assistance team model in improving student and school improvement, especially in low-performing schools. It is also hoped that these findings can assist in developing a knowledge base about how to improve identified low-performing schools through the implementation of school assistance teams.

The findings of this study also serve as a basis for the following statements relative to the situation being examined:

1. Consistent, effective, and supportive leadership is crucial on all levels of educational administration: school, system, and state.

2. While effective leadership is imperative on all education system levels, supportive leadership by the LEA principal (school level) appear to be a major key in the success of school improvement efforts.
3. Excellent relational/people/communication skills of school assistance team personnel can facilitate school improvement efforts.
4. Commitment and dedication to school improvement despite challenges demonstrated by school assistance team personnel can foster school improvement efforts.

Concluding Remarks

This study is a first step in raising issues about improving low-achieving schools through the implementation of school assistance teams in Alabama. Further studies are being conducted to explore the factors that serve as barriers to the capacity of the Alabama School Assistance Teams in promoting positive change in low-performing schools. Other research considerations in the quest for school improvement include exploring leadership development opportunities/academies for principals; and leadership development opportunities/ academies for school assistance team personnel.

Conclusion

"All children can learn. Public education should enable all children to achieve their unique potential. Education holds the key for children to reach their potential intellectually, physically and emotionally" (Cole, 1995, p. 1). As each state responds to No Child Left Behind mandates and explores facilitating strategies or "keys" to improve

these low-performing schools, serious consideration should be given to the school assistance team model. It appears that this strategy can be a cost effective and powerful method for aiding schools.

Further research into the value of the school assistance team model within Alabama and in all states incorporating this approach should be conducted. Low-performing schools are often schools with limited resources and great student needs (NEA, 2001). It is the responsibility of each state to assure that these schools receive the assistance they need so that each child can reach their full potential (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). School Assistance Teams appear to be one avenue for making this goal a reality.

REFERENCES

21st Century Project Team: Report to the State Superintendent of Education. (1997). Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education.

A+ Education Foundation (2005). *Education news in Alabama: Rewarding performance in Alabama's schools.* Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education.

Achieve, Inc. (2001). *Accountability: Turning around low-performing schools.* Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc.

Alabama State Department of Education (1997). *21st century project team: Report to the state superintendent of education.* Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education.

Alabama State Department of Education. (2002). *First look at Alabama schools academic status released.* Retrieved from http://www.alsde.edu/html/home. asp

Alabama State Department of Education. (2005). *Alabama Education News.* Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education.

Archer, J. (2003). Increasing the odds. *Education Week, 21*(17).

Balfanz, R., Ruby, A., & MacIver, D. (2002). Essential components and next steps for comprehensive whole-school reform in high poverty middle schools. In Sam Stringfield and Deborah Land (Eds.), *Educating at-risk students: Part II, One*

hundred-first yearbook of the national society for the study of education (pp. 128 47). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research in education.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1999). Four steps to keeping change efforts heading in the right direction. *Journal for Quality & Participation, 22*(3), 6-12.

Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *The Future of Children, 7*(2), 55-71.

Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin. (1999). *Hope for urban education: A study of nine high-performing, high-poverty, urban elementary schools.* Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service [On-line]. Available: www.ed.gov/pubs/urbanhope/index.html.

Clarke, C. D. (2003). *Implementing no child left behind.* ASHA Leader, I(20), p. 2-4.

Cole, R. W. (1995). *Educating everybody children: Diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Craciun, K., & Snow-Renner, R. (2002). *Low-performing schools: No child left behind policy brief.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Donaldson, G. A. (2001). *Cultivating leadership in schools: Connecting people, purpose, and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

DuFour, R., & Berkey, T. (1995). The principal as staff developer. *Journal of Staff Development, 16*(4), Fall 1995.

Education Commission of the States. (2002). *State interventions in low-performing schools and school districts.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Available online at www.ecs.org.

Education Trust. (2001). *The other gap: Poor students receive fewer dollars.* Data bulletin published by the Education Trust on March 6, 2001.

Education Week (1999). *Quality Counts 1999: Rewarding results, punishing failure.* Washington, DC: Education Week and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

First Look at Alabama Schools Academic Status Released. (2002). Alabama State Department of Education at http://www.alsde.edu/html/home.asp

From Sanctions to Solutions: Meeting the Needs of Low-Performing Schools. (2002). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education.

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

Fullan, M. (2001). *Change forces: The sequel.* Bridgeport, NJ: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. G., & Miles, M. B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and what doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73*(10), 745-752.

Ginsberg, M. B., Johnson, J. F., & Moffett, C. A. (1997) *Educators supporting educators: A guide to organizing school support teams.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glickman, C. D., Hayes, R., & Hensley, F. (1992). Site-based facilitation of empowered schools: Complexities and issues for staff developers. *Journal of Staff Development, 13*(4), 76-87.

Goodlad, J., Soder, R., & Sirotnik, K. (1990). *Places where teachers are taught.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Hardy, L. (2003). Even apparently good schools can be in need of improvement. *American School Board Journal*, 190(12), 6-8.

Helsby, G. (1995). Book review: Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 21*(1), 91-93.

Henderson, J. G., & Hawthorne, R. D. (1995). *Transformative curriculum leadership.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Holdzkom, D. (2001). *Low-performing schools: So you've identified them – now what?* Charleston, WV: AEL, Inc. Available at: http://www.ael.org/rel/policy/pb0202.htm

Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools. (1999). The University of Texas at Austin: The Charles A. Dana Center.

Housman, N. G., & Martinez, M. R. (2001). *A brief for practitioners on turning around low-performing schools: Implications at the school, district, and state levels.* Washington, DC: The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform. Available: www.goodschools.gwu.edu/pubs/issue/ibapril01.pdf

Jerald, C. (2003). Beyond the rock and the hard place. *Educational Leadership, 61*(3), 12-16.

Johnston, R. C. (1998). SREB: State accountability systems lack cohesiveness. *Education Week, 18*(12).

Karns, M. (2001). New models for reform. *Leadership, 31*(1), 28 2.

Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (2003). *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

Kochan, F. K. (1996). Factors influencing participation in school restructuring in Florida. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 24*(1), 39- 4.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America schools.* New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools.* Alexandria VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Land, D., & Legters, N. (2002). The extent and consequences of risk in U.S. education. In S. Stringfield & D. Land, (Eds.), *Educating at-risk students: Part II, One hundred-first yearbook of the national society for the study of education* (pp. 1-28). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Lessinger, L. M., & Salowe, A. E. (2001). *Healing public schools: The winning prescription to cure their chronic illness.* Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Linn, D., Rothman, B., & White, K. (2001). *State strategies for turning around low-performing schools.* Washington DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Available at www.nga.org/cda/files/20010225LITERACY.pdf

Mandel, D. R. (2000). *Transforming underperforming schools: A strategy for Tennessee.* Washington, DC: Southern Regional Education Board.

Mazzeo, C., & Berman, I. (2003). *Reaching new heights: Turning around low-performing schools.* Washington DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Available at: www.nga.org/cda/files/0803REACHING.pdf.

McCloskey, W. (2001). *A SERVE special report: Assisting low-performing schools in the southeast.* North Carolina: The Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE.

Meehan, M. L., & Cowley, K. S. (2002, January 7-10). *A study of low-performing schools, high-performing schools, and high-performing learning communities.* Paper presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education, Waikiki, HI.

Mullen, C. A., & Patrick, R. L. (2000). A principal's promising reform of an at-risk elementary urban school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 5*(3), 229-251.

Murphy, J., & Datnow, A. (2003). *Leadership lessons from comprehensive school reforms.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

National Association of State Boards of Education. (2002). *From sanctions to solutions: Meeting the needs of low-performing schools.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

National Education Association. (2001). *America top priority: Lifting up low-performing schools.* Washington, DC: Author.

Neill, M. (2003). Leaving children behind: How no child left behind will fail our children. *Phi Delta Kappan, 85*(3), 225-228.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2003). Available online at www.ncpublicschools.org/school_improvement/assistance_index.html

Odden, A., & Busch, C. (1998). *Financing schools for high performance: Strategies for improving the use of educational resources.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Olson, L. (2004). States train sights on school districts for interventions. *Education Week, 23*(20).

Public Schools of North Carolina (2006). *Building success: What works to improve schools.* Retrieved May 18, 2006 from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/assistanceteams/brochure.pdf.

Rabon, L. W. (2002). *A comparison of tasks of principals in high- and low-performing, low socioeconomic schools (SES) in Alabama.* (Doctoral dissertation, Auburn University, 2002).

Reeves, C. (2003). *State support to low-performing schools.* Washington DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Available at http://www.ccsso.org.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sampson, R. J., & Morenoff, J. D. (1997). Ecological perspectives on the neighborhood context of urban poverty: Past and present. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & L. Abner (Eds.), *Neighborhood poverty: Vol. 2, Policy implications in studying neighborhoods* (pp. 1-43). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Sanbar, C. (2000). *Alternatives for low performing schools.* Available at www.sambar.com/chuck/alternatives.htm

Save the Children. (2002). *America's forgotten children.* Westport, CT: Save the Children.

Southern Regional Education Board, Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series. (2000). *Getting results with accountability: Rating schools, assisting schools, improving schools.* Retrieved April 27, 2003, from http://stars.csg.org/spectrum/2000/fall/a00spectrum09.pdf

Sparks, D. (2000). Make principal development a priority. *Results,* April 2000.

Stanford, J. (1999). *Victory in our schools: We can give our children excellent public education.* New York: Bantam Books.

Stringfield, S., & Datnow, A. (2002). Systemic supports for schools serving students placed at risk. In S. Stringfield & D. Land (Eds.), *Educating at-risk students: Part II, One hundred-first yearbook of the national society for the study of education.* (pp. 269-288). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Sweetland, S., & Hoy, W. (2000). School characteristics and educational outcomes: Toward an organizational model of student achievement in middle schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *36*(5), 703 30.

The College Board (1999). *Reaching the top: A report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement.* New York: The College Board. Available: http//www.collegeboard.org.

The Education Trust. (1999). *Dispelling the myth: High poverty schools exceeding expectations.* Washington DC: The Education Trust. Available: http://www.edtrust.org/main/ reports.asp

Turner, M. A. (2002). *The perception of school effectiveness and school improvement by teachers in low-performing schools after state team intervention.* Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders. (1998). U.S. Department of Education at www.ed.gov/pubs/turning/part3.html.

U. S. Department of Education. (1998). *Turning around low-performing schools: A guide for state and local leaders.* Retrieved from www.ed.gov/pubs/turning/ part3.html

Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A. (2003). *Balanced leaders: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Wilson, B. L., & Corbett, H. D. (2001). *Listening to urban kids: School reform and the teachers they want.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Wilson, B., & Corcoran, T. (1987). *Places where children succeed: A profile of outstanding elementary schools.* Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5219

College of Education

Office of Laboratory Experiences
3464 Haley Center

Telephone: (334) 844-4448
FAX: (334) 844-5785

INFORMED CONSENT
FOR
PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES, FUNCTIONS AND IMPACT OF THE ALABAMA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAMS AND FACTORS THAT FACILITATE AND HINDER THEIR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

You are invited to participate in a research study of the Alabama Technical Assistance Teams to be conducted by Virginia Roy, a doctoral student at Auburn University under the supervision of Dr. Fran Kochan, Interim Dean of the College of Education. We hope to learn the facilitating factors and barriers to school improvement, and the factors that act as facilitators and barriers to the capacity of the Technical Assistance Teams to promote school improvement. You were selected as a possible participant because of your work with the Technical Assistance Teams.

If you decide to participate, an interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you (this interview will last one hour or less) regarding the Alabama Technical Assistance Teams. I would like to learn your perspective of facilitating factors and barriers to school improvement, and the factors that act as facilitators and barriers to the capacity of the Technical Assistance Teams to assist schools.

All information obtained through the interviews will be recorded anonymously. Information obtained may provide insight on expanding the effectiveness of the Technical Assistance Teams and effective strategies on improving the working relationship between the Technical Assistance Teams and school-based personnel.

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. The plan for the disclosure of information will be to provide aggregate data to the Team Leaders at the end of the study (this aggregate data will not include individual, team or school data) and for possible publications.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Technical Assistance Teams. If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, please do not hesitate to contact me (334/844-2240; royvirg@auburn.edu) or Dr. Fran Kochan (334/844-4446; kochafr@auburn.edu).

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Programs by phone or e-mail. The people to contact there are Ms. Jeanna Sasser at (334) 844-5966 (sassejb@auburn.edu) or Dr. Steven Shapiro at (334) 844-6499 (shapisk@auburn.edu) .

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE. YOU WILL BE SUPPLIED WITH TWO CONSENT FORMS; ONE SIGNED FORM WILL GO WITH THE INVESTIGATOR, AND ONE SIGNED FORM WILL BE YOUR FORM TO KEEP.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

HUMAN SUBJECTS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
PROJECT #01-157 EX0110
APPROVED 10/5/01 TO 10/4/02

A LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

List of Interview Questions

1. What is the role of a School Assistance Team?
2. What is your specific role within the School Assistance Team?
3. If you had unlimited resources available to you, how would you create a School Assistance Team? Which team designs or strategies would you consider?
4. How is the School Assistance Team perceived by the school/system?
5. What are the most significant perceived outcomes that have resulted from the efforts of the Alabama School Assistance Teams?
6. What is your specific role within the School Assistance Team?
7. What factors serve as barriers at the school level?
8. What factors serve as barriers at the system level?
9. What factors serve as barriers at the state level?
10. What do you perceive/identify as barriers that prevent the School Assistance Team to promote change?
11. What are the most important factors that facilitate the capacity of the Alabama School Assistant Team to promote school improvement?

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENTS

List of Alabama State Department Documents
(Presented in order of Documents Provided by ALSDE)

1. ALSDE memorandum (September 21, 2000) from ASAT Team Leader to Principal of _____ [LEA being served by the ASAT] (RE: Results of Classroom Observations Conducted by Team ___ on September 12, 2000)
2. Results of classroom observations [Observations of _____ LEA personnel by ASAT personnel]
3. Technology report of _____ [LEA being assisted by the ASAT]
4. Safety Site Visit Update of _____ [LEA being assisted by the ASAT]
5. Nutrition Program Review of _____ [LEA being assisted by the ASAT]
6. Recommended Free and Reduced-Price Application Maintenance System
7. Team __ Guidelines for the Instructional Audit
8. ALSDE memorandum (June 28, 2000) from ASAT team leader to team members (RE: 2000 SAT-9 Scores for LEAs being served)
9. ALSDE memorandum (July 17, 2000) from ASAT team leader to team members (RE: First Team meeting)
10. Letter (August 7, 2000) written to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams from ASAT team leader (RE: Continuing escalation of regular duties and team leader duties adversely impact ability to serve LEA schools as needed)
11. Team ___ Newsletter (September 2000)
12. ALSDE memorandum (May 10, 2000) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: Defensive actions of LEA; requesting continued service of SSTs to LEA)
13. ALSDE memorandum (May 5, 2000) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: SST Strategic Planning/Professional Development)
14. Letter (April 28, 2000) written to ASAT team leader from ____ [LEA being assisted by ASAT] (RE: Appreciation for support given by ASAT personnel)
15. ALSDE memorandum (April 28, 2000) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: SST Strategic Planning/Professional Development)
16. ALSDE memorandum (April 18, 2000) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: "Snapshot" of ___ [LEA being assisted by the ASAT]; defensive actions of LEA personnel; LEA students expressing appreciation for ASAT efforts)
17. ALSDE memorandum (March 27, 2000) from ASAT team leader to presenter of workshop (RE: "Final Countdown to the SAT 9")
18. ALSDE memorandum (March 24, 2000) from ASAT team leader to team members (RE: Professional Development)
19. Team ___ Newsletter (April, 2000)
20. Letter (January 25, 2000) written to Assistant State Superintendent from LEA teacher [RE: Complaint of ASAT teacher evaluation]

21. ALSDE memorandum (February 22, 2000) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA (RE: Invitation to workshop for "Final Countdown to the SAT 9")
22. ALSDE memorandum (December 15, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA (RE: ASAT Review of Programs at LEA)
23. Team ___ Newsletter (October 1999) [RE: Excessive Paperwork]
24. Team ___ Newsletter (December 1999)
25. Team ___ Newsletter (November 1999)
26. ALSDE memorandum (October 25, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA (RE: School Safety Leadership Workshop for All Area ___ Caution and Alert Principals)
27. ASAT Meeting Agenda (November 5, 1999)
28. ALSDE memorandum (November 10, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA (RE: ASAT Review of Programs at LEA)
29. ALSDE memorandum (October 8, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Superintendent of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Invitation of LEA Principals to Participate in Training Group Sessions)
30. ALSDE memorandum (October 8, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Superintendent of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Invitation of LEA Principals to Participate in Training Group Sessions)
31. ALSDE memorandum (October 8, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Superintendent of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Invitation of LEA Principals to Participate in Training Group Sessions)
32. ALSDE memorandum (October 8, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Superintendent of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Invitation of LEA Principals to Participate in Training Group Sessions)
33. ALSDE memorandum (July 8, 1999) from ASAT team leader to team members (RE: 1999 SAT 9 Results; Congratulations on Hard Work of Team Members]
34. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
35. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
36. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
37. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
38. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
39. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)

40. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
41. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
42. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
43. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
44. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
45. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
46. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
47. ALSDE memorandum (July 12, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Career/Technical Person in Area __ (RE: Invitation of Career/Technical Contact Person to Participate in Business-Industry Certification Discussion)
48. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, “The Administrator’s Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
49. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, “The Administrator’s Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
50. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, “The Administrator’s Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
51. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, “The Administrator’s Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
52. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, “The Administrator’s Role in Effective Instructional Planning)

53. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
54. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
55. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
56. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
57. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
58. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
59. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
60. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
61. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
62. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
63. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)

64. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
65. ALSDE memorandum (June 22, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served by ASAT (RE: Appreciation of Principal Participating in Recent ASAT Workshop, "The Administrator's Role in Effective Instructional Planning)
66. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
67. ASAT ___ "Alert 2 School Activities (1998-1999)
68. ALSDE memorandum (May 18, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: Recognition of the contribution of an outside expert in technology and library-media to LEA being served)
69. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
70. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
71. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
72. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
73. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
74. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
75. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
76. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
77. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
78. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)

79. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
80. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
81. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
82. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
83. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
84. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
85. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
86. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
87. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
88. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
89. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
90. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
91. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
92. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)
93. ALSDE memorandum (May 13, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: June Planning Program focusing on effective lesson planning and teacher evaluation)

94. ASAT Instructional Team Meeting Agenda (May 20, 1999)
95. ASAT Instructional Team Meeting Agenda (May 7, 1999)
96. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
97. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
98. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
99. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
100. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
101. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
102. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
103. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
104. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
105. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
106. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
107. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
108. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
109. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
110. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
111. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
112. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
113. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
114. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
115. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
116. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)

117. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
118. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
119. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
120. ALSDE memorandum (March 26, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams (RE: Recognition of the contribution of an outside expert to LEA being served)
121. ALSDE memorandum (April 30, 1999) from ASAT team leader to Principal of LEA being served (RE: Appreciation letter for a year of hard work)
122. Letter (April 5, 1999) written from LEA principal to ASAT team leader [RE: Request for the continued service of ASAT member to LEA]
123. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
124. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
125. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
126. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
127. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
128. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
129. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
130. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
131. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
132. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]

133. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
134. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
135. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
136. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
137. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
138. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
139. Letter (March 26, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA teacher certification contact persons [RE: Meeting Regarding Teacher Certification Issues]
140. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
141. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
142. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
143. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
144. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
145. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
146. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
147. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
148. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
149. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
150. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
151. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]

152. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
153. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
154. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
155. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
156. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
157. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
158. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
159. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
160. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
161. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
162. Letter (May 6, 1999) written from ASAT team member to Coordinator of School Assistance Teams [Appreciation of the hard work demonstrated by Team ___ Special Services Teachers and Team Members]
163. Meeting Agenda (April 12, 1999)
164. Letter (March 9, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to Team __ team members [RE: Responsibilities to LEAs during SAT test administration]
165. Letter (March 10, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final "Countdown" for SAT]
166. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
167. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
168. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
169. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
170. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
171. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
172. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
173. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]

174. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
175. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
176. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
177. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
178. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
179. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
180. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
181. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
182. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
183. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
184. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
185. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
186. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
187. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
188. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
189. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
190. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
191. Letter (January 29, 1999) written from ASAT team leader to LEA principal [RE: Final Preparations for SAT]
192. Meeting Agenda (March 23, 1999)
193. Note: “Stress Support Kit”
194. Team __ Meeting Sign-In Sheet (May 21, 1998)

APPENDIX D

LIST OF PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

LIST OF PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANT	DATE	LOCATION
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 1 & 2	10/24/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 3	11/09/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 4 & 5	11/09/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 6	09/26/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 7	09/26/01	LEA Site
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 8	10/19/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 9	10/24/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama School Assistance Team Leader 10	10/19/01	Alabama State Department of Education
Focus Group Interview: Team Leader, Team Members, and Special Service Teachers	02/15/02	Alabama State Department of Education
LEA Central Office Personnel	07/15/02	_____ County Central Office
LEA Central Office Personnel	06/26/02	_____ County Central Office
LEA Principal	02/06/02	_____ High School
LEA Teacher: Elementary	02/06/02	_____ High School
LEA Teacher: Secondary	02/06/02	_____ High School

PARTICIPANT	DATE	LOCATION
Focus Group Interview: LEA Classroom Teachers	02/07/02	_____ High School
Focus Group Interview: LEA Community Members	02/07/02	_____ High School

APPENDIX E

CODE CATEGORIES

CODE CATEGORIES

ROLE OF ALABAMA SCHOOL ASSISTANCE TEAM

Role 1: Facilitating School Improvement and Empowering the LEAs They Serve
Helping schools improve
Helping learning occur
Changing student learning
Assisting teachers in finding better ways of teaching
Identifying factors that can be improved, but also identifying the things the students, teachers, school are doing RIGHT
Going beyond just "tolerating one another" – becoming partners in creating that school to be the very best that it can be (the students deserve the best school possible)
"Altering the course" the school is presently on…improving things so student achievement is higher
Helping the school "get back on their feet" (out of Caution, Alert 1, 2 & 3 status)
Assisting the school, the students, the teachers to become stronger so that student achievement is higher
Helping the teacher profession become better and stronger
Helping the students become stronger
Helping and facilitating student and school success
Celebrating student and school success

Role 2: An External Group Charged with Enforcing Mandates and Creating Change
ASAT is part of the "State Department" – go into the school and tell personnel "what to do"
Tell LEA personnel what they are doing wrong and what they need to do different
Implement new things and new ways of doing things
Change rules, procedures every year
Wait until the school is in trouble, then give minimum help and assistance ("bandaid")

PERCEIVED POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Improved School Performance
Schools classified as Alert 2 or Alert 3 status improving their standing
Teaching strategies
Teachers conveying high expectations to students
Team building
SAT scores
School (bulletin boards convey positive messages, etc.) looks nicer

Student Empowerment
Students observe teachers seem more energized and happy
Students receiving more individual attention
Students more confident, more sure of themselves

ASAT spending time with students
Encouragement of student work

Teacher Empowerment
Support
Encouragement
Good things happening between teachers and students
Teachers doing more teaching
Teachers pleased with gifts and resources provided by ASAT

BARRIERS

Social-Economic Issues
Difficulties that students have because of lack of personal and school resources
Different kind of background and experiences than children from higher socio-economic areas
Fewer opportunities and "things most people take for granted"
Less exposure to reading (parents may not be able to read
Few learning/developmental experiences (i.e., going to the library)
Students do not bring the "same things to the table" as do students from higher socio-economic areas
Basics - food, transportation, electricity, water - may be scarce: these basic needs may crowd out the importance of school
Children in low socio-economic areas generally are not going to test as well as children in middle/high socio-economic areas
Schools fighting uphill battle: less resources, advantages, support
School must meet these needs and lack of opportunities, yet meet same expectations and accountability standards as schools from higher socio-economic areas
Hiring teachers in low socio-economic schools not easy
Turnover of staff in low socio-economic schools very high
Different goals of students
Different mindset of community, students, and school personnel

Lack of Trust
Lack of trust of ASAT personnel by LEA personnel
Fear of ASAT personnel and Alabama State Department of Education (by LEA personnel)
Overcoming initial perspective and low morale of LEA personnel
Mistrust of ASAT personnel : viewed as "State Ladies or State Gentlemen," no longer "one of them"
Mistrust of Alabama State Department of Education: LEA personnel expects any state department representatives to "come in and tell me what to do"
View by LEA personnel that the ASAT personnel/Alabama State Department of Education have no knowledge of the LEA students, school or community before assistance efforts are begun

Resistance of ASAT Efforts
Resisting ASAT's school improvement efforts ("playing along," but not "buying into" school improvement efforts
ASAT school improvement efforts resisted by LEA personnel (undermined by administration)
ASAT school improvement efforts resisted by LEA personnel (ASAT personnel asked to leave classes by teachers)
LEA personnel will resist ASAT school improvement efforts until LEA personnel feel improvement efforts are genuine

Relational Difficulties
Defensive personalities can prevent progress
Personalities of LEA teachers can prevent bonding with SSTs
Cold, arrogant attitude
"Seem to know everything"
Military attitude
Not conveying that the LEA school, students, teachers, community are valued
LEA perception that ASAT just comes into the school to fulfill a duty, then leaves (no genuine concern)

Inconsistency of Program
Very hurtful to school improvement efforts if SST leaves after one year
Difficulty for LEA teachers to bond to new SSTs
Each year brings a different SST, different rules, different requirements

Funding
Lack of funding
More funding would acquire more needed ASAT personnel
More funding would allow ASAT personnel more time in the LEA sites

FACILITATING FACTORS

Leadership
Strong leadership
Good leadership
Consistent, good leadership facilitates success on the school, system and state levels
If ASAT team leaders receive strong leadership and support (from state department), they are themselves stronger leaders
If ASAT leader provides guidance, encouragement and leadership, team can make a difference in the schools
If LEA central office personnel provide leadership advice and encouragement to LEA principals, improvement efforts are more effective
LEA principal is KEY to ASAT personnel/school improvement efforts being accepted by the LEA and faculty
LEA principal's leadership endorses partnership/teamwork relationship between LEA and

ASAT personnel

Relational/Interpersonal Skills
Excellent personality and people skills
Supportive skills
Open and accepting attitude
Encouraging attitude
Listening skills
Empathetic skills
Ability to empower LEA students and teachers
Ability to overcome initial defensiveness of LEA staff
Diffuse initial feeling of failure by LEA staff and students
Relational skills to facilitate “bonding process”
Relational skills to set foundation for partnership relationship with LEA personnel

Commitment and Dedication of ASAT Personnel
Commitment to school and student improvement efforts despite resistant behavior from LEA personnel
Patience
Service-orientated perspective
Enhancing image of ASAT team/school improvement efforts
Demonstrating high caliber and strong work ethic
Determination to promote student and school improvement efforts