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Running head: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS AT WORK

Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS AT WORK:
A STUDY OF URBAN, PUBLIC NEW ENGLAND SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

By

Jessica M. Moro

June, 2017

Dr. Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To my loving husband as he has held my hand and provided for our family through this incredible journey to further my education, my children who will hopefully benefit from their mother's research into education, and my family who have been an incredible support system for all of us. I could not have done this without you all. Mom, you've always been there for me and I honestly don't know what I'd have done without your help and encouragement. Finally, to my Granddaddy, who always believed in me and encouraged me to reach for the stars. You are my rock and I love you to the moon and back.

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ABSTRACT

Education policy and mandates have changed drastically over the last 40 years. As politicians began adopting educational platforms as part of their political agenda, the educational standards of the United States have risen. Politicians have specifically targeted underserved populations as the focus of their educational reforms. Programs such as Race to the Top, FERPA, and No Child Left Behind are examples of politicians attempting to provide all students with equitable educations, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and economic background.

Just as it is naïve to believe that all students learn the same, it is also naïve to believe that there is one perfect program that will meet the needs of all students in all areas of the country. Under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2009, the US Department of Education strove to close the education gap with the introduction of School Improvement Grants. The SIG provided federal funds to underserved schools through a rigorous application process. The funds were available to approved schools for 3-year period. The purpose of this grant was to help underserved schools create and implement a program that was tailored to meet the needs of their students, while promoting academic growth.

This study focused on urban, public New England schools who received SIG funds between 2010 – 2016. Through semi-structured interviews with administrators at identified successful SIG schools, a list of best practices has been compiled as a reference for future urban, public New England schools who receive SIG funding. The key findings of this study indicated that communication, strong leadership, collaboration, and good staffing choices played a significant role in the success of the SIG programs. The conclusion of this study indicated that while schools and students have a vast range of needs and difficulties, there are several common

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shared experiences that could possibly help other administrators in their quest to implement a successful SIG program.

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Chapter I: Introduction

For decades, educational inequality has been a controversial issue throughout the United States with race, gender, and economic being at the root of this controversy. Efforts to provide all students with equal educational opportunities (e.g., No Child Left Behind, FERPA, Ladders of Opportunity and Promise Zones) have increased over the last 30 years (US Department of Education, 2010). These programs were put into place in order to bridge the resource and personnel gap between wealthy and poor school districts. The goal was to give students equal access to education regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or place of residence.

The United States Department of Education (ED) was founded on October 17, 1979 as a federal agency tasked with establishing policies for teachers and administrators in the public school system. According to the ED, their mission was to ensure and promote student achievement by preparing all students for the world job market. This was accomplished through promoting educational excellence and educational equality (US Department of Education, 2010). While the ED has implemented programs to combat educational inequality, (e.g. No Child Left Behind) it is clear that the United States educational system has not met its goal. Federal and state governments have made educational standards increasingly rigorous; however, schools in lower socioeconomic areas have been unable to bear the financial burdens of adapting and implementing new curriculums. The Kansas Supreme Court presided over educational debates regarding funding as recently as 2014 (Ujifusa & McNeil, 2014). In *Gannon v. State of Kansas*, the Kansas Court ruled that the K-12 funding system was unconstitutional because it did not distribute the funds equitably. The poorer districts received less funding than wealthier districts, which resulted in larger educational gaps. (Ujifusa & McNeil, 2014). Educational litigation was

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not limited to Kansas; states such as Texas and New York are awaiting financial rulings regarding education (US Department of Education, 2015a). In early 2009, President Obama tasked the Department of Education to find a way to stimulate under-performing schools throughout the country. In a letter penned to the US Department of Education, President Barack Obama stated that in the United States all students deserve to have an equitable, competitive education that prepares students for the global economy (US Department of Education, 2009). The ED set the goal that by 2020 the United States would have a higher high school completion rate than other developed countries (US Department of Education, 2015b). The ED stated that raising the expectations for students was a national priority and focused on ways to raise the federal standards to reflect their goal (US Department of Education, 2010).

Through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 2009, the ED devised a list of priorities to focused on equality and opportunity for all students, as well as, effective teachers and administrators in every school (US Department of Education, 2010). The School Improvement Grant (SIG) was created under Title I, Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the goal that the lowest achieving schools throughout the country would begin to make adequate yearly progress (US Department of Education, 2014a).

Background

In 1988, The US Department of Education began sponsoring a program that tracked the growth of schools throughout the United States. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) strove to identify states and schools that were making significant academic progress and those who were in need of additional educational resources based on federal

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educational standards. The 26 members that made up the National Assessment of Educational Progress team rated each school as above the national average, not significantly different than the national average, or significantly below the national average in reading, vocabulary, math, and science (NCES, 2013). Each school in the United States was compared to other schools in the district, the state, and the nation. In 1990, the NAEP issued a National Report Card based on the scores of these comparisons. The National Report Cards were created and distributed by independent contractors through the United States Board of Education. In 2003, a program called the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) was created. The TUDA was used to more effectively track the progress of urban schools identified as scoring significantly below the national average. The TUDA was released every two years and tracked each school's growth and/or regression in reading, vocabulary, and math scores. The TUDA results showed that most underserved urban populations had glaringly obvious deficiencies in the academic records (US Department of Education, 2006).

In January 2009, President Obama's administration began the arduous task of reforming the K-12 and higher education system. The focus of the 2009 reforms was on state and federal standards in the areas of math, science, technology, English language and literature, and social studies. The goal of the educational standards reform was to ensure that all students in all school districts in all states, regardless of economic status, would receive the same educational opportunities (US Department of Education, 2014a). The U.S. Department of Education spent approximately three-quarters of its funds split between Pell (college) Grants and Title 1 (K-12) grants that support schools in low-income communities; and aid for special needs students that ensures all children receive the educational services they need to reach their full potential (US

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Department of Education, 2014a). While Pell Grants did not fund K-12 schools, it did take a large portion of the ED's funds, which impacted the amount of money that K-12 schools were able to access. Though Title 1 funding helped underserved populations throughout the United States attain learning standards not previously reached, there continued to be an educational deficit in low – and moderate-income school districts (US Department of Education, 2015b).

Though high school graduation rates had risen to its highest point in 30 years, due mostly in part for the increase of African American and Hispanic students receiving their diplomas, equitable education had yet to be attained (US Department of Education, 2014a). In order to make significant educational gains, the Obama administration devised an in-depth plan that aimed to support school administration, teachers and children in their teaching strategies and learning. Specifically, the plan addressed redesigning high school education so that students were prepared to either enter college or enter the global workforce. It was the intention of this administration that STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education subject matter was strengthened, teachers and school leaders were given significant support as they dealt with the day to day needs of their students, and finally, helped schools improve safety measures so that school personnel were prepared for any and all emergencies that may have arose (US Department of Education, 2014a).

In addition, President Obama's administration invested in preschool education so that students were prepared to enter the public school system, regardless of their financial situations or place of residence. This preschool initiative was put into place so that children were ready to enter kindergarten with an appropriate knowledge base. This initiative impacted the readiness of children to become active learners in the elementary schools. Previously, students entering public

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kindergartens had not always attended preschool or head start programs. The students were unprepared to be full time students. By updating and opening up preschool education to all students, regardless of their financial backgrounds, students were better prepared for a full time kindergarten program with higher standards.

Race to the Top (RTT) was implemented in 2010 with the intention of encouraging states to implement educational reform using a comprehensive approach, meaning that schools focused on all areas of education, not just the five main subject areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). RTT was a \$4.35 billion competitive grant program with the goal of significantly increasing student achievement, increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates, and decreasing achievement gap so that students were prepared to enter either the global workforce. It encouraged and rewarded states for implementing comprehensive reforms across four key areas: adopting standards and assessments that prepared students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; building data systems that measured student growth and success, and informed teachers and principals about how they could improve instruction; recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they were needed most; and turning around the lowest-achieving schools (US Department of Education, 2015b). RTT acknowledged that there was no one right way to implement educational change and encouraged state and district leaders to design and implement educational reforms in a manner that met the needs of the teachers, children, and families in the school district (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). RTT was significant to educational equity because states who received the grant money were asked to share their models of reform, thereby spreading best practices in reform throughout the country.

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Statement of the Problem

Educational inequality was still a very real and present issue for many schools throughout the United States. While the US Department of Education had attempted to streamline education with programs such as Common Core and National Standardized Tests in order to require all students in the country to be learning the same material, the TUDA and NAEP indicated that socioeconomic and racial inequalities prevented school districts from obtaining the same level of learning competencies (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008). When President Obama took office in 2009, the US Department of Education began to research programs that provided additional funding for under-performing schools in America with the goal that all students would receive an appropriate education to prepare them to enter the adult workforce (US Department of Education, 2010). As part of the reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965, President Obama reallocated SIG to states educational agencies (SEA). The SEA divided the grant money among the lowest performing schools who demonstrated greatest financial need and the strongest commitment to providing adequate resources and learning opportunities to raise their academic achievement levels. The Office for School Turnaround monitored SIG schools, requiring regular progress reports. Schools that received SIG grants were able to use different intervention models as long as the model was approved by state and local education agencies and was based on the guidelines in the SIG (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of best practices for implementing SIGs so that other administrators could use the federal grants in the most effective

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manner in order to meet the needs of their underserved population and produce results consistent with the goals of the school. In addition, this study aimed to investigate successful strategies used in implementing such grants, lessons learned in implementing SIGs and how they can be used to improve future implementations, and how the success of these programs were measured. The study focused on SIGs used in urban school districts in New England, including schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.

Research Questions

- What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?
- What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?
- How did participating schools measure the success of the School Improvement Grant at their respective schools?
- Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?

Significance of Topic

The United States Department of Education intended to create internationally competitive learning environments for students so that students were prepared to enter the adult workforce as competent and successful employees. It was important that students were properly educated in all subject areas, regardless of their socioeconomic status, religion, race, gender, etc. Educational equality had been an important and controversial issue for more than half a century (US Department of Education, 2015a). While the United States had made significant strides through

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desegregation, religious tolerance, and gender integration in classrooms, the educational system continued to fall short in its ability to provide educational equality to all socioeconomic, racial backgrounds.

The findings of the study intended to guide urban, New England schools who received SIGs so they can: identify programs that were successful in other urban schools; learn from examples of successful assessment strategies; accurately determine best practices for teachers, administrators, Local Education Agencies, and State Education Agencies. Determining best practices used in underserved urban schools helped LEAs and SEAs determine which schools in their areas were model schools when new SIG schools begin their own programs. Overall, the goal of this study was to provide vital information for SIG schools so that schools can identify the best practices for its population. In order to compile a reference of best practices, various studies had been conducted throughout the country, targeting specific populations of students that qualify for SIGs. However, to date, there were no published studies of urban, New England schools that were currently using SIGs.

Key definitions

The following list contains definitions of important terms that were used throughout this study. The terms were defined by either the literature or the US Department of Education. All terms were relevant to the application guidelines and the process that SIG schools went through in order to qualify for SIG funds.

Underserved schools. The ED defines underserved schools as those schools within the United States that have a high-minority or high-poverty population (US Department of Education, 2010). These schools are identified on the National Report Card and by State

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Education Agencies (SEA) as not gaining academic progress due to lack of resources including funding and high quality teachers. These are schools that consistently score below the National Average in the Core learning areas.

Increased Learning time programs. Increased learning time programs are federally or privately funded programs that provide additional instructional time in English, Language Arts, Math, and other core subjects in order to enhance students' knowledge (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). Increased learning time programs are carefully monitored by either LEAs or the private organizations providing funds in order to track student progress. Increased learning time programs generally add an addition 90-120 minutes of instructional time. Students who attend schools who use increased learning time programs are required to attend the programs.

Educational equality. Educational equality refers to the ED's initiative that all students receive high quality education regardless of locations, population, race, or gender. The ED supports states in their efforts to ensure quality teaching in every classroom through various federally-funded programs. In addition, the ED aims to raise standards for all students, build systems to improve instruction, and significantly improve low-performing schools (US Department of Education, 2014b). The current goal is by 2020 all students in all states will graduate high school.

National average. The National average refers to the statistical data collected, analyzed, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics for the 50 states and Washington DC. Schools who fall below the National average are generally labeled as failing schools. The ED's goal is for all schools throughout the United States to meet or exceed the National average. This report is released every two years.

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School Improvement Grant (SIG). School Improvement Grants are federal grant money awarded based on the Title 1 funding formula to states education agencies. Funding is then competitively distributed to school districts applying on behalf of their eligible schools in order to support the turnaround of the nation's persistently lowest-achieving schools (Hurlburt, Le Floch, Therriault, Cole & Wei, 2011). SIG monies are awarded based on the proposed usage for the funds to the neediest schools who are committed to making the necessary changes to their schools in order to promote academic achievement. The SIG schools receive the grant for a total of three school years.

Achievement gap. The achievement gap is defined as the difference in the performance between each ESEA subgroup (as defined in this document) within a participating LEA or school and the statewide average performance of the LEA's or State's highest achieving subgroups in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by the assessments required under the ESEA (US Department of Education, 2014). This means that each school's academic record in the core learning areas are compared to other schools within the same district and the same state. Based on the differences in the scores, the ED, LEAs, and SEAs determine how large a gap exists between the highest scoring schools and the lowest scoring schools. This determines the achievement gap for the following school year.

Academic enrichment programs. Academic enrichment programs are any programs that are funded by SIG monies that provide all students within a school with educational opportunities that extend beyond the standard school day activities (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). Academic enrichment programs generally extend the learning day 90 – 120 minutes. These

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programs are mandatory under the SIG guidelines. These programs generally focus on reading, writing skills, math, and technology.

Race to the Top (RTT). Race to the Top is an ED-sponsored competitive grant program that funds states and districts planning to implement comprehensive education reform in one or more core areas (US Department of Education, 2009). RTT awards go to states that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive education reform. Unlike SIG, Race to the Top awards funds to schools who have shown academic progress and are committed to continuing their academic achievement pursuits. RTT requires that its awardees: (a) adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy, (b) build data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction, (c) Recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and (d) Turn around our lowest-achieving schools.

Local education agencies (LEA). Local education agencies are defined as public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools (US Department of Education, Elementary and Secondary Education Act). LEAs oversee the schools within a given school district to ensure that academic achievement and state standards are being met. LEAs are

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generally defined as members of the local board of education and members of the superintendent's office. LEA's report their district statistics to SEAs.

State education agencies (SEA). State education agencies are in charge of awarding federal grant money to local education agencies based on the number of eligible SIG schools, using a competitive application process (US Department of Education, 2009). SEAs are generally defined as the state board of education members, the State Commissioner of Education, and members of the State Department of Education offices. The state Turnaround Office is generally included as part of the SEA as more states are applying for SIG funding. SEAs oversee the distribution of SIG funds and are required to meet quarterly with school and LEAs who have received SIG funds to monitor progress.

United States Department of Education (ED). The United States Department of Education's (ED) mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. ED was created in 1980 by combining offices from several federal agencies. ED's 4,400 employees and \$68 billion budget are dedicated to: (a) establishing policies on federal financial aid for education, and distributing as well as monitoring those funds, (b) collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research, (c) focusing national attention on key educational issues, and (d) prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education (US Department of Education, 2009). The ED oversees all federal education mandates and federal education grants.

Key Assumptions

Several assumptions were made while conducting this study. First, it was assumed that all students attending the schools targeted in this study were working to the best of their ability in

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order to make significant academic progress. Second, it was assumed that the teachers and administrators involved in the academic enrichment program were willing participants and supported the program. Third, it was assumed that the school district, the district superintendent, and other responsible parties were active in the enrichment program with the intention of seeing it succeed. Finally, it was assumed that the interviewees were being honest and answered each question to the best of their knowledge.

Limitations of the study

This case study was specific to urban schools in the New England area that were employing the SIG turnaround or transformation model. Each school district that received monies from SIG was allowed to allocate and design the academic enrichment program at their discretion, as long as it was approved and followed the outlined SIG guidelines. The flexibility of the SIG academic enrichment program allowed each school to design a program that met the needs of the students enrolled. While many of the programs were similar in style, no two was exactly the same; therefore, this study only focused on best practices rather than identify a single model for all schools to employ.

The results of this study were specific to the urban, public schools in the New England states who received SIG funding. The findings of this study were limited by the information provided by the administrators and school superintendents and any information that was public record. Any information that was not provided or information that was private, and therefore unattainable through research, could not be included in this study.

Summary

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This study examined the effect, both positive and negative, of academic enrichment programs funded by the SIG initiative of the US Department of Education in underserved urban, public schools within New England. This study identified the successes and hardships of creating and implementing an academic enrichment program funded by SIG and identified best practices when employing a SIG turnaround or transformation model. This study identified how schools measure the success of the SIG program and compiled recommendations for future schools employing the SIG turnaround or transformation model. This study served as a snapshot of how urban schools within one area of the country had chosen to address the issue of educational inequality through the use of funds allocated by the SIG.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this section, literature pertaining to educational reform in the United States dating back to the mid 1900's, post-World War II was reviewed. Prior to World War II, education equality was not the focus of the federal government; therefore, little to no information exists on the topic. Literature that specifically discussed the role of federal mandates for public schools in the United States, the local education policies for each individual New England state, and how poverty in urban areas affects the learning environment were also reviewed. The literature review also explored the use of federal grants for underserved schools who were not making adequate academic achievement. The purpose of this literature review was to build a foundation of knowledge about the role of the federal government in educational initiatives over the last 60 years.

Educational Reform

The educational system has been one of the most commonly debated issues amongst politicians throughout the 20th century. Since The Truman Report was released in 1947, presidential commissions on education have been fairly common. Over the years, various presidential commissions on education have been penned, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "Committee on Education Beyond the High School" (1956), President John F. Kennedy's Task Force on Education (1960), and President George W. Bush's Commission on Higher Education (2001).

There is no agreed upon, recognized date or event that researchers and educational analysts identify as the major catalyst for educational reform. Reform efforts have been part of the educational system beginning in the early 1900's. There are, however, several dates and

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events throughout the 20th Century that highlight the movement for the educational reform that we continue to work toward today. According to Lehman (2015), the beginning of educational reform started in 1983, where education became a highly discussed topic in most political platforms. Spring (2014) contends that Democrats have used educational reform for political advancement as early as 1960. However, it could also be argued that 1957 was the defining year of educational reform with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, a precursor to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the enforcement of integration in Little Rock, AK. While educational experts continue to disagree over the beginning of educational reform, they all agreed that educational reform continues to be a priority for the US ED.

The 1983 report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014), though not the first Presidential report on education, it was the first report addressing the issues of unequal education and the failing American educational system as a whole not as the result of racial or economic issues. This report was compiled by a commission of 18 members from the educational, private, and government sectors who analyzed the lack of progress of American schools to prepare students to enter the competitive workforce. According to the report, the commission identified five major areas of education which needed reform (i.e. content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support) and made a total of 38 recommendations within these five areas.

Over the past 31 years the focus of the ED has continued to center on these same five areas of reform, though emphasis on standards and expectations had become the central area of critique for educational reformers and politicians. Researchers, politicians, and educators had

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yet to successfully address education inequality in a manner that significantly changed the course of education.

On the 25th anniversary of the release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), Strong American Schools, a nonprofit organization supported by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that endeavored to support sound educational practices and policies in America, released a report that analyzed the progress of American school since the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The Strong American Schools reported that even though the United States was aware of the issues facing their school systems, very few of the Commission's recommendations were actually put into practice (Strong American Schools, 2008). The report contended that educators and the education system were not the issues that were directly effecting the change; rather they contended that the political leadership was responsible for improving education on the national, state, and local level. The Strong American School report specifically focused on the role of national leadership and its role in helping state and local school agencies overcome educational challenges to improve K-12 education (Strong American Schools, 2008). This report was released as motivational tool to encourage 2008 presidential candidates to renew the discussion of American educational reform measures.

At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, high school graduation rates had risen to its highest point in 30 years (US Department of Education, 2014b). When President Obama took office, his administration began an aggressive approach to revamp the education system. This approach called for a significant change to the way in which teachers teach and the way that students learn (US Department of Education, 2014b). Specifically, the Obama administration

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focused on redesigning high school education in order to prepare student to enter either college or the workforce. The redesigned curriculum focused on strengthening the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) curriculum. In order to ensure that schools were providing student with the best possible education, the plan also included improving support for teachers and school leaders. The redesigned plan also addressed the need to help schools improve their safety measures to deal with any unplanned emergencies or disasters (US Department of Education, 2014b).

The goal of the administration was to raise high school graduation rates and continually decrease the high school dropout rates on a national level. As part of this renewed commitment to raising the nation's education standards and goals, the US Department of Education and the Obama administration included providing access to high-quality preschool education for low- and moderate-income families and providing incentives for states who provided preschool for middle income families, as well (State of the Union Address, 2013). By strengthening the preschool education system and providing educational opportunities at a young age, children were better prepared to enter full time elementary classrooms.

In January 2009, President Obama's administration implemented their educational reform policies. The main focus of reform on the national level was regarding STEM (science, technology, English language and literature, and math) content areas. State and Federal Standards were revised, with many states adopting Common Core. Although the focus of the educational reforms was on a national level, states maintained control over the actual curriculum and fine tuning of the standards that the state adopted (US Department of Education, 2015b). At the time of publication, 45 states and the District of Columbia had voluntarily adopted the

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Common Core State Initiative (US Department of Education, 2015b). Through a program called ESEA Flexibility – based out of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the federal government supports states in their transition to the new standards and allows each state to create and adapt their own accountability system (US Department of Education, 2015b). The purpose for these reform measures is to ultimately allow states to move away from the expectations under No Child Left Behind and focus on meeting the needs of the students so that students would be successful (Department of Education, 2015b).

In 2009, the Obama administration introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) which allocated federal funds to help stimulate the economy (Hurlburt, Therriault, LeFloch, & Wei, 2012). As part of this government initiative, the US ED began to research programs that would stimulate educational growth in identified under- performing schools throughout the country. The SIG was developed based on the need for additional funds under- performing schools so desperately needed in order to make significant national progress (Hurlburt et. al., 2012). SIGs were awarded to schools that consistently scored below the national average and were committed to redesigning the school day to add academic enrichment programs which provided all students in the school with additional educational time. In order to monitor these grants, the federal government designed a rigorous application process that awarded over 1200 schools monies nationwide in 2010-2011 (Hurlburt et. al., 2012). On February 20, 2014, the US Secretary of Education announced that nine states received over \$71 million in SIG grants in order to continue to make improvements to their underperforming schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014d).

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While the commitment to success of students was buttressed by substantial funding through School Improvement Grants, implementation and optimal use of the funds proved to be quite challenging. Due to the significant differences in each school, based on diversity of population, location of schools, and differing needs within these, the Institute of Education Sciences, with the help of researchers from the American Institutes for Research, found that each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C. varied their approaches for implementing the SIG programs (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). The local educational agencies (LEA) in each state governed how funds were distributed to each school and how many of the applying schools actually received funding. Hurlburt et. al. (2011) found that funds were distributed based on the budget plan that the applicants provided.

Furthermore, there were no strict guidelines or documented best practices in implementing such grants for school administrators. As such, with the absence of such guidelines or a roadmap, school administrators struggled in successful implementation of these grants including measuring the success of strategies they had employed. Due to the newness of the data collected by the Institute of Education Sciences through the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, it did not provide a comprehensive overview of the SIG programs. Hurlburt et. al. (2011) acknowledged that their research only provided an incomplete picture of the implementation of SIG programs. This meant that, while the data collected at that time was relevant to mapping SIG schools' progress, the revised SIG program was in its infancy stage and best practices and implementation guidelines had yet to be proven effective.

Recent Statistics

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On October 28, 2015, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) released the 2015 National Report Card. This report card specifically focused on students in grades 4 and 8 for the 2014-2015 school year. The NAEP released the National Report Card every two years and focused their results on grades 4 and 8. In 2015 the Mathematics scores for grade 4 were lower compared to the 2013 school year scores, though the proficiency scores were only lower by 1 percent or less. In 2015, the number of students in 4th grade who scored proficient or above in Mathematics was 40% while the number of students in 4th grade who scored proficient or above in Mathematics in 2013 was 42% (US Department of Education, 2015c). In 2015, the number of students in 8th grade who scored proficient or above in Mathematics was 33% compared to the 36% who scored proficient and above in 2013 (US Department of Education, 2015c). In 2015, the Reading scores for grade 4 were slightly higher than the 2013 National Report Card. In 2015, 36% of students scored at proficient or above on the reading test, compared to the 35% of 4th grade students in 2013 (US Department of Education, 2015c). In 2015 the number of 8th grade students who scored proficient or above on their reading stayed the same as the 2013 score at 35% (US Department of Education, 2015c).

Through further demographic research, the NEAP reported that students who performed higher on the National Report Card were from wealthier, more advantaged districts. Students who performed lower were from poorer, less advantaged districts. These findings were consistent with the findings of state and local education agencies that underserved schools generally performed lower on standardized tests and did not make as much academic progress as schools who had students from higher-socio economic backgrounds. These findings indicated that not only was there an achievement gap in the United States, but there was also a gap in resources and

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educational experiences. These findings further supported the need for high-quality education for all students, regardless of where they live.

Poverty and Education

Both Republican and Democratic political leaders agreed that the American education system was failing to prepare American students to enter into a competitive global workforce. There was, however, little agreement as to how to create equitable education for all students in the United States. Political discussions on educational reform consistently addressed content areas, standards, national testing, and teaching practices but law makers too often overlooked one of the key factors in the struggle to provide equitable education: poverty. Lehman (2015) highlighted one of the main issues, stating “no one is opposed to education. We just don’t want to pay for it. Let’s face reality: good education is expensive” (p. 24). This was the problem faced by too many American schools: standards were raised, expectations were raised, and teachers were held accountable for their students’ ability to pass standardized tests, but funding for education was lacking.

Michael Rose, author of *A Mind at Work* and a research professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA spent 30 years studying school systems throughout the United States. He concluded that inequitable funds and resources, along with lack of cohesive educational support and social injustices limited the potential of students (Rose, 2015). Stanley, Richardson, and Prior (2005) similarly found that families who lived in poverty often had children who attended schools with less resources and with overwhelmed teachers. Research showed that parents and guardians of these children focused on paying day to day bills rather than the quality of their children’s education (Stanley et. al., 2005). Teachers in high-

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poverty, underserved schools were asked to create a positive learning environment while combating lack of funding, lack of resources, and lack of parental support at home, whether due to language barriers, parent's work hours or other poverty-related issues. Rose (2015) argued that in order to fully understand the children who lived in poverty, educators had to recognize how poverty affected the lives of the students and identify ways to intervene on behalf of the students.

While education could not fix the plague of poverty in American society, it was naïve to discount the effects on children, teachers, test scores, and the classroom. Resources were needed for low-achieving schools to make significant progress and close the achievement gap. Teachers who were interviewed as part of a study for SIG in high-English Language Learner schools “reported having insufficient resources and support” (Golden et. al, 2014, p. 6). Researchers also found that more than half of the teachers included in the research had not received sufficient materials that met the needs of ELL students. Teachers also did not have the required training for working with ELL students (Golden et al., 2014). Lehman (2015) argued that teachers who had appropriate materials, resources and technology were successful because they were equipped to do their jobs and engaged in best teaching practices.

Standardized Tests

Standardized testing was a common practice in the United States since the early 1970s and have been critiqued since their inception. As early as 1975 standardized testing and their reliability for measuring a quality education have been discussed and criticized. Braun (1975) found that while standardized testing was a useful tool for measuring and comparing students' growth it was not always a useful tool for judging a student's competency. While these two statements may seem contradictory, Braun (1975) found that standardized tests were unable to

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take into account factors outside the test that had obscured the level of students' competence. Judith Sinkule (1996) found that though students in public US schools during the 1980s were the most tested population in the world, they were not making significant academic achievement when compared to other developed countries. The 1991 Hearing on the Office of Education Research and Improvement recommended less testing and more focus on school reforms (Sinkule, 1996). However, over the following few decades standardized testing continued to be the primary method by which schools, districts, states, and even the federal government assessed the success or failure of a school, its curriculum and programs.

Many researchers agreed that although standardized tests should not be the only measure of students' knowledge or the measure of a given program, they did have a place in education. When interpreted correctly standardized tests provided a baseline assessment of content areas to show which ones needed strengthening (Popham, 1999). Lehman (2015) suggested that standardized tests were important for measuring achievement but warned that when assessing the quality of education or for improving education, "testing cannot do the job alone" (p. 24). Standardized tests were also useful when devising a student-centered curriculum. Administrators and teachers determined critical information about their students' knowledge, identified students' strengths and weaknesses and used this information to drive the choice of instructional style. A third valid use for standardized tests was to measure students' growth, or achievement, over a period of months, semesters, or years in order to provide individualized assistance and supportive instruction (Popham, 1999). Standardized tests provided a snapshot of students' abilities but did not necessarily indicate a student's true level of content knowledge – authentic measures needed to be in place to provide educators with accurate information. Gonzalez (2006)

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acknowledged that standardized tests were created to help schools make adequate yearly progress in subject-content areas. The goal was for students to show growth and proficiency.

However, researchers were quick to warn that standardized testing was not the only indicator of a successful education. In fact, research showed that an emphasis on standardized testing resulted in teachers teaching to the test, which took the focus away from learner-centered education (Gonzalez, 2006). Policy-makers used standardized testing to measure the quality of education and to hold teachers accountable for students' ability to meet current educational standards. Ryan (2010) pointed out that standardized testing was not an indicator of high quality, equitable education but of whether material had been retained by students.

While the intention of both No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top was to streamline education so that all children, regardless of socioeconomic background and location, received a quality, equitable education, such programs failed to produce the desired results. No Child Left Behind blamed the lack of academic achievement on educators' low expectation and lack of effort (Rose, 2015) rather than holding the students accountable for the test results. In fact, standardized tests only indicated whether material has been retained by students. Lehman (2015) also pointed out that while No Child Left Behind was originally supposed to provide educational funding for low performing schools, funds were never provided. Alexander (2015) concluded that an education system cannot be deemed "good quality" unless that system was equitable for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, gender, etc.

Research indicated that though government programs and standards were often created with the intention of raising the quality of the education for all students, the opposite had in fact occurred. Rose (2015) found that while test scores improved, students in low income areas were

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still receiving an inadequate education which focused on learning skills and routines. Conversely, students in more affluent districts received educational experiences that were engaging and meaningful (Rose, 2015). Lehman (2015) argued that schools had focused on testing rather than improving education because administrators were concerned about failing standardized tests and not meeting their annual yearly progress goals. Unfortunately, the term ‘quality education’ had been reduced to test scores and annual yearly progress (AYP). Alexander (2015) argued that the term ‘quality education’ had become a slogan for educators and policy-makers rather than a definition of what education should include.

Moving Beyond the Test

In 2010, President Barack Obama and his administration began a series of educational reform measures in order to bridge the achievement gap and ensure that all students received a high quality education (US Department of Education, 2010). These initiatives (e.g., RTT, SIG) were intended to improve the education system through high quality teachers and leaders, higher standards for students, updated assessments that produced relevant data, and updated technology (US Department of Education, 2010). In “A Blueprint for Reform” (2010), the ED identified five priorities for reform that mirrored President Obama’s reform initiatives: (a) college and career-ready students; (b) great teachers and leaders in every school; (c) equity and opportunity for all students; (d) raising the bar and reward excellence; and (e) innovation and continuous improvement.

In his 2010 State of the Union address, President Barak Obama outlined his intended reform measures for education. President Obama believed that hiring high-quality teachers would guide students to be successful. One way of ensuring that prospective teachers were well-

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prepared to enter any classroom in the U.S. was to create rigorous teacher-training programs in colleges across the nation so there were high-quality teachers in each classroom and high-quality administrators for each school. The ED, in conjunction with President Obama's office, released "A Blueprint for Reform" in March 2010, which outlined new evaluation systems to ensure teachers were effective in the classroom. The purpose of this new system was to "identify effective and highly effective teachers and principals on the basis of student growth and other factors" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 4). Grants made it possible for schools to provide teachers and administrators with effective professional development, support for educators who are struggling to provide effective lessons or whose students are not making adequate progress, and support for educators in high-poverty, high-minority areas (US Department of Education, 2010).

Accountability on all levels (i.e., teacher, administrator, students, districts, states) was an important piece of creating college and career-ready standards. The ED and SEAs provided rigorous interventions and support to students and schools that were not making adequate progress in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities, English Language Learner students, and those who came from disadvantaged circumstances (US Department of Education, 2010). The RTT program rewarded schools and districts who made significant improvement over time through reform measures and developed comprehensive plans that changed policies and practices so that students made positive improvements (US Department of Education, 2010). In addition, the ED aimed to prepare students to become workforce ready and prepare other students for college educations by providing access to more challenging high school curriculum and college-level classes.

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Finally, the ED and the Investing in Innovation Fund (a program under the ARRA that provided competitive grants to schools who were making AYP and were committed to continuing student growth through innovative education) provided support to local programs that encouraged students to be innovative in their approach to learning and closed the achievement gaps. It was the intention of such competitive funding to be more flexible so that local programs could meet the needs of students in their district and prioritized programs that provided students with the most support to keep students safe and healthy and help families more involved in their children's education (US Department of Education, 2010). The ultimate goal was to create student-centered learning environments that actively involved all stakeholders in the education process.

Teachers and Reform

Educational reform affected the way teachers conduct their lessons and the curriculum that they taught. The topic of educational reform was generally addressed prior to the end of the school year. Teachers, administrators, and school staff members generally met at the end of the school year to review the results of standardized tests, address new innovations that would be employed in the new school year, and revising goals and expectations for both teachers and students. In high-poverty, high-minority areas of the country this was often a daunting task, especially for schools that had not made adequate yearly progress. Schools that were designated as failing often faced the new school year with fear of failing once again, or of losing teachers and administrators that were deemed ineffective.

Although education reform often used students' standardized test scores to evaluate teacher performance, research showed that teacher effectiveness was not adequately reflected by

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these scores. Rose (2015) found that standardized tests did not reflect the cognitive discussions and overall learning that took place in the classroom. Courville (2003) pointed out that the emphasis on standardized test results did not take into account the authentic learning experiences that took place in the classroom. The results of standardized tests only measured whether a student was employable after graduation, whether the school had reached the state benchmarks, and the AYP of the school as a whole (Courville, 2003). Poor test scores were used as a measure of identifying inadequate teachers or students (Courville, 2003) rather than evaluating the standardized tests themselves. This discounted and ignored those other factors in daily life that affected the outcome of a standardized test. Lehman (2015) agreed that there were many factors that influenced student performance which were outside a teacher's control and that basing teacher performances on one factor was not a valid measurement.

Because test scores often determined whether a teacher was effective in the classroom, teacher retention was a growing problem, especially for underserved schools. When schools did not make AYP or were designated as failing, it was common practice to replace teachers whose students had the lowest test scores. In fact, programs such as SIG required schools to replace at least 50% of their teaching staff and, often, the principal as well (US Department of Education, 2015b). The high rate of teacher turnover was detrimental to the education system as knowledgeable, high quality teachers had left the teaching field in search of other professional opportunities.

Teachers were often dismissed as not having enough knowledge and understanding of educational law and reform and were rarely consulted when decisions regarding the classroom were made. Educators' professional judgments were restricted by policy-makers who did not

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have a comprehensive understanding of the student population and classroom learning environment (Lehman, 2015). Rose (2015) argued that educational reform was too focused on innovation and creative disruption rather than the transfer of teacher-learner knowledge. Alexander (2015) stated that quality teachers were extremely important because they helped children reach their true learning potential through this knowledge transfer.

As part of the school turnaround program and under both SIG and RTT, teachers were subjected to the ever-changing demands of policy and classroom expectations, especially in areas where high-poverty, low-achieving schools were concerned. SIG and RTT grants stipulate that staffing changes must be made in order to receive the funds. Under the turnaround program of SIG, the school receiving the grant funds were required to replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of the school's staff (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). Similarly, SIG's transformation program guidelines required the principal to be replaced and staffing be adjusted as needed. While changes such as these were sometimes effective, they also created anxiety for students and teachers as they adjusted to new programs, staff and expectations. These changes also ignored other factors that impacted the school population.

Rather than dismiss teachers' knowledge and expertise, it was the contention of many in the educational field that teachers ought to be consulted as changes were made and actively involved in the decision-making process (Alexander, 2015; Courville, 2003; Rose, 2015). Programs such as Teach to Lead and the Center for Teaching Quality advocated for using teachers' knowledge and experience to create learning environments and standards that were high-quality and required high expectations for student learning. In her 2014 address to the National Board on Professional Teaching Standards Teaching and Learning Conference, U.S.

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Secretary of Education Anne Duncan addressed the concerns that teachers had little to no voice outside the classroom. Secretary Duncan (2014) believed teachers and administrators needed to work collaboratively with parents and community members in order to create sustainable changes including higher standards of education and more effective support and evaluations systems. She went on to discuss the value that teachers' knowledge added to education and how Teach to Lead encouraged and promoted the use of classroom teachers in educational decisions. Secretary Duncan argued that teachers needed to have a voice in policies and decisions that affected students, the classroom, and moreover, the teaching profession (para. 36). Teachers could not be leaders if they do not have the flexibility to make decisions that benefited their students and if they are forced to conduct lessons that do not meet the needs of their students. According to Duncan (2014) teachers and administrators needed to work cohesively because teachers have a better understanding of the daily life in the classroom and listening to their opinions and insight help administrators make effective changes.

Lehman (2015) argued that schools should have access to a wide assortment of teacher-led research in order for appropriate curriculum to be created and so that teachers had access to best practices for teaching methods and assessment techniques. He went on to argue that teachers should have been consulted when making major decisions in relation to the education process and expectation. "They [teachers] ought to be given the authority they need, as professionals, to do their jobs" (Lehman, 2015, p. 26).

School Improvement Grants

School Improvement Grants were federal monies that were awarded to schools with low-performing students (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). These grants were awarded based on the extreme

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need for underperforming schools to make necessary changes. The intent for this funding was to provide all students with adequate learning environments and experiences to prepare them to enter the world of business and/or college. Each grant was given over a three-year period. In order to qualify for the grant money, the applying school must have been willing and able to follow one of the four models that the SIG offered. Each model had its own requirements that had to be followed in order to receive federal funding. If, at any time during this three-year period, a school was unable or unwilling to continue to follow the model they had chosen, the grant was withdrawn (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

SIGs were added to Title 1 funding in 2001 under section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). SIGs were awarded to states based on the Title 1 funding formulas put forth by the ED. The State Educational Agencies (SEA), in turn, disbursed sub-grants to local educational agencies (LEA), such as school boards of education. LEAs funded schools with the greatest need and the strongest commitment to increasing student performance and closing the education gap (Le Floch et. al., 2014).

In order to receive an SIG, eligible schools had to meet the required criteria put forth by the U.S. ED. Under Title 1 funding, school had to fall under one of three tiers or categories in order to be considered eligible for an SIG.

Tier I: Schools that fell under Tier 1 were involved in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring plans. In order to be considered a Tier I school, the population of the school must have met the following requirements:

- was among the lowest-achieving five percent of schools in the state; and
- was a high school that had a graduation rate below 60% for a number of years; or

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- was an elementary school that was no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school identified as a persistently low-achieving school in Tier I; and/or
- was an elementary school that had not made annual yearly progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years; or
- was in the state's lowest quintile based on proficiency rates.

Tier II. Secondary schools that did not receive Title 1, Part A funds, but were eligible for these funds fell under the category of a Tier II school as long as it also:

- was among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools in the state; or
- had a graduation rate below 60% for a number of years; or
- was no higher achieving than the highest-achieving school identified as a persistently lowest-achieving school in Tier II and
- had not made annual yearly progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years; or
- was in the state's lowest quintile based on proficiency rates.

Tier III. Tier III schools included any other Title 1 schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring plans that did not fall under the Tier I guidelines. Tier III schools were identified as:

- Title 1 eligible schools that did not meet the requirements of Tier I or Tier II schools
- had not made annual yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years; or
- was in the state's lowest quintile based on proficiency rates (Le Floch et. al., 2014, pp. 2-3).

Tier I and Tier II schools were identified on the SIG application. According to federal Department of Education rules, Tier I and Tier II schools received the funds first. If there was

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additional money, State Educational Agencies explained and detailed how any additional funds were disbursed to eligible Tier III schools. In order for schools to qualify for a School Improvement Grant, the local educational agencies followed a rigorous application process that detailed exactly why the school needed the money, which of the four SIG models it intended to implement, and how the money would be allocated if received. School Improvement Grant monies could be used for staffing incentives, training purposes, stipends, and for educational materials that the classrooms required. While there was built-in flexibility to SIG, each school that received funds was carefully monitored in order to ensure that the grant money was properly spent to benefit the population of the school.

Changes to School Improvement Grants

SIGs were originally funded under Title 1 section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001 (Hurlburt et. al., 2012). When the Obama administration began its 2009 education reform, SIGs were reevaluated and redesigned under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) resulting in three major changes. Previously, SIG were awarded to states with underperforming schools and the state then awarded the monies to districts applying on behalf of their low-performing schools. Under the ARRA, SIGs were streamlined to target school districts with schools that were in the bottom five percent of performance and had been low performing for 3 or more years. In short, schools who received the federal monies had to demonstrate an overwhelming need for 3 or more years in order to qualify for SIG. These guidelines greatly limited the number of applicants and allowed the lowest performing schools to receive the largest grants.

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The second significant change that School Improvement Grants underwent in 2009 was to change the number of acceptable reform plans that schools and districts could employ. Under ARRA, schools were given a prearranged set of four intervention models, each with their own crucial requirements. These four models were (a) turnaround, (b) transformation, (c) restart and (d) closure.

Turnaround. The turnaround model required school districts to make major staffing changes in the school receiving the federal funds. Under this requirement, the school was required to replace the principal and at least 50% of the teaching staff. For many school districts, this step meant that they must implement strategies to recruit, retrain, and place highly skilled educational staff that would meet the school's needs. Turnaround also required schools to use job-embedded professional development to strengthen the teachers' skills and proficiency in any given subject matter. Schools were also required to implement substantial instructional reforms, including an increase in the learning time. School years were required to include a minimum of three hundred additional hours of learning time, which could be broken up at the school's discretion. However, the additional learning time was required for all students who were enrolled in the school. In addition, the turnaround model required schools to provide students with community-based services and social-emotional services and supports. This model also promoted the use of data and data-driven lessons so that both students and teachers knew how to use data effectively in their learning experiences. While the turnaround model included the above requirements, it allowed for sufficient operational flexibility so that the school was able to make its own operational decisions when it came to such things as hiring new staff, replacing or firing existing staff, and budgeting the money allocated to them (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

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Transformation. The transformation model also had specific requirements that the school must follow in order to qualify for SIG. In this model, the principal was also replaced. Unlike the turnaround model, there was no percentage of staff that must be replaced, however, the school was required to have strategies to recruit, replace, and retain skilled staff members. Staff members that were unable or unwilling to follow the new guidelines under the transformation model were replaced with a staff member who was highly skilled. Professional development was also job-embedded, as in the turnaround model. Schools using the transformation model were also required to develop a leader and teacher evaluation system that promoted and took into account student progress. This meant that schools were required to have evaluations systems in place that were rigorous, transparent, and equitable for all teachers and principals (Perlman & Redding, 2011). This evaluation system was implemented to ensure that principals and teachers had continual involvement with the classroom instruction, provided meaningful differentiated instruction, and provided clear, timely, and useful feedback to the individual in order for them to make necessary changes to were also used to determine personnel decisions as far as which staff members were invested in the model and were working to promote instructional excellence and learning.

Restart. The third model was called the restart model because the school receiving the monies was closed and reopened under a charter school operator (CSO), a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO). After a rigorous review process, it was determined which of these three organizations would be most beneficial to the students attending the school. The rigorous review process included looking at the operation or management system has shown significant improvement in academic achievement for all

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students housed in the school, the rate of success in closing the achievement gap, the high school graduation rate (if applicable), and the frequency of significant compliance issues, including civil rights, financial management and student safety issues. The purpose of this process in determining which organization to reopen under was to create and implement changes to the school that were meaningful (Perlman & Redding, 2011). A restart school was required to allow any former students that met the age and grade requirements to re-enroll in the school. This ensured that the restart school benefited the population of the students that required the restart model.

Closure. The final model for SIG was to close a school and enroll the students in a higher achieving school. In order to do this, the higher achieving school must have been within a reasonable distance from the closed school. Students could also be enrolled in area charter schools or new schools that did not yet have achievement data available. In order to successfully close a school, it was crucial that the community and families of the students supported the decision and fully understood the decision for closure. Open dialogue with staff and community members early in the closure process ensured that family members and community members fully understood the reasons why a school was being closed. Support staff and educational leaders also needed to engage families in dialogue in order to transition students and families into the new school setting as smoothly as possible. When a closure model was implemented, it is important to note that the monies received from SIG must be used for the expenses of the school being closed. The federal SIG funds were not given or gifted to the new school that students were attending. This type of SIG was non-renewable (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

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The third and final significant change to SIG under the ARRA was that the monies allocated to school districts substantially increased over a three-year period (US Department of Education, 2010). For the 2009 fiscal year, which impacted the 2010-2011 school year, ARRA increased the allocated monies to SIG by 3 billion dollars (US Department of Education, 2010), which essentially created a \$3.5 billion budget from 2010-2013 for SIG awards. This final change to the SIG fund had the potential to allow schools significant flexibility when implementing any of the four models above because the schools received more money than they previously had, allowing the administrators to re-allocate additional funds for resources.

Recent Studies of School Improvement Grants

In 2010, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance commissioned two analysis reports of SIG and five SIG case studies that each began data collection in the Spring of 2011 (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). The purpose of these studies was to collect relevant data about the new design of SIG and analyze the effectiveness of each intervention model in various schools throughout the country. The goal was to collect data through interviews and to provide descriptive results about the experiences of the first cohort of SIG schools that implemented intervention models beginning in the 2010-11 school year (Hurlburt et. al., 2011).

Each of the five case studies extended over three school years (i.e. 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013) and focused on different aspects of SIG. The three main case studies employed case study models focused on a specific selection of 25 SIG schools from six different states (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). The purpose of selecting these schools was to have a variety of populations from different regions throughout the United States, with differing school sizes,

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racial and ethnic backgrounds, economic backgrounds and SIG rewards represented in the study (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). The other two case studies were more specialized and, therefore, used a different evaluation process. One of the case studies focused on SIG schools with high enrollment of ELL students while the other focused on schools in rural areas (Rosenberg et. al., 2014). Researchers chose two sets of ten schools that met the criteria for the studies. Student populations needed to be less diverse due to the nature of each study therefore the schools were chosen based on the presence of the target population. All of the studies included interview questions, teacher surveys, site visits, and an analysis of the school's fiscal records. At the end of the three-year period, the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), part of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, intended to use these results in order to identify indicators of successful programs and share these best practices with policymakers, other schools, and any other stakeholders that would find the information gathered by the researchers useful and meaningful (LeFloch et. al., 2014).

The Institute of Educational Sciences had published 6 of the 7 anticipated reports. The first report released on May 9, 2011 was entitled "Baseline Analysis of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible and SIG Awarded Schools" (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). The second report released on October 24, 2012 was entitled "School Improvement Grants: Analysis of State Applications and Eligible and Awarded Schools" (Hurlburt et. al., 2012). The purpose of these first two publications was to provide "descriptive information on the SIG cohorts and state SIG application" (Hurlburt et. al., 2014, p. 1). These two reports provided general information about SIG recipients and contained background information about SIG process.

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Four of the five case study reports had been published at the time of this study and contained pertinent data for schools, officials, and others who may be considering applying for a SIG or were implementing a SIG and were investigating potential best practices for each intervention model. On April 2, 2014, “A Focused Look at Rural Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants” (Rosenberg et. al., 2014) was published on the Institute for Educational Sciences website. The second report entitled “A Focused Look at Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants That Have High Percentages of English Language Learner Students” (Golden et. al., 2014) was published to the IES website on April 16, 2014. The third report entitled “Building Teacher Capacity to Support English Language Learners in Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants” (Boyle et. al., 2014) was released on November 25, 2014. The fourth report was released on May 28, 2014 and was entitled “Case Studies of Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants” (LeFloch et. al., 2014). The fifth and final report had an anticipated release date in the Fall of 2015, but in the spring of 2016 had yet to release the name and publication site.

While each study contained valuable information on SIG and the impact of the intervention models on student achievement, there was a noticeable lack of data on the impact of SIG and intervention models in underserved urban schools. The data reported in the April 16, 2014 report “A Focused Look at School Receiving School Improvement Grants That Have High Percentages of English Language Learner Students” (Golden et. al., 2014) did comment on the needs of many urban schools who have higher populations of ELL students, but the data for the study was collected from several non-urban schools that did not face the same struggles as many urban schools. The April 2, 2014 report “A Focused Look at Rural Schools Receiving School

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Improvement Grants” contained integrated information about rural schools and their English Language Learner (ELL) population and how ELL students potentially affected the implementation of intervention programs in rural schools receiving SIG (Rosenberg et. al., 2014). There was a need for a similar study or studies in order to fully understand the impact of ELL students on urban schools as they implemented intervention models using SIG.

Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants

Authorized in 2009 under ARRA, the Race to the Top Assessment Program provided funding to States to develop assessments that were valid, supported and informed instruction, provided accurate information about what students knew and could do, and measured student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gained the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. These assessments were intended to play a critical role in educational systems; provide administrators, educators, parents, and students with the data and information needed to continuously improve teaching and learning; and help meet the President's goal of restoring, by 2020, the nation's position as the world leader in college graduates. This study focused on the K-12 component of Race to the Top.

The K-12 RTT program was a federally funded competitive grant program that provided additional grant monies to states and districts who were interested in implementing educational reform programs in one or more of the core education areas. ARRA had awarded approximately \$4 billion to states under the RTT grant, a large part of which was awarded for “comprehensive K-12 education reform in four core areas: teacher and leaders, standards and assessments, data systems, and school turnaround” (Tanenbaum et. al., 2015, p. 1).

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The Institute of Education Science, under the Obama Administration's First Year 2010 Evaluation Initiative, studied the impact of the RTT and SIG programs and evaluated their role in successful schools (Tanenbaum et. al., 2015). In looking at these two grants in tandem, the IES proposed to investigate the impact of the use of these grants in low-performing schools. The intent was to create a comparison of the types of policies and intervention models adopted and how those policies and models affected the improvement of the low-performing schools. These studies were projected to be evaluated over a number of years (2010-2016), as both the RTT and the SIG had implementation requirements of at least three years (Tanenbaum, et. al., 2015). Additional longitudinal studies were necessary to comprehensively describe the implementation and impact of these programs (US Department of Education, 2015b).

In order to collect pertinent data, the information gathered for the RTT portion of the evaluation included administrators from schools from all 50 states and Washington, DC. Two different data collection methods were employed in order to give a comprehensive impact evaluation. The first data collection method included interviews with administrators and faculty members from the sample RTT schools from each state and Washington, DC. The second part of the data collection was "addressed using a short interrupted time series design with state-level National Assessment of Educational Progress data" (Herman, Murray, Tanenbaum, & Graczewski, 2014, p. 6). The National Assessment of Educational Progress compared the data from schools that applied for and received RTT with schools that applied for but did not receive RTT. The RTT schools were evaluated based on their scores prior to application and after receipt of grant money. The schools that did not receive RTT monies were evaluated based on their scores prior to application and after rejection of their application.

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The sample of schools that received SIGs were “selected to support a regression discontinuity design...exploiting cutoff rules that states used to identify their persistently lowest-achieving schools as eligible for SIG to implement one of the four intervention models” (Hurlburt et. al., 2011, p. 22). Approximately 525 schools within 60 different districts from 22 states were used in this study. Data was collected through interviews from state and district officials and through school surveys. Formal data scores for students and the sample schools were obtained from administrative records through the 2012-2013 school year (US Department of Education, 2015c).

To date, the Institute of Educational Science had released four briefs detailing two years’ worth of data collection, though the outcome data collection had not been completed and was not expected to be finalized until summer 2016 (US Department of Education, 2015c). On January 8, 2014, IES released its first evaluation brief “Operational Authority, Support, and Monitoring of School Turnaround” The second evaluation brief, “State Requirements for Teacher Evaluation Policies Promoted by Race to the Top” was released on April 30, 2014. The third evaluation brief, released on October 28, 2014, was entitled “Are Low-Performing Schools Adopting Practices Promoted by School Improvement Grants.” The fourth evaluation brief, and final so far, was released on May 5, 2015 and was entitled “State Capacity to Support School Turnaround.” Each of these reports provided crucial information about the initial impact of Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants. These four briefs served to provide background for later reports that would detail the initial findings regarding the implementation of SIG and RTT (US Department of Education, 2015c). They also served to provide this study with preliminary information on the impact of SIG and RTT grants.

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Connecticut's Response to Reforms

On July 7, 2010 Connecticut legislators adopted a new set of Common Core State Standards (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012) as a response to the changes in federal standards. The implementation of the new set of Common Core Standards meant that school districts across the state of Connecticut needed to judge their current curriculum and determine which curriculum to include or exclude based on its alignment with the new standards (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012). Districts and curriculum developers also needed to determine whether the published resources (e.g., textbooks) were aligned with the new standards and find new instructional materials to replace those that did not meet the standards (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012). For many districts, this meant the possibility of having to purchase all new instructional materials for K-12 schools, a cost that would cut into already strained school budgets for the 2010-2011 school year. Since this would present a financial hardship to some of the less advantaged districts, the Connecticut State ED Commissioner Mark K. McQuillan applied for a waiver from the U.S. ED, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. The waiver gave Connecticut schools one year to restructure supplemental services, fund school improvement costs, and obtain Title 1 service Part A funds (US Department of Education, 2009).

In December 2011, Connecticut's Governor Daniel Malloy released an educational reform plan brochure entitled "2012: The Year for Educational Reform." In this brochure, Governor Malloy outlined the reorganization of the Connecticut ED and provided the key principles for reforming education in Connecticut including: high- quality early childhood education opportunities; interventions and supports for the lowest-performing schools; access to

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high-quality school models; creating a system to evaluate educators that would ensure high-quality teachers and principals, as well as high-quality resources for all school districts (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012).

The catalyst for this reform resulted from President Obama's educational reform initiatives, as well as from the fact that Connecticut's "overall performance has stagnated and our achievement gap – the worst in the nation – has persisted" (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012, p. 1). As of the end of the 2014-2015 school year, Connecticut schools continued to strive for academic excellence based on these reform goals. Though progress continued to be made on a statewide scale, there were school districts within Connecticut that were not making AYP.

The School Improvement Grant initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), was first awarded in the state of Connecticut for the 2009-2010 school year. "The purpose of this grant is to improve student achievement in Title I schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring so as to enable those schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and exit improvement status" (Connecticut Department of Education, 2010). As of July 28, 2014, 28 schools in Connecticut receive federal funding totaling \$6,666,242 for the 2014-2015 school year (Connecticut Department of Education, 2014). Of the 28 schools, 4 receive School Improvement Grant funds, 26 receive 1003(g) Competitive Grant funds, and 3 receive the High School Redesign Grant (Connecticut Department of Education, 2014).

Massachusetts' Response to Reform

In March 2011, Massachusetts introduced the Massachusetts Department of Education's plan to transition to the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks which incorporated the

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Common Core State Standards. The new Curriculum Frameworks became effective in September 2011 and remained in effect at the time of publication. By incorporating the Common Core State Standards into the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education aimed to “define the knowledge and skills that students must master to be college and career ready by the end of high school” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

The timeline assigned three major tasks over a period of three school years. The first task, to take place during the 2010-2011 school year, included building awareness and identifying what needed to be changed and how to implement the changes. The second task, to take place during the 2011-2012 school year, was partial implementation of the previous years’ findings. This meant that any unfinished changes in a targeted grade level or subject needed to be near completion by the end of the 2011-2012 school year. The third and final task to be completed during the 2012-2013 school year was to implement the balance of changes, meaning that the majority of districts had completely adopted the new curriculum standards and adjusted the curriculum planning to meet said standards (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

In addition to the districts being responsible for adopting the new curriculum standards, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Readiness Centers supported the districts and schools during the transition period by providing curriculum modeling, professional development meetings, and targeted support for those struggling to complete the transition in a timely fashion. Schools were given additional grants through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, the Annie Casey Foundation, and the

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Pearson Foundation. Massachusetts school districts were encouraged to utilize other community resources (e.g., YMCA, Girls Club, Boys Club) in order to make the transition to the new framework as smooth as possible (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

As part of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's plan to promote academic achievement, Mitchell D. Chester, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, approved and implemented the US Department of Education's Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism. According to the US Department of Education, chronic absenteeism is an equity issue in the United States (US Department of Education, 2015c). While this program was available to all states, Massachusetts was the only New England state employing it at the time of publication. The Massachusetts Department of Education was using Every Student, Every Day as an essential piece of their reform plan for underserved schools. Students who came from low-income homes, were of a minority backgrounds, or had disabilities were most likely to have chronic absences, which could ultimately lead to dropping out of school altogether. Through the Every Student, Every Day initiative the US Department of Education strove to alleviate chronic absenteeism through community resources. In order to fully launch the initiative throughout the country, a virtual summit was held on November 12, 2015 in order to outline the key steps that communities, schools, districts, and other agencies could take to help alleviate chronic absenteeism and reinvest students in their school work and community. Massachusetts was the only New England state represented at the summit.

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In an ongoing effort to offer students educational equality and meet the needs of underserved populations, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker announced on October 8, 2015 that he would file new legislation “An Act to Improve and Expand Educational Opportunity.” The legislation stated that 12 new commonwealth charter schools would be added annually to districts that are performing in the bottom 25% of Massachusetts schools (press release, October 8, 2015). Governor Baker stated, “Every child in the Commonwealth deserves the opportunity to access high-quality education regardless of their zip code or background” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). This bill put strategies into place to ensure that charter schools were able to serve a larger population of students, including low-income students, English Language Learners, and students with learning disabilities. Through this legislation, students from high-need backgrounds would attend charter schools that were tuition-free, independently run as either Commonwealth or Horace Mann charter schools, and had their charter renewals assessed every 5 years based on their ability to meet performance standards.

Rhode Island’s Response to Education Reform

Rhode Island Department of Education’s (RIDOE) most recent response to reforming their educational system was released on August 24, 2015, the “2020 Vision for Education: Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for pk-12 & Adult Education 2015-2020” (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015). This document targeted the areas that Rhode Island schools needed to focus on in order to meet the current standards. The plan identified six educational priorities: (a) teacher and leader support, (b) early childhood education, (c) personalized learning statewide, (d) globally competent graduate, (e) informed instructional decision making, and (f)

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student-centered resource investment (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015). Each of the six areas were subcategorized into measurable outcomes. The Rhode Island Department of Education's intention was that by 2020 the entire educational system would be overhauled and meet the needs of all students in all districts.

The ultimate vision for developing teacher and leader support in Rhode Island was to help educators and leaders grow in their profession with the support of the Department of Education. In addition, professional development emphasized creating student-centered learning experiences, strengthening decision-making skills, and building relationships with other educators as support teams. In doing so, the goal was to retain high quality teachers and education staff and attract new educators who were culturally diverse, had proficiency in difficult subject areas, and those who were interested in working in challenging schools (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

In order to prepare students to enter kindergarten in public schools, Rhode Island's goal was that by 2020 all children were provided with meaningful early childhood learning experiences. To accomplish this goal, educators worked collaboratively with each other to provide high quality learning opportunities for children as young as 3 years old. State agencies provided support for birth to 3 programs, provided pre-kindergarten programs for families with the greatest need, and provided all students with full-day kindergarten classes. In addition, children ages 3 through 8 received support to ensure that all developmental milestones were met. Early childhood educators attended professional developments that helped them expand and improve their early childhood education knowledge and skills (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

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The Rhode Island Department of Education created a vision for personalized learning which included rigorous learning opportunities that were specially tailored to meet each student's educational needs. Student progress was monitored through demonstrated academic knowledge in all required academic areas. Early childhood educators exposed all students to experiential, blended, flexible, and differentiated instruction in order to allow students to control the pace, place, and content of their learning experience while still meeting state and local requirements. As students entered middle and high school, a wide range of high quality early college and early career training programs were offered in addition to regular education classes. This allowed students to earn high-value, portable credit and credentials. Teachers were provided with support and guidance so that they possessed the skills to be effective in these new learning environments (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

The Rhode Island Department of education aimed to produce students who were globally competent so that they may be prepared to enter the job market on a local and global level. Being globally competent included recognizing and being sensitive to other perspectives and beliefs in the world market workplace. Students were taught how to communicate effectively with a culturally diverse audience and encouraged to help create a better world for the next generation by being a responsible global citizen. Educationally, this plan required schools to invest in the social and emotional health of students, teach students how to build cultural competence, and provide access to multiple world language classes (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

The Rhode Island Department of Education was working toward creating assessments that corresponded to the curriculum in order to monitor students' progress effectively and

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objectively. The results were provided to educators so they could improve and adapt their teaching practices. The purpose of the assessments was clearly outlined so that all stakeholders understood how the assessments aligned with the teaching and curriculum. The assessments were designed to meet the needs of both educators and students so that both groups are successful (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

Finally, the Rhode Island Department of Education planned to invest in educational resources that met the needs of students, teachers, and schools by looking for new, federal revenue sources. School buildings were scheduled to be renovated to include resources that met the growing technology and curriculum needs. Schools with the greatest need received funding for renovations first (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015).

Vermont's Response to Education Reform

In 2009, the Vermont Legislature developed and passed Act 44, a law that established the goal of 100% graduation by the year 2020 (Vermont Agency of Education, 2009). Through this legislation struggling students would be assessed by an educational support team for each school to identify which students needed additional help in order to be successful and graduate high school (Vermont Agency of Education, 2009). Once a student was identified as needing additional assistance, an educational support team created an individualized plan for the student and collaborated with parents or guardians to help the student succeed (Vermont Agency of Education, 2009). The support team provided the necessary interventions and support services. The goal was for every student to be successful in their elementary and secondary education, resulting in higher graduation rates.

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In 2013, Act 77 was put before the Vermont legislature. The goal of Act 77 was to foster a system of public education that supported student graduates so that all students were either college or career ready (Vermont Agency of Education, 2013). In other words, students would be able to graduate based on varying combinations of high-quality classes and experiences which would provide credits to complete their secondary education requirements. These classes and academic experiences would allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to tasks in which they were interested (Vermont Agency of Education, 2013). To meet these goals, all students attending public schools in Vermont aimed to have personalized learning plans (PLP) in place by 2018-2019 with multiple learning experiences and unique opportunities to earn credits toward graduation. Act 77 allowed students to earn learning credits through work study programs, blended/virtual education, early college, and/or dual enrollment education (Vermont Agency of Education, 2013). The end goal mirrored that of Act 44: 100% graduation rate by 2020.

In December 2014, the Vermont Agency of Education released an action plan for implementing new 2014-2015 Common Core standards, updating professional development opportunities for elementary and secondary educators, creating learning opportunities for administrators and higher education faculty, and addressing curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Vermont Agency of Education, 2014). The Vermont Agency of Education targeted specific areas of need in order to provide useful and appropriate professional development/learning opportunities for all educators and administrators. Areas within the curriculum, instruction, and assessment that were not being properly addressed or taught were also identified and educators were provided with the proper training to help students be

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successful. This action plan was written as a living document so that it could be updated and amended as necessary.

Act 64 of 2015 allowed districts and other supervisory unions to unify governance structures by 2020 as part of an ongoing effort to provide Vermont students with equitable educational opportunities (Vermont Agency of Education, 2015). Rebecca Holcombe, Vermont's Secretary of Education, wrote on May 28, 2015, that locally regulated education "affords each and every child an education that is built around his or her own needs and interests and which does not disadvantage any child by virtue of his or her community's relative wealth" (Holcombe, 2015, memorandum). The purpose of Act 64 was to allow and support local decisions that: (a) provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities statewide, (b) lead students to achieve or exceed the State's Education Quality Standards, adopted as rules by the State Board of Education at the direction of the General Assembly, (c) maximize operational efficiencies through increased flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing the district-level ratio of students to full-time equivalent staff, (d) promote transparency and accountability, and (e) are delivered at a cost that parents, voters, and taxpayers value (Vermont Agency of Education, 2015, Act 64).

New Hampshire's Response to Reform

In response to the rigorous educational standards changing throughout the U.S., the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) explored ways to reshape its educational system to meet the federal standards and the needs of its students. In 2010, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, and Rhode Island joined together to pass resolutions that would support a partnership called the New England Secondary School Consortium (New Hampshire Department of

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Education, 2014). The purpose of the NESSC was to develop innovations in the design and implementation of secondary education in order to meet the needs of students in the New England area. By supporting each other to secondary education redesign programs, the EDs of each state were able to learn about and adapt different learning techniques and use them when appropriate. This collaboration allowed these four states to pool their ideas and resources in a very innovative way.

An Effective Teaching task force was appointed in 2011 as part of the New Hampshire DOE's mission to revamp the education system. The task force purpose was to design an equitable teacher evaluation system and complete a "Phase 1" report detailing the steps to create such an evaluation system (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2011). Based on the information from the "Phase 1" report, the Effective Teaching task force convened again in 2013 with the task of completing a "Phase 2" report. This report introduced a "practical approach to teacher support and evaluation" (New Hampshire Task Force on Effective Teaching, 2013).

The New Hampshire DOE also filed an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver offered by the U.S. ED in 2013. The waiver allowed New Hampshire schools to develop and implement initiatives designed to improve the state's educational system (New Hampshire Department of Education). As part of the ESEA Flexibility Waiver, the NHDOE and the districts of the state identified 4 areas on which to focus their efforts in order to build a high quality education system: (a) Standards, Assessments and Instruction, (b) Data Collection and Use, (c) Teacher and Leader Effectiveness and Evaluation, and (d) Transforming Struggling Schools (New Hampshire Department of Education).

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Though New Hampshire has a history of high graduation rates and high standardized test scores (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013) the New Hampshire DOE identified specific areas for improvement. New Hampshire's K-12 standardized test scores for math proficiency drastically decreased from 66% to 37% between grades 8 and 11 (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013). Reading and writing also dropped significantly, with reading proficiency decreasing from 81% to 75% and writing from 67% to 40% between grades 8 and 11 (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013). In 2014 New Hampshire's Governor Margaret Hassan commissioned the Governor's Task Force on STEM education in order to strengthen and improve STEM education (Hassan, 2014). By working with business partners in various communities the task force strives to create an academically rigorous STEM curriculum with the end goal of preparing students to enter higher education or the global workforce.

Maine's Response to Education Reform

On January 27, 2012, Maine's former Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen released the first draft of "Education Evolving: Maine's Plan for Putting Learners First." The plan was developed in 2011 after Mr. Bowen conducted a listening tour where members of the learning community (e.g., educators, parents, students, and administrators) provided input on the problems plaguing the educational system and submitted ideas on how to solve the problems. "Education Evolving" outlined a transition plan for Maine schools that allows students more input in their academic journey by giving them a more active role in organizing their own education and more choices of how to master academic standards (Maine Department of Education, 2012).

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There were five core priorities put forth in “Education Evolving.” Each priority had four subcategories and/or goals for achievement. This model has been created so that there is a broad set of specific, measureable steps so that progress can be easily identified (Maine Department of Education, 2012). Ultimately this plan allowed schools districts to build “on the innovative work being done in schools across Maine already and by employing strategies to increase collaboration and sharing of best practices” (Maine Department of Education, 2012, p. 6).

The first strategy the MDE identified as needing reform was effective, learner-centered instruction (Maine Department of Education, 2012). The MDE adopted rigorous standards that aligned the curricula with federal standards. Schools adopted learner-centered instruction focused on the students’ needs and allowed teachers to adapt lessons. New assessment systems were put into place in order to provide data on achievement and student growth that was both accurate and easily managed. The final piece of this strategy was to create and implement information systems that would track student growth over a given period of time (Maine Department of Education, 2012).

The second strategy that the MDE identified as needing reform was termed great teachers and leaders (Maine Department of Education, 2012). In order to ensure that teachers and school leaders were being effective, the MDE created common standards for teacher and leader effectiveness. Teachers and leaders were provided with professional development programs that were rigorous, relevant and data driven in order to prepare them for the new standards. New evaluation systems were also put into place in order to provide teachers and leaders with timely feedback about their effectiveness. The final piece of this strategy was to develop communities of practice in order to foster continuous improvement (Maine Department of Education, 2012).

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The third strategy that the MDE reformed was termed Multiple Pathways for Learner Achievement. This strategy based student advancement on the demonstrated mastery of subject content (Maine Department of Education, 2012). Students were given a choice in how they demonstrated their learning, in that they were allowed to choose from multiple learning experiences that interested them. Through various learning opportunities, students were able to choose what they wanted to learn and how that learning would occur. These expanded learning options were aligned with state and federal standards so that students were still meeting state and federal goals. Students were allowed to earn credits through work-study programs, apprenticeships, and other community-based opportunities (Maine Department of Education, 2012).

The fourth strategy for reform was to create comprehensive school and community supports (Maine Department of Education, 2012). This directly impacted students with special needs. Under this strategy, students with special needs were provided effective and efficient services through coordinated health and wellness programs. These programs committed to provide families with community support and engage in conversations and plans that would best benefit the student (Maine Department of Education, 2012). These community supports also committed to provide career and workforce partnerships for students with special needs so that they could graduate high school and join a workforce that would meet their needs and understand any limitations.

The final strategy of school reform was to coordinate with state support staff to provide effective support to all schools (Maine Department of Education, 2012). These support measures included integrating educational programs for all students from early childhood into adulthood.

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This also included providing adequate and equitable state resource to all of Maine's schools. Schools were also provided with updated technology and the professional development training necessary to effectively use said technology in the classroom. Finally, the MDE provided an accountability and improvement system for each school.

Each of the five priorities had designated tasks that were completed by a specific deadline. Each task was assigned to a specific group and included a strategy for completion (Maine Department of Education, 2012). Upon completion of the final task, the goal was that all school districts in Maine implemented the new educational model, therefore creating a more supportive, student-centered approach to learning.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature pertaining to educational reform in the U.S., dating back to the mid-1900s, post-World War II, through 2015. The discussion also included the role of federal mandates for U.S. public schools, the local government policies enacted by the New England states in response to the rising educational standards, and how poverty in urban areas affects the learning environment. This chapter also included each New England state's educational initiatives. It is clear that while each New England state has its own approach to closing the education gap and meeting the needs of their students, there are several common themes (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012; Maine Department of Education, 2012; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015; New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013; Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015; Vermont Agency of Education, 2015). All six New England states share the goal of providing students with equitable educational experiences, great teachers and leaders, access to knowledge,

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and effective, learner-centered instruction themes (Connecticut Department of Education, 2012; Maine Department of Education, 2012; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015; New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013; Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015; Vermont agency of Education, 2015).

Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology

The objective of this study was to provide American teachers, administrators, policymakers and other education personnel throughout the United States with knowledge as they prepare to design other transformational or turnaround models using SIG monies. This study examined how urban New England schools who qualified for SIG funding were successful in implementing a transformation or turnaround model in their school. The phenomenon of success in these SIG funded public schools was studied because the majority of urban New England schools with underserved populations are struggling to close the achievement gap and make adequate yearly progress (AYP). Lastly, the goal of this study was to collect and analyze data concerning best practices when creating a transformation or turnaround model that met the needs of the students, while following the guidelines put forth by the SIG.

Nature of Study

This descriptive study focused on urban schools in the New England that are currently using School Improvement Grant funds in either the transformation model or the turnaround model. Specifically, this study answered the following research questions:

- What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?
- What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?
- How did participating schools measure the success of the School Improvement Grant at their respective schools?

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- Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?

This study employed a qualitative approach because the objective was to understand “the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). In-depth interviews were conducted with superintendents, principals, and administrators in urban schools throughout New England to develop a comprehensive understanding of how to create a successful SIG funded program that meets the needs of an underserved population. The findings of this study were meant to serve as a reference for future SIG administrators to use as they begin designing and implementing SIG programs.

Methodology

This qualitative study explored the issue of inequity in the public school system and how SIGs attempted to close the achievement gap for underserved populations. Qualitative research, as defined by John Creswell (2012), “begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) similarly define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). In other words, the study is based in the setting being investigated and the data collected attempts to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon in question based on the participants’ statements and comments. Per Creswell (2012), in order to collect data that is relevant to this meaning, the data was collected through interviews that produced patterns and/or themes.

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Qualitative research is used when there is a problem that needs to be explored. This study explored the success of urban New England public schools using SIG money to create a turnaround or transformation models in order to close the achievement gap for their underserved population. This study used a descriptive approach that incorporated interviews and content analysis to develop a comprehensive picture of SIGs in urban schools in New England. This study employed qualitative methods in order to empower individuals to share their stories of success and failures throughout the process of using SIG monies to transform underserved schools (Creswell, 2011).

This study used a phenomenological approach because the intention was to discover the common experiences of administrators who implemented SIG programs in their schools. According to Creswell (2012), a phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 76). The purpose of a phenomenological study is to “describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 76). A phenomenological study includes a description of what is experienced and how the individuals or group experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a phenomenological study relies on participants’ perceptions because the data collected is based on the meaning that the participants assign to them. In this study, the participants were administrators of urban New England public schools who qualified for SIG funding to implement a transformational or turnaround model in their school. The common experience was the actual implementation of and results of the implemented model. By interviewing multiple urban New England administrators this study

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created a comprehensive overview of urban New England SIG funded schools and the challenges they faced.

A case study model could have been employed for this study, but it was rejected because it would have narrowed the focus of the study. According to Stake (1995) a case study should be used when a researcher intends to complete an in depth exploration of a program, activity, or process. Case studies are bounded by time and the activity being studied (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of this study was to compile data on multiple programs in order to obtain data that was significant to a larger audience. SIG programs are, by design, more flexible than other programs so that schools can tailor them to meet the needs of the school population. A program that was successful in one school would not necessarily be successful in a different school. Studying one program at one school would limit the transferability of the results.

Research Design

Participant Selection. Participants in this study were administrator in urban New England public schools awarded funds from the SIG to be used in a transformational or turnaround model. Participants were also selected based on their expertise of implementing successful SIG programs, as exemplified by the annual yearly progress during the 2013 – 2014 or the 2014 – 2015 school years. Participants were prescreened for interviews and selected based on (a) their willingness to openly discuss SIG and its impact on their school, (b) their availability for an in-depth 60-minute interview, and (c) the documented success of their SIG program in an urban, New England public school. Participant names, phone numbers, and email addresses were obtained through public board of education websites for each state included in the study.

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Sources of Data. Data for the study was obtained through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants who were selected through purposive sampling. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) a sample size can be variable as it relates to the purpose of the research and the data collection strategies. The US Department of Education identified 30 urban schools in New England that had successfully implemented a turnaround or transformational program. Of those 30 schools, there were two to three administrators who met most of the criteria for this study. In order to maintain a manageable number of interviewees, a list of administrators was compiled and any administrator who was new to the school or school district was automatically removed from the list. At least two administrators from each state were chosen, so that all the New England states would be represented. An alternative list of administrators was compiled in case one of the administrators from the first list was unavailable or unable to participate.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are intentionally selected because they can provide the researcher with the best possible information about a given topic (Kumar, 1996). In qualitative research, purposive sampling is concerned with the type of knowledge that the sample group will produce and whether that knowledge was necessary to understand the phenomenon being studied (Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998). Purposive sampling is most often used when describing phenomena and can be useful in a phenomenological study (Kumar, 1996). This study used expert sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique in which the sample population has a specific knowledge or expertise in a given area. The participants for this study were chosen for their expertise and knowledge of SIG.

Inclusion/Exclusion. Participants were identified as successful administrators – either as a superintendent or as a principal – through the U.S. ED website. The U.S. ED identifies schools

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each year that implement SIG models that are successful based on their ability to meet their yearly goals and show growth in their annual yearly progress reports. The website produced a pool of 30 schools, each with at least two administrators. From this pool of 60 administrators, 28 were identified as meeting the criteria for this study.

15 participants were selected based on their location in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine – the six states that make up the New England territory and on whether their schools were classified as urban. Participants were excluded if they were unable to schedule an in-person or online interview during the allotted time period in February and March 2016. Participants who were new to the school or program were excluded based on their inexperience with implementing a successful SIG model.

Participants were contacted by either email or over the phone in order to prescreen their ability to participate in the study using a recruitment script approved by Pepperdine University's Institution Review Board (Appendix A). Names, phone numbers, and email addresses were all obtained through web searches of each state's public board of education websites. Participants who were interested in being interviewed for the study were given additional information about the study through email. All participants received a copy of the IRB approved informed consent and the interview questions. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher either by phone or email with any questions regarding the interview prior to the interview date.

Participants were included based on the urban population in their schools. Urban populations are identified by the US Department of Education as cities with a high percentage of people at or below the line of poverty. Often these schools have high percentages of students

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who receive free or reduced lunches, high percentages of English Language Learners, and high percentages of families who receive state assistance.

Participants were excluded based on their inability to schedule an in-person interview. Participants who were unable to schedule an interview during the allotted time period in February were also excluded, as the researcher could not be flexible on the data collection period. Participants who were new to the school or program were excluded based on their inexperience with implementing a successful School Improvement Grant model.

Protection of Human Subjects

When conducting research that involves human subjects, Pepperdine University in accordance with state and federal law provides specific guidelines and regulations that all researchers must follow. The Health and Human Services branch of the federal government established protection protocol for human subjects so that no person(s) would be exploited or harmed during the research process. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversees and monitors all research studies to ensure human subject protection. Prior to collecting data, the Pepperdine University IRB panel rigorously reviewed this study to ensure that no subjects would be harmed during and after the data collection process.

The subjects in this study were protected as outlined by the Pepperdine University IRB. This study employed the ethical principles stated in the Belmont Report and in accordance with the U.S. code of Federal Regulations, DHHs (CFR), Title 45 Part 46 (45 CFR 46), entitled Protection of Human Subjects. This study also employed privacy practices as discussed in DHH (CRF), Title 45, Parts 160 and 164, entitled Standards for Privacy of Individual Identifiable Health Information. This study followed the guidelines listed under the California Protection of

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Human Subjects regarding the Medical Experimentation Act, Code Section 2417024179.5 (Pepperdine University Institutional Review Boards, n.d., para 1-2).

Based on the standards set forth by the National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects, only participants who met the criteria for human subject research were sampled. According to the criteria, participants must be competent to provide consent, information provided to the participants must be sufficient for the participant to make a reasoned decision to participate, and consent cannot be coerced; it must be voluntary (National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects, 2015). All participants in this study agreed to be interviewed with the stipulation that names and school information would not be used in reporting the finds of the study in order to protect both the participant and the students housed in the SIG school.

An online certification course was completed prior to collecting data, on November 13, 2015 through citiprogram.org in accordance with Pepperdine University IRB policy (Appendix B). A copy of the certificate was submitted with the approved Pepperdine University IRB application prior to any data collection. The IRB application was submitted December 2015 to the Pepperdine University IRB panel and the application was rigorously reviewed prior to approval for exempt status.

An informed consent form (Appendix C) was created and given to all participants prior to data collection. As required by the Pepperdine Institutional Review Board, the informed consent form included full disclosure of the nature of the study and the participant's involvement. Participants were made aware of the type of information being gathered, why the information was being gathered, how the information would be used, the expectations for the participant's role in the research, and how and/or if the use of the information would directly affect the

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participant (Kumar, 1996). It also ensured that participation was voluntary and that the participant's confidentiality would be protected at all times. Finally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary and no monetary compensation was provided.

Data was collected through individual, 60 minute, semi-structured interviews with participants. Interviews done in person were recorded with the permission of the participant. Participants were asked to read the consent form prior to the onset of the interview. Once all data was collected and analyzed, the names of participants and their schools were coded so that no identifiable information was included in the printed study. Names of participants and their schools were known only to the researcher. No unforeseeable risks were identified during the data collection process. All relevant data regarding this study, including interview notes, transcriptions, and password protected external hard drive, CD and/or other similar electronic storage device, remained filed and locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's home for three years after the completion of the study. It was destroyed after three years. Recorded interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of completing the interview and recordings were permanently deleted.

Data Collection Methods

The contact information for participants in this study was obtained through an online search of each state's Board of Education website. Names, phone numbers, and email addresses for each participant is publically available. Each participant was initially contacted on their work phone during working hours using a recruitment script prepared prior to the phone call (Appendix A). Following the IRB approved recruitment script participants were invited to

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participate in a 60-minute interview regarding their experience with School Improvement Grant funded programs in urban New England public schools. Once the participant agreed to participate, they were asked to provide their full contact information and an interview was scheduled for February or March 2016.

On the day of each interview, the researcher arrived 15 minutes early at the appointed location. The researcher brought a field notebook to take notes while conducting the interview and two digital recorders. Interviews were conducted at each participant's respective Board of Education office or a meeting room of the participant's choice. Participants who were interviewed in person were asked to read and review the informed consent form and ask any additional questions. Interviews were conducted in the allotted 60-minute time period. After the interview concluded, each participant was offered the option of receiving a complimentary hard copy of the study once it was published.

In cases where inclement weather prevented participants from being able to complete an in-person interview, an Adobe Connect session was created. Adobe Connect allows two or more participants to conduct computer-based meetings in which the session is recorded. Participants were emailed the informed consent prior to the meeting time. Participants were asked to read and review the informed consent and contact the researcher with any additional questions by phone or by email. Once the informed consent form was discussed, the Adobe Connect session began. Interview protocol for in-person interviews was used during the interview. After the interview participants were sent a personalized thank you note and were offered a complimentary hard copy of the study once it was published.

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Interview Techniques

This study employed interview techniques outlined by McNamara (2009) and Creswell (2007). Interviews were conducted wearing appropriate business attire. Copies of all paperwork, two tape recorders with extra batteries, and a field notebook and pen were brought to each interview. Cell phones and digital devices were turned off and stored until after the interview was completed.

Active listening techniques as outlined by McNamara (2009) and Creswell (2007) were employed during the interview. This included making eye contact with the interviewee, acknowledging what the interviewee was saying by nodding, and showing interest. Facial expressions were kept neutral so to suspend any judgement, positive or negative, about the topic. Follow up questions were held until the participant finished answering the initial question, so as not to interrupt the flow of the conversation. During the interview, per Turner (2010) no personal opinions and thoughts were interjected so as not to influence the participant's answers. Follow up questions per Creswell (2007) were only asked for clarification purposes and to encourage the participant to provide more information, such as "can you elaborate?"

Interview Protocol

The following is a copy of the final interview protocol for the study, as reviewed by the preliminary review committee and approved and finalized by the dissertation committee. Since the protocol was designed for a specific one-time usage, traditional methods of establishing reliability of a data collection instrument were not applicable. Validity of the instrument was established to ensure that the questions on the protocol adequately addressed the constructs in the research questions. To facilitate this process, a three- step validation process was utilized.

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Step 1 began with Prima Facie validity. Interview questions were designed based on the purpose of this study. Based on the review of the literature, interview questions were then matched to one of the 4 research questions. Step 2 in this process involved engaging in peer review validity. Three additional doctoral students from Pepperdine University reviewed the interview questions and also matched them to one of the 4 research questions. The three researchers were current doctoral students in the EDOL/EDLT at Pepperdine University. These students were conducting their doctoral dissertations at Pepperdine University and employing a similar research methodology in their own research. The panel members had all completed a series of doctoral level courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods and data analysis. The peer review results were discussed. In step 3, the interview questions were submitted to the dissertation committee for an expert review. The committee reviewed the interview questions, made suggestions, and engaged in dialogue to ensure that the final interview questions were appropriate and addressed the research questions adequately.

Table 1 shows the relationship between each research question and the corresponding interview questions. The table was reviewed by the doctoral students after being given a package that included a summary statement of this research paper and instructions to follow to assess if the interview questions adequately addressed the research question.

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Table 1

Relationship Between Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the SIG?	<p>a. What were your strategies for creating and implementing the school improvement grant in district and/or school?</p> <p>b. Who were your stakeholders and how did you get them involved in the SIG process?</p> <p>c. What outside or community resources did you need to develop your strategies?</p>
What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?	<p>d. What were the major challenges and/or surprises in the implementation process the school improvement grant?</p> <p>e. How did you deal with/overcome those challenges?</p> <p>f. Did you identify any areas of the program that would need to be corrected for the following year? If so, please describe.</p> <p>g. How did you go about making those corrections?</p>
How did participating schools measure the success of the SIG at their respective schools?	<p>h. How does your district and/or school measure the success of the SIG program?</p> <p>i. What evaluation methods do you use to measure success for the students? Teachers?</p> <p>j. How did you measure your interim success through the development process? For instance, how did you know things were going to plan?</p>
Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar SIG?	<p>k. What recommendations would you make for schools as they begin to design and implement a SIG program?</p> <p>l. What would you have done differently if you were doing this again?</p> <p>m. Is there anything else you would like to share about your SIG experience that you think would be relevant to this study?</p>

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The instructions were as follows: Please review the summary statement attached to familiarize yourself with the purpose and goals of the study. Next refer to the table above and read each research question carefully. Then review the corresponding interview questions. If you determine that the interview question is directly relevant to the corresponding research question, mark “Keep.” If you find the interview question irrelevant to the corresponding research question, mark “Delete.” Finally, if you determine that to be relevant to the research question, the interview question must be modified, mark “The question should be modified as suggested.” and in the blank space provided recommend your modification. There is also space provided for you to recommend additional interview questions for each research question.

The results of the work of the preliminary review panel were then presented to the dissertation review committee consisting of three faculty members. Recommendations of the preliminary review panel were then examined and approved or modified by the dissertation committee. In instances where a majority did not agree on a recommended modification, the committee chair had the final vote.

For question a, the panel agreed that the wording should be changed to “district and/or school” and the faculty member committee agreed. Question b was changed completely through discussion with the committee. Question c was approved by the initial panel, and then changed by the committee through discussion about the importance of knowing what outside or community resources were being used to support the program in place. Two panel members agreed that question d should be kept as stated. One panel member gave a suggestion on how to reword the question. After being reviewed by the committee, the word “surprises” was added to the original question. Question e was left unchanged by both the initial panel and the committee.

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The original question f was eliminated by the committee and reworded to read “Did you identify any areas of the program that would need to be corrected for the following year? If yes, please describe.” Question g was added as a follow up to question f. Question h was left unchanged by both the panel and the committee. Questions i was also left unchanged by the panel and the committee. The panel agreed question j could be left unchanged. However, the committee reworded the question to be more specific. Through discussion, it was decided that the rewording of the question would leave the question more open-ended and invite a variety of responses. Question k was left unchanged by both the panel and the committee. The original questions l and m were eliminated from the interview questions because they were not relevant to the data being collected. The committee recommended question l to read as above as it was an open-ended question that invited a broader variety of answers. Question m was added after discussion with both the panel and the committee as a final follow up question so that the interviewee could add any other information that may add to the research on School Improvement Grants.

Statement of Personal Bias

The researcher was involved in every stage of this study, which indicates that the researcher’s bias would impact each step of the study. Creswell (2003) states that all researchers should “identify their biases, values, and personal interest about their research topic and process” (p. 184). Creswell (2014) also states that it is the responsibility of the researcher “to take steps to minimize the bias” (p. 193). In order to minimize the bias of the researcher, this study focused on administrators in SIG programs rather than teacher’s experiences in SIG programs.

The researcher in this study was a certified K-6 teacher in California, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. She worked as a K-1 teacher in an urban school district in Connecticut for 5

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years and substituted in urban K-12 schools for 5 years in California. While the researcher was experienced in dealing with underserved K-12 populations in urban schools, she purposely used only the remarks of current administrators in urban SIG schools so as not to impose a teacher's perspective on the research. This study also excluded interviews with school administrators that she had previously served under as a teacher.

In order to ensure that the researcher's personal bias did not interfere with the research process, the strategy of bracketing was employed. Bracketing is the act of suspending judgement, good or bad, about a topic and rather focuses the researcher on the analysis of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing is often used in phenomenological studies to help the researcher "unpack" the phenomena by looking at the experience layer by layer (Creswell, 2007). Each layer of the experience can have a symbolic meaning and it is the job of the researcher to find those symbolic meanings and analyze them.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) stated that data analysis "involves organizing the data, conducting preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation" (p.179). The data analysis for this study was a multi-step process. First, the data was transcribed verbatim from interviews. Next, keywords or phrases that the participants used during the interview were identified. Then, meaning was assigned to the keywords and phrases and the data was coded into themes/categories. Two additional researchers then coded the same data. Finally, the researchers compared their findings to validate the data analysis.

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During the in person interview process, a tape recorder was used to record the participant's answers so that the interview could be later transcribed in order to have accurate, verbatim information. McMillan & Schumacher (2006) state that "[t]he primary data of qualitative interviews are verbatim accounts of what transpired in the interview session" (p. 353). During each interview notes were taken regarding the non-verbal information and cues that the interviewee exhibited. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings so that a hard copy of the interviews was available for further analysis. The notes were also included in the hard copy. Each transcription was then edited for spelling errors and other typos that might change the meaning of what the interviewee said during the interview.

Inter-rater Reliability and Validity

A three step data coding process was used once all data was collected. The first step was the primary researcher coded the data collected. Once the transcription process was completed, all hard copy materials, including the transcriptions and field notes were reviewed. Next, significant phrases or sentences that were repeatedly used or emphasized by participants were identified and the significance of those phrases or sentences were reflected on as in relation to what they might mean to the study. Corbin and Strauss (2007) stated "A first general step is to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (p. 191). During this reflection time, notes were taken about the meaning of the data as a reference for completion of the data analysis.

Next, meaning was formulated from these phrases or sentences and cluster them into themes. According to Corbin and Strauss (2007) comparing difference pieces of data for the purpose of identifying similarities and difference is the purpose of the analytic process. Creswell

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(2012) describes data analysis as a spiral in which “the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than in a fixed linear approach” (p. 182). The data was coded in order to “simultaneously employ(s) techniques of induction, deduction, and verification” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 27). The data was sorted into common incidents or experiences then created themes/categories that encompassed those experiences. Using open coding, categories of information were generated. These categories were then positioned within a theoretical model (axial coding), and finally meaning was derived in order to explain the phenomena of successful urban New England SIG funded transformation or turnaround schools.

Step 2 required the recruitment of two peer reviewers to complete a second set of coded data categories from the data collected in order to assure validity and reliability of the primary researcher’s findings. These two peer reviewers were doctoral students in the EDOL/EDLT at Pepperdine University. These students were conducting their doctoral dissertations at Pepperdine University and employing a similar research methodology in their own research. The peer reviewers had completed a series of doctoral level courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods and data analysis. Research suggests that the use of a secondary coder helps to minimize the researcher’s bias (Plinske, 2008). The two sets of coded data were then compared for similarities and differences. Inconsistencies were resolved through discussion and mutual revision. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, computer analysis software would not have been as effective in coding the data. The results were then integrated in an in-depth, exhaustive description of urban New England School Improvement Grant awarded schools.

The third step was to engage in an expert review of the coded data. The dissertation committee members for this study reviewed and discussed the results of the first two steps in this

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process. In cases where the researcher and the peer reviewers were not able to reach a consensus of the coded data, the faculty made the final coding decisions. The committee engaged in scholarly discussion about the final changes made to the data coding.

Once the final step was completed, the findings were validated with participants and included participant remarks that supported the findings. In order to substantiate the findings, each participant was contacted by phone or email to discuss the study's findings. The findings were presented to each participant and the participant was given the opportunity to comment on the findings. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on any findings that they felt were particularly essential to the study. Participants were also encouraged to discuss findings that they did not necessarily agree with and provide feedback on why they disagreed. These remarks were included in the research findings and analyzed for deeper meaning.

Summary

This chapter described the research methods used in gathering and analyzing the data collected on best practices of successful urban New England School Improvement Grant awarded schools. The chapter began with an overview of the School Improvement Grant program and described the chosen qualitative research methods employed by the researcher. The research questions were discussed, as was the interview protocol for obtaining data from interviewees.

This chapter also described the interview process and participant selection. The researcher included how participants were selected and how their information was obtained. The recruitment process and interview question validity were discussed in detail. The researcher's personal bias was then identified and addressed so that it would not interfere with the data

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collection and analysis process. Finally, the interview and coding processes was examined in detail.

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Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the best practices of successful urban, public New England schools using School Improvement Grant funds to turnaround or transform an underserved school. For over 40 years, educational inequity was the focus of the US ED as it referred to the inability of underserved schools throughout the United States to make adequate yearly progress (US Department of Education, 2011). In order to provide all students, regardless of where they lived, what their socioeconomic background was, or what their race or gender was, with high quality education, the US ED implemented a series of competitive grants, funded under the ARRA bill, that underserved schools were eligible to apply for and that provided underserved schools with the opportunity to create programs that would increase students' academic knowledge and growth (US Department of Education, 2010). To date, more than 1400 schools throughout the United States have received funds under the SIG program (US Department of Education, 2015b).

The IES, under the supervision of the NCES, completed a total of six case studies on the effect of the SIG program on different populations throughout the United States (Hurlburt et. al., 2011). While these studies provided important information about the populations being studied, the information did not apply to all schools implementing the SIG programs, due to the varying needs and populations of the schools. This study specifically targeted urban, public New England schools implementing turnaround or transformation models under SIG. This specific population had yet to be studied and provided additional information about schools using SIG funding.

In order to identify the best practices of administrators of urban, public New England schools, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 administrators identified as

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successful through the US ED's website. Participants were asked a series of interview questions that related to four research questions. The research questions were as follows:

- What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?
- What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?
- How did participating schools measure the success of the School Improvement Grant at their respective schools?
- Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?

In order to answer research question 1, participants were asked three interview questions. The first interview question asked "What were your strategies for creating and implementing the School Improvement Grant in district and/or school?" The second interview question asked "Who were your stakeholders and how did you get them involved in the SIG process?" The third interview question asked "What outside or community resources did you need to help develop your strategies?" Based on the participants' responses, keywords and phrases were identified and themes were created in regards to strategies or practices used in SIG programs.

In order to answer research question 2, participants were asked four interview questions. The fourth interview question asked "What were the major challenges and/or surprises in the implementation process of the School Improvement Grant?" The next asked "How did you deal with and/or overcome those challenges?" The sixth interview question asked "Did you identify any areas of the program that would need to be corrected for the following year? Please

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describe.” The seventh interview question asked “How did you go about making those corrections?” Based on the responses to these questions, similar challenges in implementing SIG programs were identified.

In order to answer research question 3, participants were asked three questions. The eighth interview question asked “How does your district and/or school measure the success of a SIG program?” The ninth interview question asked “What evaluation methods do you use to measure the success of students? Teachers?” The tenth interview question asked “How did you measure your interim success through the development process? For instance, how did you know things were going to plan?” Based on the answers to these questions, similar ways of measuring success were identified.

Finally, in order to answer research question 4, participants were asked three interview questions. The eleventh question asked “What recommendations would you make sure schools as they begin to design and implement a SIG program?” The twelfth interview question asked “What would you have done differently if you were doing this again?” Finally, the thirteenth interview question asked “Is there anything else you would like to share about your SIG experience that you think would be relevant to this study?” Based on the answers to these questions, similar recommendations were identified.

Participants

The participants in this study were administrators of successful urban, public New England schools, as identified on the US Department of Education website (US Department of Education, 2014c). Of the 15 participants, seven were female and eight were male. Two participants were from Vermont, three were from New Hampshire, two were from Maine, three

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were from Massachusetts, two were from Rhode Island, and three were from Connecticut. Five of the 15 participants were principals, three of the participants were superintendents, three of the participants were district administrators, and four participants were from various state turnaround offices.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured in-person interviews and semi-structured online interviews. A recruitment script (Appendix A) was used to invite each participant either via phone or email to participate in the interview process. Interested participants were emailed an informed consent form and the interview questions prior to their scheduled interview. Eight of the 15 interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and/or through notes taken during the interview. Three of the interviews were completed over Skype and recorded using a digital recorder. The remaining four interviews were conducted through written correspondence, as there was inclement weather at the time of the scheduled interviews. Two interviewees engaged in a live chat interview using Google Docs. Each interview took between 30 – 60 minutes, depending on the level of detail the interviewee went into about each question.

The completed interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. All identifying information was removed from the transcription at that time. Recorded interviews were permanently erased after they were transcribed and checked for accuracy. Transcriptions were coded with the two letter abbreviation of the state from which the participant was from and the date of the interview. Names of schools, when mentioned, were replaced with the phrase “our school.” Names of districts, when mentioned, were replaced with the phrase “our district.”

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Names of the administrators, when mentioned, were replaced with the phrase “our administrator.” Transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the locked home office of the researcher for a three-year period.

Data Analysis

After completing the aforementioned 15 interviews, the data was coded into common themes and experiences. According to Saldana (2009), a code was a pertinent word or phrase that captures the essence of the data collected. Due to the unique nature of qualitative studies, there was no one way to code data correctly (Patton, 2002). For this qualitative study, a simple three step coding process was used.

After each interview was completed, the recordings were transcribed within 48 hours and the recordings were deleted. Hard copies of the interview notes and transcriptions were reviewed several times in order to identify significant words and phrases. After identifying the keywords and phrases, the next step was to identify the significance of those phrases or sentences in relation to the study. Each significant word or phrase was recorded on a master list under the corresponding interview question. The words and phrases were then sorted into common ideas or experiences. Themes/categories were then created that encompassed those common experiences. Using open coding, the categories of information were then positioned within a theoretical model (axial coding). In the final step, meaning was derived in order to explain the phenomena of successful urban New England SIG funded transformation or turnaround schools.

Two peer reviewers were recruited to complete a second set of coded data categories from the data collected in order to assure validity and reliability of the primary researcher’s findings. The two sets of coded data were then compared for similarities and differences. The

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inconsistencies were discussed and resolved through discussion and mutual revision. The data was then integrated the compiled results in an in-depth, exhaustive description of urban New England School Improvement Grant awarded schools.

The third and final step of the coding process was an expert review of the coded data. The three members of this dissertation committee provided focused feedback regarding the data collected and the meaning derived from that data. The committee and the researcher engaged in scholarly discussions regarding the meaning and presentation of the coded data. The final product of the data coding process was then provided to participants for review, giving an opportunity to comment on the findings. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on any findings that they believed were particularly essential to the study. Participants were also encouraged to discuss findings that they did not necessarily agree with and provided feedback on why they disagreed. These remarks were included in the research findings and analyzed by the researcher for deeper meaning.

Data Display

Data was initially organized by each interview question. The data was then organized into common subcategories that had a common theme. Frequency charts and a master reference list was used in order to identify themes that emerged from the interviews. Because participants were guaranteed complete confidentiality, interviews were redacted and participants were referred to in the order in which interviews were completed (i.e. P1, P2, etc.).

Research question 1. Research question 1 asked “What strategies and/or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?” In order to answer this question, participants were asked three interview questions. Based on the responses from the

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three interview questions, the data was coded and synthesized into four main themes: (a) collaboration, (b) vision, (c) mission statement, and (d) support (see figure 1).

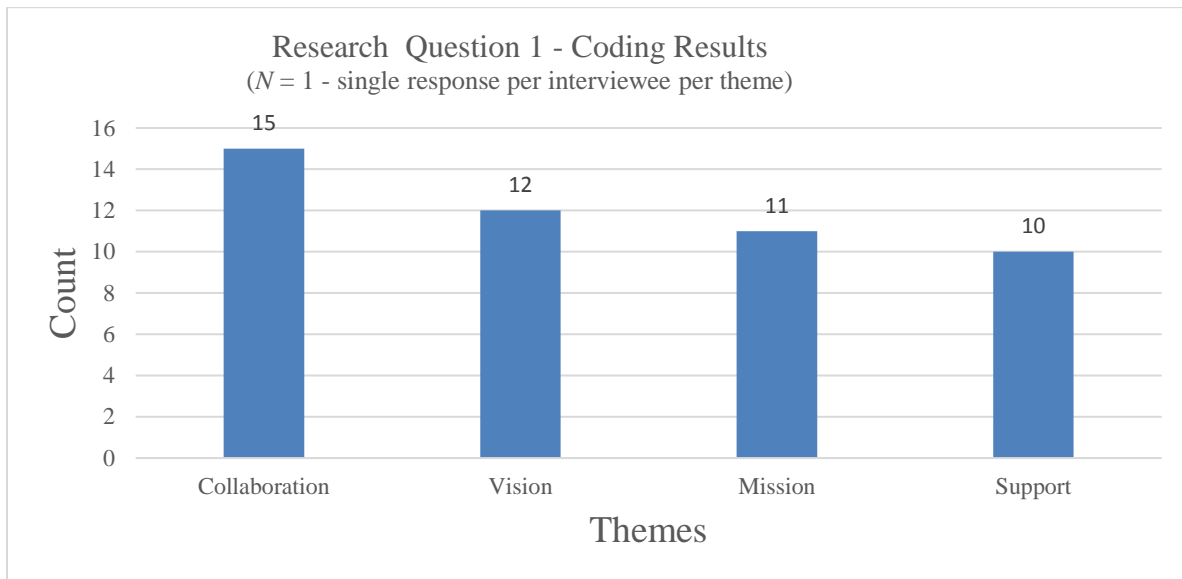


Figure 1. Coding results for research question 1. This illustrates the four main themes that emerged from research question 1.

The first interview question asked “What were your strategies for creating and implementing the School Improvement Grant in your school and/or district?” This question yielded six themes: (a) collaboration, (b) vision, (c) mission, (d) support, (e) creativity, and (f) professional development (see figure 2). Of the 42 responses for question 1, 15 (35%) dealt with collaboration between the staff, administration, parents, and support staff. All of the participants mentioned collaboration as their main strategy for creating and implementing their program.

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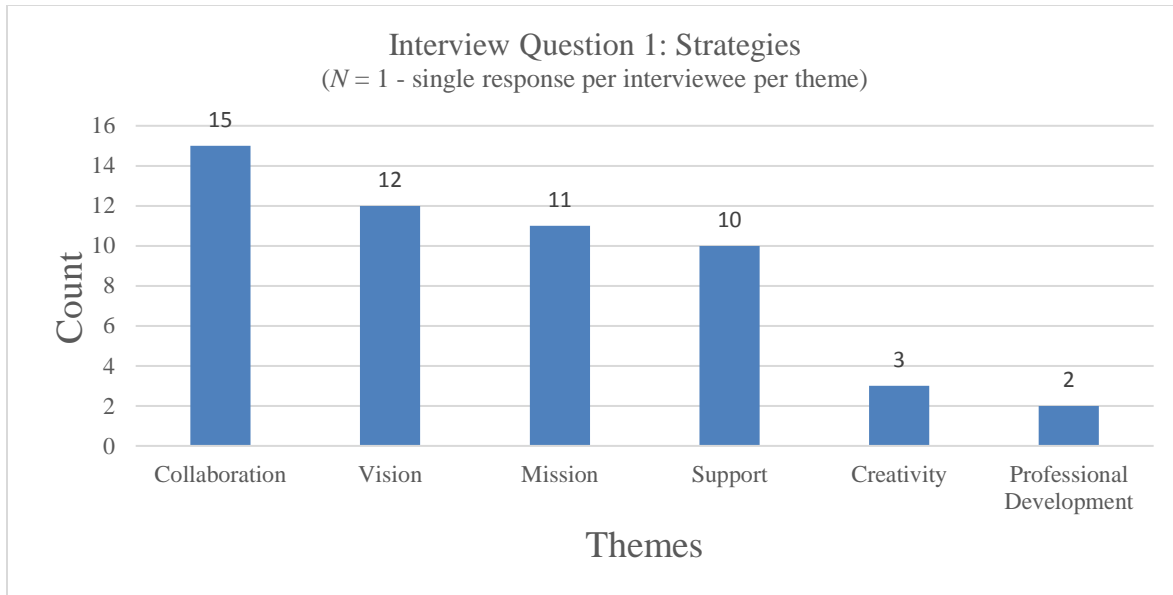


Figure 2. Strategies for creating and implementing SIG programs. This illustrates the strategies SIG schools used for creating and implementing SIG programs.

Collaboration. All 15 participants cited collaboration as a strategy they used to create and implement a successful SIG school. Collaboration in education “takes place when members of an inclusive learning community work together as equals to assist students to succeed in the classroom” (Powell, 2016, para 9). Collaboration included listening to one another, having open discussions about the education process, and working together to develop the most effective strategies for success. P3 articulated the reason for collaboration as the key to her school’s success stating, “we need each other – especially our school staff – no one understands what we are going through better than the people in this building” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Other participants echoed these sentiments, in that, it was not possible to build a successful new program from the ground up without the help and expertise of others. P6 argued that “programs that are built by one person are bound to fail. No one person can know everything

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about a 500+ person school” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Several of the participants agreed that the cooperative learning and teaching that resulted from the SIG model helped the staff and students succeed. P7 concluded, “our [teachers] teamwork has affected our students in a positive way. We are modeling best practices for our students, too” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

The theme of collaboration extended to other areas besides the initial building of the program. In order to keep the momentum of the new programs implemented under the SIG funds, many participants found it essential to partner with outside community organizations and agencies who were willing to work with the students, teachers, and other staff members in providing materials, personnel, and support systems throughout the process. P11 commented, “It’s been great to see that our community cares. Our students, I believe, work harder because they know so many people are helping us to succeed” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). Several other participants agreed that having people outside the school invested in their success created an additional drive for success, especially as many of the organizations offered their services regardless of how much money they would receive.

P4, P5, and P9 agreed that outside services were paramount to the success of their schools’ programs. Each of these participants spoke highly of the literacy coaches, mentors, and technology team members that they were able to hire from their respective state’s consultant lists. P4 stated “The tech team came in to fix the issues so that the teachers could continue their lessons and not lose instructional time. This was a huge help” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P5 praised the mentors for the role they played in the guidance of new

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teachers. “Our mentors are able to provide additional guidance, resources, and conversation for those teachers” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Other types of collaboration included, but were not limited to, parental involvement, local college student involvement, and support of the adult education department. Several participants reported that many of the agencies were committed to continuing the partnership after the three-year SIG program concluded. P15 stated, “we have forged these cooperative relationships with these agencies and they are as invested in our students as we are – and several are looking toward how they can continue our partnership in the future” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Vision. Educational literature defined vision as a description of goals that a school or educational organization hopes to successfully achieve (Abbott, 2016). Of the 15 participants, 12 specifically mentioned the role of having a clear vision for the SIG program’s design and implementation. P7 contended “Knowing your school’s goals and aligning them with the district and the state goals sets the stage for everything else. A shared vision gives us a path to follow” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). P14 agreed, “It gives us a shared purpose and measurable goals that we hope to meet by the end of the three-year mark” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Interestingly enough, P10 and P12 felt that vision statements were not as important as most of the other respondents. Both P10 and P12’s respective schools attempted to create a school vision, but decided against it. When the process of trying to create a vision statement became overwhelming to the staff, P12 decided to stop the process and “we focused on what the district and state goals were and aligned our goals with theirs” (P12, personal communication,

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March 8, 2016). It can be concluded, therefore, that vision statements, when prepared properly can guide the creation and implementation of a successful SIG program, but are not absolutely necessary for a successful program.

Mission Statement. A mission statement, as defined in educational literature, generally describes the day-to-day operational aspects of a school, its instructional values, and the commitment to education, students, and the staff (Abbott, 2014). Seven of the 55 keywords identified under research questions 1 dealt with creating a mission statement as a positive aspect of the process. P9 felt her school's mission statement "encouraged the students to focus on why they are in school" (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016). Similarly, P1 stated "It gives a quick snapshot of what we, as a school, value in our education" (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016).

On the other hand, three of 11 participants described creating a mission statement as a negative experience. P8 described the process as "troublesome for our staff. In the end, we decided to stick with our district's vision statement to avoid unnecessary conflict" (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). While P12 experienced difficulty when creating the school mission statement, he felt it was too important to the process to skip. "In the end, the leadership team and I devised our mission statement and focused on the academic pieces that we felt we pertinent" (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Based on these results, it can, therefore, be concluded that a mission statement can be helpful to the SIG process, but it is not necessarily pertinent to the success of a SIG program.

Support. The term support encompassed many aspects of the SIG schools' programs. Participants mentioned parent supports, teacher supports, administrative supports, and student

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supports as being key to their respective school's success. Of the 105 responses for research question 1, 49 (46%) of the answers were focused on the support systems in place for the schools under SIG. For example, P4 stated "the majority of our funds go to providing support systems for our students and teachers" (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P13 felt "the community programs that have partnered with us have allowed our staff to focus on the academics and have been instrumental in providing supports, not only for our students, but also our teachers" (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Several participants mentioned the increase in volunteers that came in a few times a week to perform secretarial tasks for teachers and/or volunteered to lead small group activities. P7 commented "We have several parents in each grade level that make copies for teachers, help create bulletin boards, and other tasks that are important to our success but take valuable time away from the classroom" (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Similarly, P14 stated "volunteers are important to our success. Eventually the money is going to go away and we are going to need to rely on the people who come in to help because they care, not because we can pay them" (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

Administrative support was also mentioned by several participants as being key to the success of the implementation process of SIG. Administrative support included being able to openly talk with administrators about classroom issues without fear of judgement or blame, relying on administrators to support the teacher in classroom decisions, and relying on administration to guide the staff through the SIG process through encouragement and understanding. P3 stated "our climate surveys from teachers have specifically mentioned the administration and the support they provide teachers on a daily basis as playing a pivotal role in

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the positive change in the school's climate" (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2106). Similarly, P9 felt "teachers trust us more because we are there to support them. The energy is positive and welcoming" (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016).

It can be argued, therefore, that a strong support system was important to not only the success of the SIG program, but also to the education system as a whole. One can conclude that having multiple sources of support for students, teachers, and other staff members created a positive learning environment which, in turn, generated positive attitudes towards school and learning. The shared sense of responsibility to provide students with the best possible learning experience was obvious as participants discussed the number of people who were actively involved in the schools and the willingness of organizations to creatively fund their role in the school.

Creativity. Three participants believed creativity played an important role in the development of their respective SIG program. P5 stated "even with the SIG funds, we had to be creative in how we used them because the money only goes so far" (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P7 agreed, stating "being frugal and being creative allowed us to partner with more agencies and negotiate how funds would be spent" (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Though the SIG funds were allocated to each school for a period of three years, administrators believed that spending money wisely and negotiating with outside agencies involved a level of skill that many had not needed to use in prior experiences. P9 stated "financial creativity, along with teacher creativity was important to our success. We brainstormed what services we could barter for and what a fair exchange would be" (P9, personal

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communication, February 26, 2016). All three administrators found companies and outside organizations who would benefit from working with the students and could provide necessary services to meet the needs of the students.

Professional Development. Only two of the 15 administrators believed professional development seminars contributed to the success of the SIG program. Professional development seminars, in these cases, were programs that either the district or school created to increase the knowledge of the staff about a specific topic. P15 stated “one of our professional development days was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the new SIG program. I wanted our staff to have a clear picture of what we were doing and why” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016). P12 also believed professional development days were important because “we learned about the SIG program and allowed teachers to ask a lot of questions. I wanted open, honest conversation to take place so that we were ready to tackle the new year under SIG” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Professional development time, in these two schools, allowed teachers to learn about the program and work together to make the programs successful.

Interview question 2 asked “Who were your stakeholders and how did you get them involved?” This question yielded six themes: (a) students, (b) district/state, (c) school personnel, (d) parents, (e) teacher-trainers, and (f) general support staff. Participants, interestingly enough, all agreed that they did not have to actively seek out these stakeholders to get them involved in the process because of the nature of the SIG program. In other words, the stakeholders were involved based on the fact that they were involved with the school. P7 commented “we were all involved because this is our job. We did not have to look for stakeholders – they were already here” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Responses varied based on the needs of

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the school and the location of the school. Of the 40 responses for interview question 2, only 10 (25%) considered students active stakeholders in the school. Interestingly enough, only 6 (15%) of the responses acknowledged parents as active stakeholders in the program. The remaining 60% of the responses acknowledge various staff members as being active stakeholders (see figure 3).

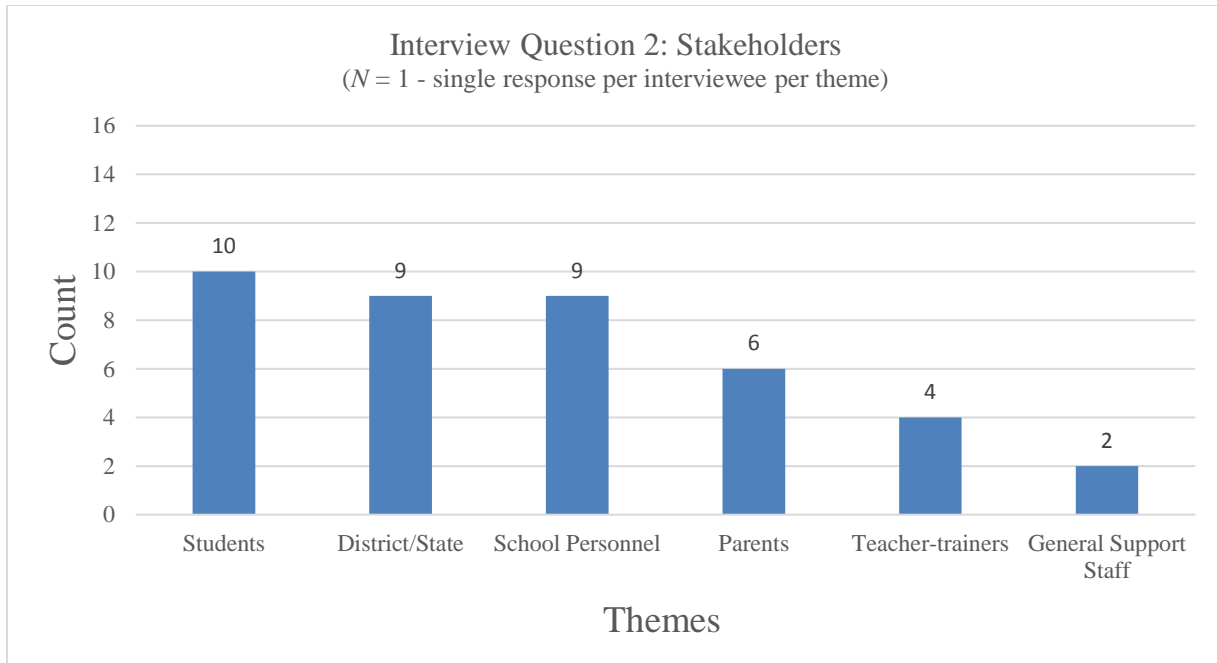


Figure 3. Stakeholders in the SIG program. This illustrates the identified stakeholders involved in SIG programs.

Students. Of the 15 participants, 10 discussed the role of students as stakeholders in the SIG program. P6 stated “obviously, the biggest stakeholders are the students. They are the ones who stand to gain the most from this process” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P12 concurred, stating “the students were the reason we even attempted this program. Their success is our success” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). All 10 participants who mentioned students as stakeholders discussed the need for students to be successful in school and

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making their success a priority as part of the SIG program. P14 stated “It doesn’t matter that we feel successful. It’s the students’ success and their needs that drive this whole thing” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

District/State. Nine of the 15 participants discussed the role of the district and state personnel as stakeholders in the success of the SIG program. District and state personnel included the superintendent of the school district, the staff in the state turnaround office, and the members of the Board of Education for both the district and the state. P3 stated “we had to include our state talent office, part of the turnaround office, in our program. They had a vested interest in our success as they make recommendations for our staffing changes on a yearly basis” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P6 stated “we believe that our stakeholders included our state Board of Education because they are watching us closely to determine if our program is one that other schools might benefit from” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

P4 mentioned the role of the superintendent’s office in the process as being extremely important. P4 stated “we had a very involved superintendent who believed that our success or failure reflected on her ability to lead us. She offered her support and the support of her office openly” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Other participants mentioned the role of the Board of Education as active stakeholders in the SIG process. P2 stated “we began our program in an election year. Our district Board of Education members felt the pressure of our success or failure because they, too, were under a microscope” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

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School personnel. Nine of the 15 participants explicitly mentioned the importance of the school personnel as active stakeholders. P1 stated “our staff members were clearly stakeholders in our SIG program. Everything that was accomplished reflected on their abilities to teach and adapt to the new program” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). P3 also stated “the success and/or failure of the SIG program fell directly on the shoulders of the school staff. They were being watched by everyone” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). All nine participants agreed that the school staff were key to the success or failure of the program, therefore had the most invested in the success of the program.

Parents. Six of the 15 participants mentioned parents as active stakeholders in the SIG program. P8 stated “our parents were an important part of the SIG program. While they were not directly involved in the implementation of the program, their support was invaluable” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). The role of parents included volunteer support, homework support, and at home encouragement. Four of the participants agreed that parental support encouraged the students to work harder and make additional gains. P10 stated “our parents could make or break the program at times. If they were not supportive of our efforts, students stopped caring too” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Teacher-trainers. Teacher-trainers were mentioned by four of the 15 participants as having an active stake in the success of their SIG program. Teacher-trainers included math coaches, literacy coaches, and curriculum team members who were in the classrooms on a regular basis in order to help teachers use the curriculum effectively. P5 stated “our trainers were instrumental to the success of our program. Their input and curriculum training gave our teachers additional support for difficult lessons” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P11

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stated “the trainers and coaches that came in on a regular basis had a big stake in our success. We felt that they were part of our staff and invested in our students too” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

General support staff. Two participants mentioned the additional support staff as active stakeholders in the program. P1 stated “the additional support staff we’ve gained under the SIG program are definitely stakeholders in our success. It’s a reflection on their abilities as much as it is on our ability to be successful” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). General support staff included any additional behavior staff members, consultants, and coaches that were hired using the SIG funds for the three year grant period.

Interview question 3 asked “What outside or community resources did you need to help develop your strategies?” This question yielded two themes: (a) paid supports and (b) volunteer supports. Of the 23 responses, 12 (52%) included community resources such as the YMCA, NAACP, and consultants who received payment for their services. Volunteered resources (unpaid resources) made up the remaining 48% of the responses. Volunteer resources included parents, reading buddies (a senior citizen program), and college students (see figure 4 below).

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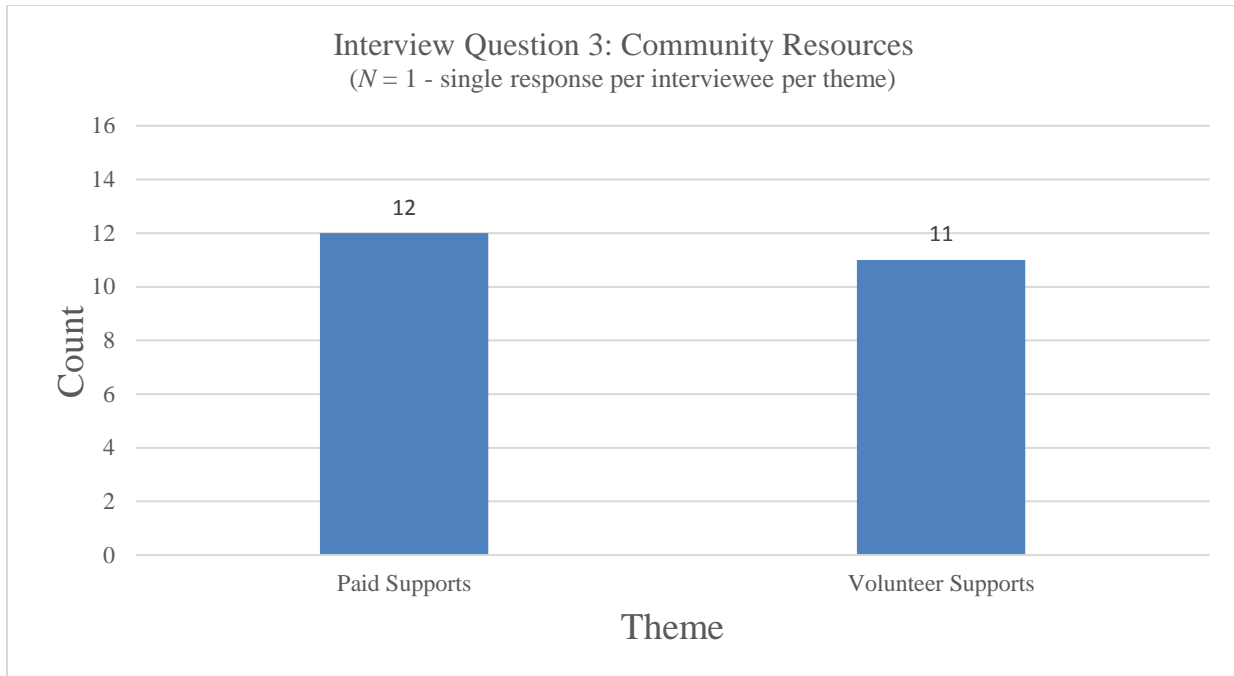


Figure 4. Community resources. This figure illustrates the types of community supported received by SIG schools.

Paid supports. The paid community resources that participants identified received funds allocated under the SIG programs. Nine participants identified the consultants as an active support in their SIG program. Seven participants identified the YMCA as an active support in their SIG program. Four participants identified the NAACP as an active support in their SIG program. Three participants identified other community businesses that provided support for their SIG program. Two participants identified larger corporations that provided support for their SIG program. P13 stated “our community resources were such an important part of our success. Even after our SIG funds ran out, many of these resources worked with us to continue their involvement in our school” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016). P15 agreed “the additional community resources, such as the YMCA, really made a difference in our SIG

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program. They worked hard and invested themselves in our students” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Volunteer supports. The volunteer community resources that participants identified did not receive any payment or compensation for their time. Seven participants identified senior citizen programs as active community supports for their school. P9 stated “our senior reading buddy program is such a huge asset. These men and women provide one on one time to our students who need additional reading support, which the students seem to love” (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016). Similarly, P14 found “the senior center around the corner from our school has made a big difference for our students who do not have a lot of home support. It’s like having an extra grandparent who can help with homework or attend a sporting event to cheer on students” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Four participants identified local college students as additional volunteer support for their students. P5 stated “our community college requires freshman to complete 20 hours of community service. We offer the hours and benefit from reading and math support, homework tutors, and after school activity support. Many volunteers continued beyond the required hours” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P10 found “our college volunteers keep coming back! They seem to enjoy the students as much as the students enjoy working with them” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

After examining the data and reflecting on the combined information for these three interview questions, the data was synthesized to answer research question 1. Through detailed analysis and scholarly discussion, the data yielded four key practices and/or strategies for developing a successful SIG school: (a) collaboration, (b) vision, (c) mission, and (d) support

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(See Figure 4). Each of these four themes encompassed the responses from the first three interview questions.

Based on the four common categories that research question 1 yielded, it can be concluded, therefore, that successful SIG programs employ the strategies of collaboration, vision, mission statements, and support systems. Participants believed collaboration between administration and staff, staff and parents, and staff and students produced a positive learning environment founded on mutual respect. Participants believed that having a vision, or set of goals that all people involved in the program could work toward gave a clear picture of what the school wanted to accomplish. Participants believed that having a mission statement was important as it provided a reference to what was important to the school. Finally, participants believed having systems of support in place allowed teachers to focus on the lessons and the students to focus on learning.

Research question 2. Research question 2 asked “What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?” In order to answer this, participants were asked four interview questions pertaining to the challenges and/or surprises that arose during the implementation process of SIG and how participants went about addressing those issues. Research question 4 yielded five themes: (a) staffing, (b) curriculum, (c) growth, (d) budget, and (e) behavior (see figure 5).

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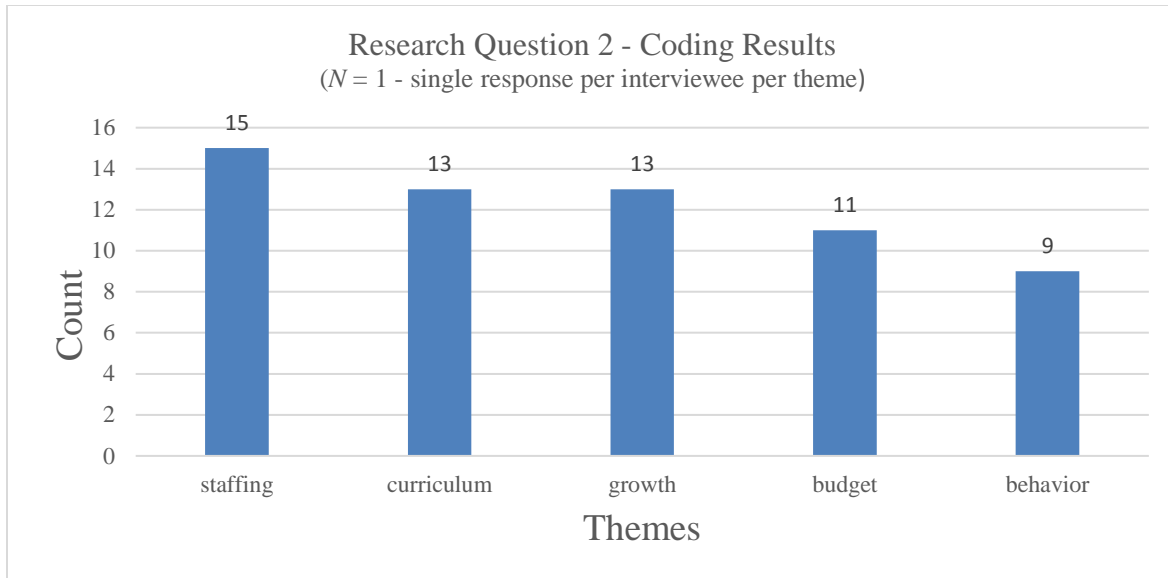


Figure 5. Common challenges and/or surprises faced by successful SIG schools. This figure illustrates the common challenges and/or surprises that SIG administrators faced when implementing a SIG program.

Interview question 4 asked “What were the major challenges and/or surprises in the implementation process of the School Improvement Grant?” The data yielded eight themes: (a) staffing, (b) resources, (c) funding, (d) growth, (e) behavior, (f) time, (g) parents, and (h) other (see figure 6). All 15 participants agreed that staffing challenges were the most difficult part of implementing the SIG program. Of the 67 responses for interview question 4, 15 (22%) addressed the difficulty of ensuring that the staff members were engaged and wanted to see the SIG program succeed. Interestingly enough, there were only two (3%) responses that dealt with the challenge of parental involvement. Both participants expressed that the parental concern stemmed from the extended time of the school day and the additional work students would have to accomplish. Both participants also stated that after the first year, the parental challenges diminished.

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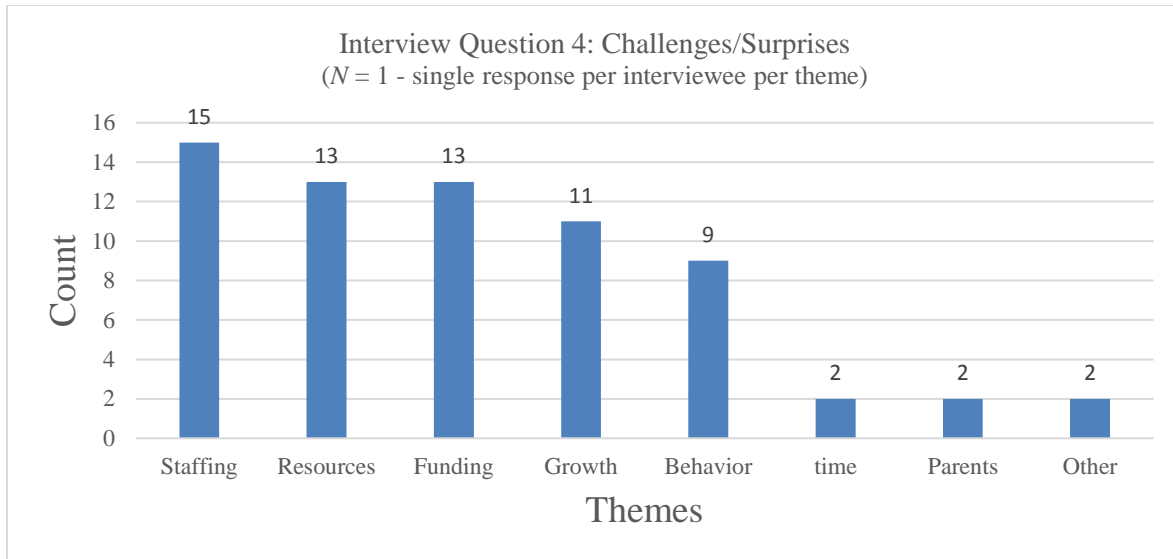


Figure 6: Challenges/surprises of SIG. This figure illustrates that challenges and/or surprises that SIG administrators faced.

Staffing. All 15 participants cited staffing as one of the key challenges facing the administration as they began to plan and implement the SIG program during the first year. Staffing issues ranged from losing senior staff members who did not wish to participate in a SIG school to new teachers to new administrators and to staff who did not ‘buy into’ the program but stayed anyway. Each of these staffing issues present its own difficulties.

Several of the participating districts and/or states required new teachers to have a mentor who provided feedback, answered questions, and provided support. Many of the administrators remarked that they often tried to pair new teachers with a qualified mentor who taught the same grade or at least was one grade above or below. P3 explained “the purpose of having a mentor in the same grade or a similar grade gives the mentor and mentee a shared experience and makes it a little easier for the mentor to provide helpful advice” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Three of the participants mentioned the loss of qualified mentors as a major challenge to the program. P13 stated “one of our schools lost the entire staff. The district replaced all 30

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teachers and the administrator. I would never recommend that any school do this” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Similarly, P9 stated “many of our long-term staff members chose to leave, which opened up spots for teachers who wanted to be here, were excited to be part of this program, but also left a void of qualified mentors” (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016).

Five of the participants repeatedly mentioned the ability to move teachers in and out of the school as being helpful to success of the program. P2 stated “Forcing them to stay would have created more challenges and I do not believe we would have seen the same progress” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P8 stated “Their negative attitudes and obvious dislike for the program set us back. We removed them in the second year and have had a much higher rate of progress” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). P4 agreed “Having the right people on board with the program was instrumental to our success” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). All five participants agreed that positive people who wanted to be part of the program was more important to the success of the SIG program than the number of years the teachers had been teaching and made a greater impact on the success of the students.

P3 and P8 believed one of the biggest challenges their respective schools faced was the replacement of the administration. Several of the participants replaced the Principal and Vice-Principal as part of the requirements of implementing the SIG program. While the new administrators were qualified and experienced, P8 stated “After the first year, we wound up removing some people from the building because they were so resistant to the new administration. It took away from the purpose of the program at times” (P8, personal

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communication, February 25, 2016). P3 also commented “We had a lot of pushback from parents because they really liked the previous administration” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Resources. Of the 15 participants, 13 identified resources as a challenge when implementing a SIG program. Curriculum was identified as the major challenge when dealing with resources. Common Core standards were a requirement of all the New England states. All of the schools in this study were, therefore, required to align their district and school curriculum to the Common Core standards of their respective states. This, in itself, presented many of the administrators with the unique task of creating and implementing a creative SIG program that addressed the vast needs of their students while also meeting the requirements of the State Board of Education. In order to assure that these standards were met, several participants stated that they met with their district and state curriculum coordinators in order to properly align the curriculum to Common Core and ensure that the students’ needs were met. P7 believed “it’s a balancing act when you choose a curriculum. We want high quality instruction that meets the needs of our students, but we don’t want to create this ‘box’ where teachers are confined” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

P11 and P14 had the opposite challenge when it came to curriculum. Both administrators felt confined by the curriculum and did not have the flexibility to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the students as they would have liked. P14 stated “We needed to adapt our curriculum but we were unable to, which did not allow us to make as much progress as I had hoped” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

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Funding. The financial needs were as vast as the academic needs of the students in SIG schools. Creating a budget that encompassed all of the needs of the school posed a major challenge for many of the participants as they designed their SIG program. Budgeting challenges ranged from having too much support in one area to having too little support to making every dollar count. P10 stated “deciding on how to use our finances responsibly and effectively was a challenge in and of itself” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016). P2 agreed, stating, “sometimes you don’t realize what you need until you don’t have it” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P15 acknowledged “knowing your academic needs does not always mean knowing your financial needs” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

P4 and P5 found that they had too much behavior support staff in the first year and had to adjust for the second and third year. In order to do this, P4 stated “we reprioritized our needs. We were able to pull in more academic supports and decrease our behavior supports” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P5 found that “we were so concerned that the longer day would negatively impact our behavior. We prepared ourselves for the worst and were pleasantly surprised that we did not need the extra help” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Growth. Academic growth or lack of academic growth was often the reason that schools received SIG funds. Of the seven schools included in this study, all seven received SIG funds due to insufficient academic progress as measured by state and district standardized tests. These schools were identified by their respective state agencies as high risk schools in danger of being taken over by the state’s Board of Education and becoming a state-run school. P2 stated “We had

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a choice to make: let our school go or make drastic changes that we could control. In the end, we agreed that working together with the state and being partners was much better than the hostile alternative” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Academic growth and/or progress became the central focus for the schools as they began their SIG application. P13 acknowledged “The first year, we talked constantly during data team meetings and district check in meetings about our growth data; what it looked like, how we knew we were making progress, what other strategies we could use” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Similarly, P15 stated “Progress was slow at first, but over time, it felt like we were gaining momentum and the staff really started to push students further and harder towards our goals” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

While academic growth was generally measured by state and district assessments, P8 acknowledged “Our growth comes in many forms. It’s hard to look at just academic data and ignore attendance data, referrals, in and out of school suspension; each has its own role in our academic progress” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). Nine of the 13 participants who acknowledged growth as a major challenge agreed that attendance, referrals, and suspension numbers affected their rate of academic growth. P6 stated, “when we look at our data, we look at the decrease in chronic absences and increase in attendance. We chart it and compare the growth in academic data to the attendance that month” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P10 believed “the drop in suspensions was largely in part to our behavior support staff interventions. This allowed our students to focus on the academics, make progress, and meet our goals because they are able to focus in the classroom” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

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Behavior. Behavior management was a surprise and challenge mentioned in different contexts by many of the administrators. P1, P4, P7, and P12 felt that they had overestimated the amount of behavior support their school would require. P2, P6, P9, P14, and P15 felt that they had underestimated the amount of behavior support their school would require. P7 stated “We focused on behavior because we knew that our day was longer than in previous years. We were pleasantly surprised when our data took a drastic plunge” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

P1 and P12 both acknowledged that behavior problems were one of their first concerns when implementing the extended day. P1 stated “both teachers and administrators felt some apprehension about the possible behavior issues we would encounter that first year. We wound up with too many behavior interventions. In our minds, it was better to be prepared” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). P12 agreed, “we thought hard about our priorities and how the extended day would affect our students. While we did not need as many behavior support staff as we hired, I was glad to have them on hand, just in case” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

P6 and P15, on the other hand, was surprised by the challenge that behavior presented the first year. Neither administrator planned for the potential increase in behavior issues. Both schools were using behavior interventions and systems from previous school years that they expected to be adequate. P6 stated “Before we had our winter break, a record number of referrals flooded the main office, much to our dismay. However, we were able to reallocate some funds and hire a few extra behavior support staff” P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

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P15 also did not expect the number of behavior issues that arose during the first year. P15 stated “In talking with another administrator, I learned that we could request behavior support staff. So in the second year, we made the financial adjustments to have a few extra behavior support staff join us” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2015).

Time. Two of the participants found time to be a challenge. Specifically, P8 stated “the time between applying for the grant and receiving the grant is short, but it also gave us very little time to actually implement the program before the beginning of the school year” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). Similarly, P13 stated “we felt very rushed in the first year. We got the grant maybe a month before school started and had to implement our plan in a very short amount of time” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Parents. Two participants stated that they encountered a few challenges in regards to parents. P3 stated “there was some parental pushback about the extended day, but not as much as we expected” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). P10 stated “some of our parents did not want their children to be part of the SIG program. They felt that it was ‘unfair’ that their school was being labeled as needing help” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016). In both cases, participants found that parents were more receptive to the SIG program after attending open meetings that discussed the program plan and how it would benefit the students.

Other. Two participants identified challenges that did not fit into any of the other categories. These challenges were school specific and did not impact the SIG program directly. P7 stated “parking became a problem for us. We had all this additional staff and our parking is already limited” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). P12 stated “our school lost heat for a few days, which caused some of our paperwork to be late. It’s crazy how a building

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maintenance issue can affect our ability to stay on track” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Interview question 5 asked “How did you deal with or overcome these challenges?” The data yielded six themes: (a) curriculum, (b) staffing, (c) resources, (d) collaboration, (e) time, (f) nothing (see figure 7). Of the 37 responses, 11 (30%) dealt with finding a curriculum that met the needs of the students. P12 stated “once we figured out the needs of our students, we were able to maximize the effectiveness of the curriculum, making our program more effective” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Staffing corrections made up 27% of the responses, while 24% of the responses dealt with finding the right resources. Collaboration with other teachers and administrators made up 8% of the responses while finding additional time for teachers to plan made up 5% of the responses. Two participants stated that they did not actively make a plan to overcome some of their obstacles.

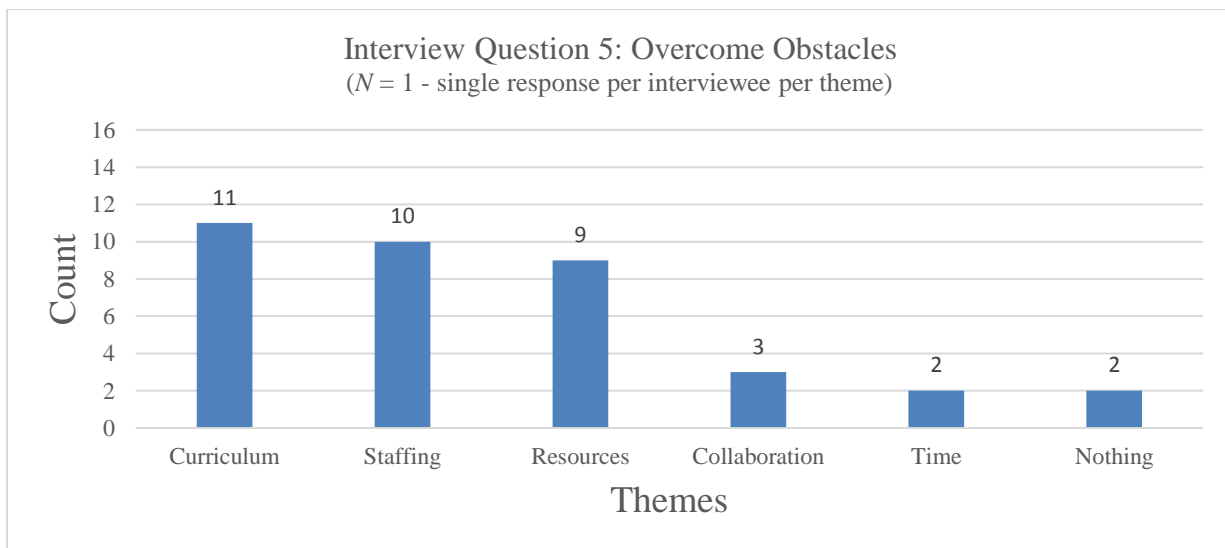


Figure 7. Ways to overcome challenges. This figure illustrates the ways SIG schools overcame challenges when creating and implementing SIG programs.

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Curriculum. The role of curriculum was pivotal in the amount of progress SIG schools experienced. While 10 of the participants had positive experiences when adapting the curriculum, three of the participants had negative experiences in regards to dealing with curriculum. When asked how each participant dealt with the curriculum issues, most agreed that they did the best with what they were given. P14 stated “Cookie cutter lessons are not always effective, but our teachers find a way to make them their own” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016). P1 agreed, “we adapt as much as we can, but in the end, our teachers really work hard to ensure our students get what they need from each lesson” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016).

Staffing. Participants also cited making staffing changes to ensure that everyone in the school building wanted to see the SIG program succeed was important to their respective school’s success. Of the 37 responses, 10 (27%) specifically addressed the need to move out negative staff members and replace them with others who believed the SIG program could succeed. Most of the participants stated that the staffing issues were resolved by the second year of the SIG program. P5 stated “We were able to move out teachers who were still not onboard with the program and pick and choose our support staff needs based on the identified needs of our students” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P11 acknowledged that “some of our conversations with staff were very uncomfortable, but necessary in order to get us all on the same page. We were very clear – the changes were not going away and we are on a mission of excellence” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). It can, therefore, be surmised that having staff members who willingly chose to be part of the SIG program and a strong administration were paramount to being successful.

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Resources. Participants stated that they used several resource options to deal with the challenges that they encountered when implementing their SIG program. For example, P7 and P14 had budgeting challenges during the first year of their respective SIG programs. P7 summed up their budgeting needs, stating “it’s a balancing act. We want to be sure that we have enough money set aside for each aspect of the program. I don’t think anyone would say they did it right the first time” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). P14 agreed, stating “like anything else, we learn from our mistakes and made better choices for the next year. Never leave a dollar unspent, but spent them wisely” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Other participants stated that they reached out to community agencies to help the school find additional resources that were lacking. For example, P3 stated “we put out a flier asking businesses to donate books to our school library as a tax right off” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). P10 stated “we joined Donors Choose and have received a lot of really great items for our classrooms. It’s amazing the resources that are out there if you look hard enough” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Collaboration. Three participants mentioned collaborating with their coaches, consultants, and other staff was helpful as they dealt with issues in the SIG program. P6 stated “we had some trouble, at first, with making growth. With the help of our coaches, we were able to reteach lessons in new ways that met our students’ needs” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Additionally, P4 stated “through conversations as a staff, we were able to sort out some of our problems and help each other creatively solve them” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). By using the staffing resources and sharing challenges, participants were able to work together to find solutions.

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Time. Two participants discussed the fact that over time they were able to identify and make necessary corrections to their respective SIG programs. P2 stated “this is a learn as you go program. It’s not always easy, but you have to be willing to adjust and learn from your mistakes” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P9 stated “over time you kind of figure out what needs to change and how to change it. No one gets it right the first time and we all make mistakes” (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016).

Nothing. Interestingly, two of the participants stated that they did not have to actively do anything to overcome the challenges. P15 stated, “after the first year, everything seemed to work itself out. We saw changes, but there was no hard plan in place” (P15, personal communication, March 10, 2016). P1 agreed, stating “we knew that we needed to make some changes, but it was interesting to see how many of the challenges corrected without intervention” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). These two participants both found that staffing issues, especially, did not require their intervention because the staff who did not want to be at the school voluntarily left after the first year.

Interview question 6 asked “Did you identify any areas of the program that would need to be corrected in the following year? If so, please describe.” The data yielded three themes: a) staffing, b) budget, and c) behavior (see figure 8). As seen in the previous two interview questions, staffing needs continued to be one of the most important areas of change to ensure that the SIG program was successful. Of the 21 responses to interview question 6, 9 (42%) dealt with staffing changes that would have to be implemented during year 2 of the SIG program. The financial needs of the program comprised 7 (33%) of the identified corrections for year 2 and finally, 5 (24%) of the corrections dealt with behavior. Interestingly, not all of the corrections for

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year 2 were negative. Several participants found that they had over staffed their programs to deal with negative behaviors and were able to decrease their behavioral support.

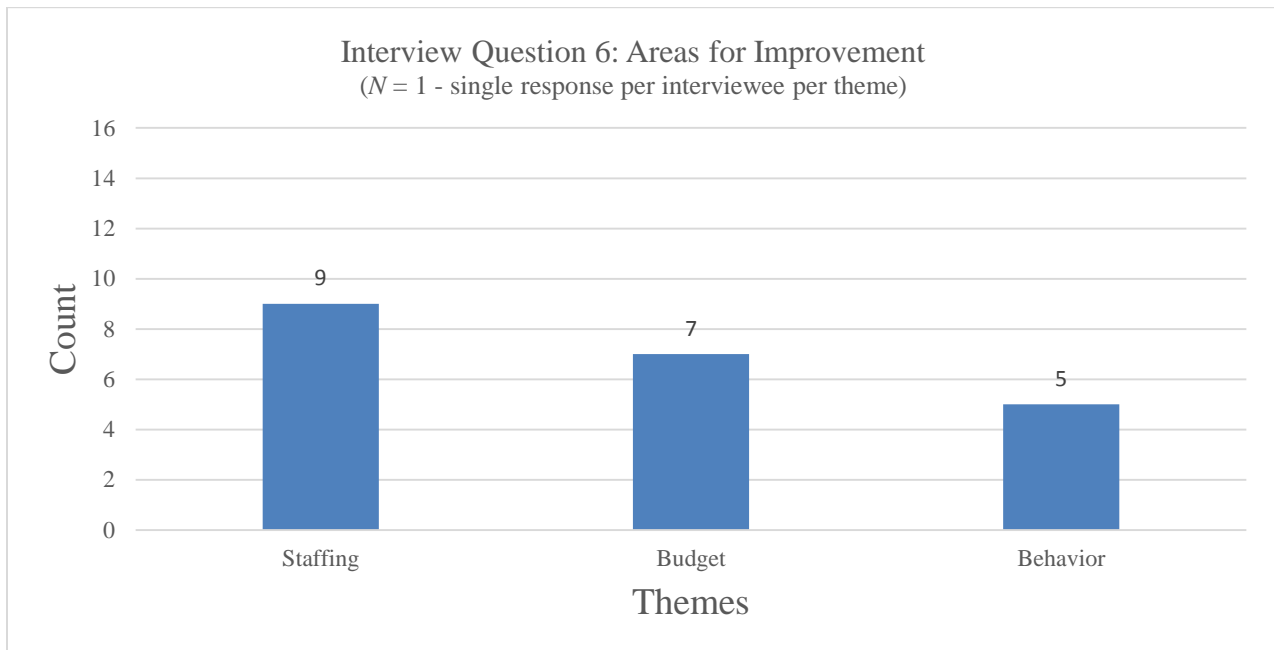


Figure 8. Corrections for the following year. This figure illustrates the corrections that SIG administrators made to the SIG program during the second year.

Staffing. As seen in interview question 4, staffing corrections were the most prominent of the challenges that needed to be dealt with prior to the second year of the SIG program. Participants found that there were some teachers and staff members who did not agree with or support the implementation of the SIG program. P3 specifically stated “we thought we had weeded out those who did not want to be part of the program. However, as the first year progressed, we identified others who were still struggling to get on board” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Seven of the nine participants who addressed staffing issues prior to the second year of the SIG program stated that they identified teachers and staff members who did not support their SIG program.

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Another staffing issue that was identified was the amount of support staff in the building. Two participants found that they had overestimated the number of support staff they would need in the first year. Three participants had underestimated the number of support staff they would need in the first year. All five of these participants stated that they had to reevaluate their staffing needs prior to the second year.

Budget. As seen in interview question 4, several participants discovered that the school budget needed to be adjusted in order to meet the needs of their students. Of the seven participants who identified the budget as needing correcting, four participants identified the need to increase their staffing budget. Two of the participants identified the need to increase their resource budget. One participant identified the need to decrease the consultant budget. P8 stated “it’s difficult to know your budgeting needs. As we moved through year one, we were able to get a better grasp on where the money was needed most” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). P13 agreed, stating “financial needs for a school are always changing. It was a challenge to find the best way to allocate the money” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Behavior. Behavior plan adjustments for year 2 of the SIG program were both positive and negative. As seen in interview question 4, several participants had overestimated the amount of behavior support they would require, while others were surprised by the increase in behavior issues. To combat this in year 2, five participants identified areas of behavior that needed to be addressed. P15 stated “in year 2 we needed to have additional behavior support. The extra 90 minutes definitely increased some of the negative behaviors” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016). On the other hand, P12 stated “our negative behavior patterns decreased. We

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were able to readjust our plan for year 2 because of this” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Interview question 7 asked “How did you go about making these corrections?” The data yielded two themes: (a) formal corrections and (b) informal corrections (see figure 9). Formal corrections included district surveys, standardized testing data, reallocating funds, and behavioral patterns. Of the 23 responses, 12 (52%) of the corrections were made based on hard data collected throughout the year. These corrections were written into the year 2 grant paperwork and approved by the SEAs and the LEAs prior to being implemented. The informal corrections (the remaining 48%) included observations of attitudes, informal climate and culture surveys, and open conversations with staff and students. These items did not have to be written into the grant paperwork, but could be dealt with directly by administration, without permission of the SEAs and LEAs.

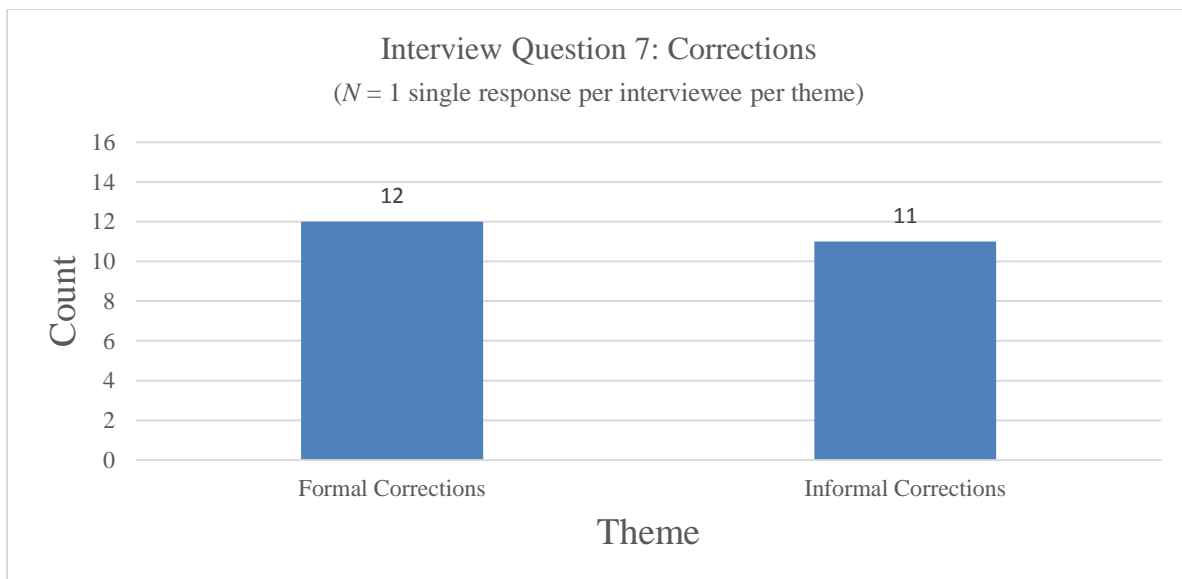


Figure 9. How corrections were made. This figure illustrates how SIG administrators went about making corrections for the following year.

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Through detailed analysis of interview questions 4 – 7, the data was synthesized to answer research question 2. The data yielded five themes that were challenging for the schools as they implemented their SIG program: (a) staffing, (b) curriculum, (c) growth, (d) budget, and (e) behavior (see figure 9). All 15 participants addressed staffing issues in some form as being a challenge that they had to overcome during the first year of the SIG program, ranging from having too much support staff to having staff members who did not want the program to succeed. Of the 148 responses, 43 (29%) directly addressed the staffing issues that the schools faced.

Research question 2 addressed the challenges and/or surprises that SIG administrators encountered. Interview questions 4 – 7 asked participants what kinds of challenges they experienced during the SIG process and how participants overcame or handled those issues. Participants identified five major challenges and/or surprises they faced during the SIG program. The first issue centered around staffing problems, in that some schools did not hire enough staff, while others hired the wrong type of staff members. In order to deal with these staffing issues, participants believed that reallocating funds and hiring staff members who met the needs of the students was important. The second challenge dealt with the curriculum. Some participants were overwhelmed by the various curriculum choices they were offered, while others found that they did not have adequate curriculum choices. In both cases, participants found that adapting whatever curriculum they chose was necessary to meet the needs of their students. The third challenge and/or surprise dealt with growth. Participants believed that growth in the first year was difficult because the program was new. In the second and third years, however, participants were surprised by the amount of growth students made. The fourth challenge that participants identified was the budget. Participants found that it was difficult, especially in the first year to

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allocate the funds properly and that, often, the budgeting choices needed to be revamped to meet the needs of the school and the students. The fifth and final challenge participants identified was in regards to behavior. Because the day was extended by 90 – 120 minutes, administrators were concerned with the effect of the longer days on behavior. Some participants found that they overestimated the number of behavior issues and were surprised when they realized that they did not need as many behavior supports as they originally believed they would need. Other participants underestimated the number of behavior issues that arose during the longer school day. In both cases, staffing was adjusted to deal with the behavior needs.

Research question 3. Research question 3 asked “How did participating schools measure the success of School Improvement Grants at their respective schools?” In order to answer this question, participants were asked three interview questions. The three interview questions resulted in four themes that answered research questions 3: (a) evaluations, (b) observations, (c) climate and culture, and (d) assessments (see figure 10).

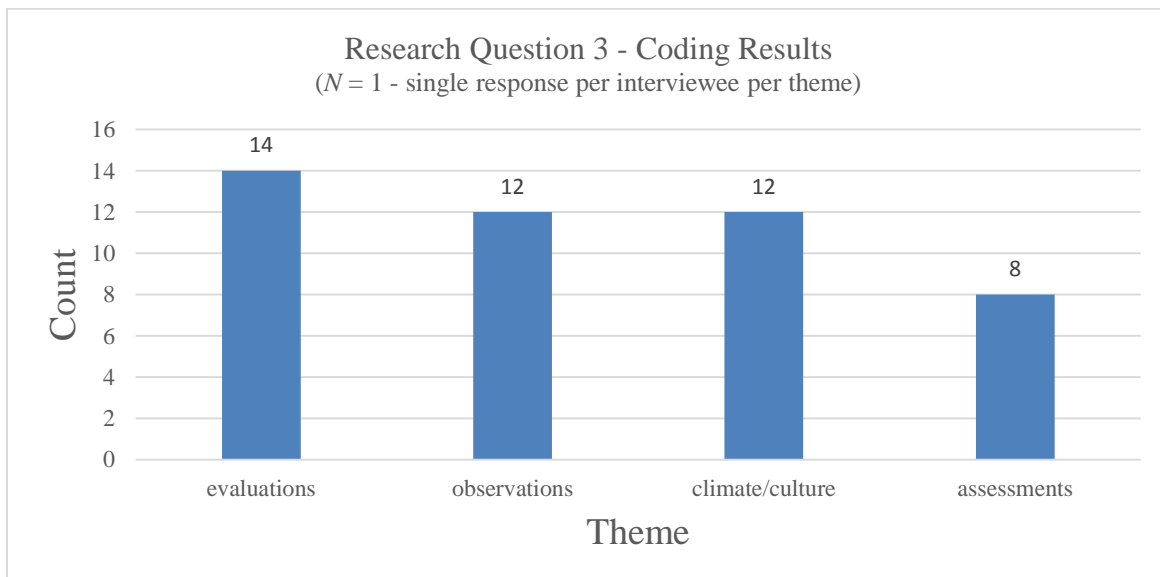


Figure 10. Measures of interim success. This figure illustrates how administrators of SIG schools measured the interim success of their SIG program.

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The eighth interview question asked “How does your district and/or school measure the success of the SIG program?” The data yielded two themes: (a) formal measures and (b) informal measures (see figure 11). Of the 24 responses, 13 (54%) were related to formal measures of success. This included hard data pertaining to standardized test scores, attendance data, referral data, and formal meetings with state and district staff. The informal measures comprised 11 responses (46%) and included teacher and student attitudes, open conversations, and quality of work.

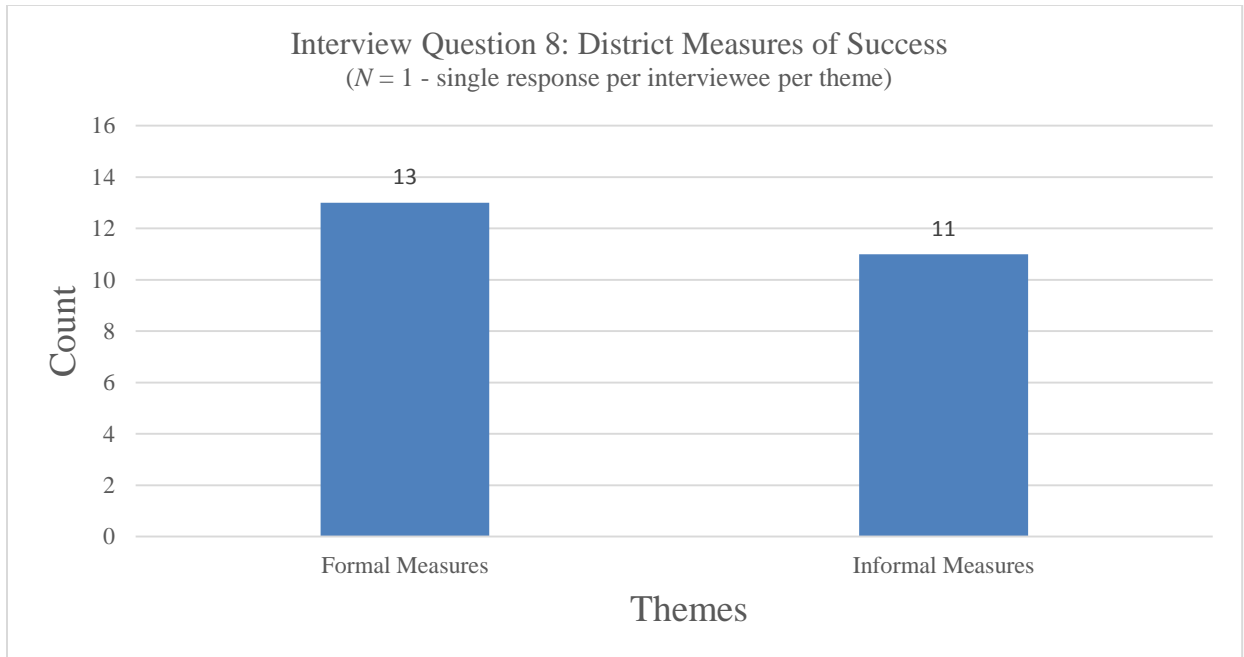


Figure 11. District and School Measures of Success. This figure illustrates the different ways that districts and school measure the success of a SIG school.

Formal measures. Of the 15 participants, 13 identified the formal procedures that their respective district used to measure the success of the SIG school. While each district had different procedures and forms and evaluating the success of the SIG program, there were common themes among those formal measures. Ten of the 13 participants identified standardized

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test scores as the most often used formal measure of success. P10 stated “we look at the growth of standardized test scores rather than the number of students who passed the test. We know our students are struggling, so we look at the percentages rather than the individuals” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016). Similarly, P15 stated “if all of our students could pass the standardized tests, we would not need SIG funding. However, we focus on the growth over a period of three years. That’s our indicator of success” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Additionally, several participants stated that attendance data and referral data were indicators of success, as measured by the district. P4 stated “the district wants to see that our attendance rates are increasing and our referral rates are dropping” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P7 stated “by the second and third year we saw a huge drop in referrals. Our attendance rates were up, as were our standardized test scores. Our district was thrilled with the progress” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Informal Measures. Of the 15 participants, 11 identified various informal measures of success their respective district employed. Nine of the 11 participants discussed the observations of student and staff behavior as a major indicator of success. P14 stated “I know that a school has been successful when I walk through the door and am greeted by smiling faces of staff and students” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Similarly, P8 stated “there’s this feeling of happiness when you enter the school. It’s something that you can’t physically see or measure, but it’s there” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). These informal observations of teacher and student’s attitude and behavior were identified as the best indicators of a successful program. To illustrate that, P2 stated “Before SIG I’d visit our school and leave

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feeling down, gloomy even. The physical changes to the school have helped, but also the change in attitudes and the positive atmosphere is obvious” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Additionally, participants identified the quality of the work being produced by students as an indicator of a successful SIG program. P3 stated “our students are proud to display their work. They are proud of what they can do and want to show it off” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P15 stated “the writing that you see hanging in the hallway is well done. You can tell students are taking their time to use neat penmanship and are paying attention to the rules of writing. It’s different than years past” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Interview question 9 asked “What evaluation methods do you use to measure success for students? Teachers?” This question yielded five themes: (a) assessments, (b) evaluations, (c) data collected, (d) student attitudes, and (e) teacher attitudes (see figure 12). Of the 42 responses, 14 (33%) dealt with the formal assessments that teachers and students have to take on a yearly basis. This included standardized test results and hard data collected through online programs, such as Khan Academy and STAR. Eight (19%) of the responses included evaluations as part of their measures of success. This specifically pertained to formal teacher evaluations that were completed on a yearly basis, scored on a district-based rubric. Eight of the responses (19%) dealt with data collection. This included any data about the school as a whole, such as number of referrals, numbers of suspensions, attendance records, and any data team data that had been collected and presented to the administration throughout the year.

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The informal measures of success were presented in the form of teacher and students' attitudes. Six (14%) of the responses measured the students' attitudes based on observations, conversations, and informal climate and culture surveys. This data, though not formally presented to the SEAs and LEAs, was tracked by the school administration. In the same way, six (14%) of the responses measured the teachers' attitudes based on observations, conversations, and informal surveys about the program. This data was also tracked by the school administration, but not presented formally to the SEAs or LEAs.

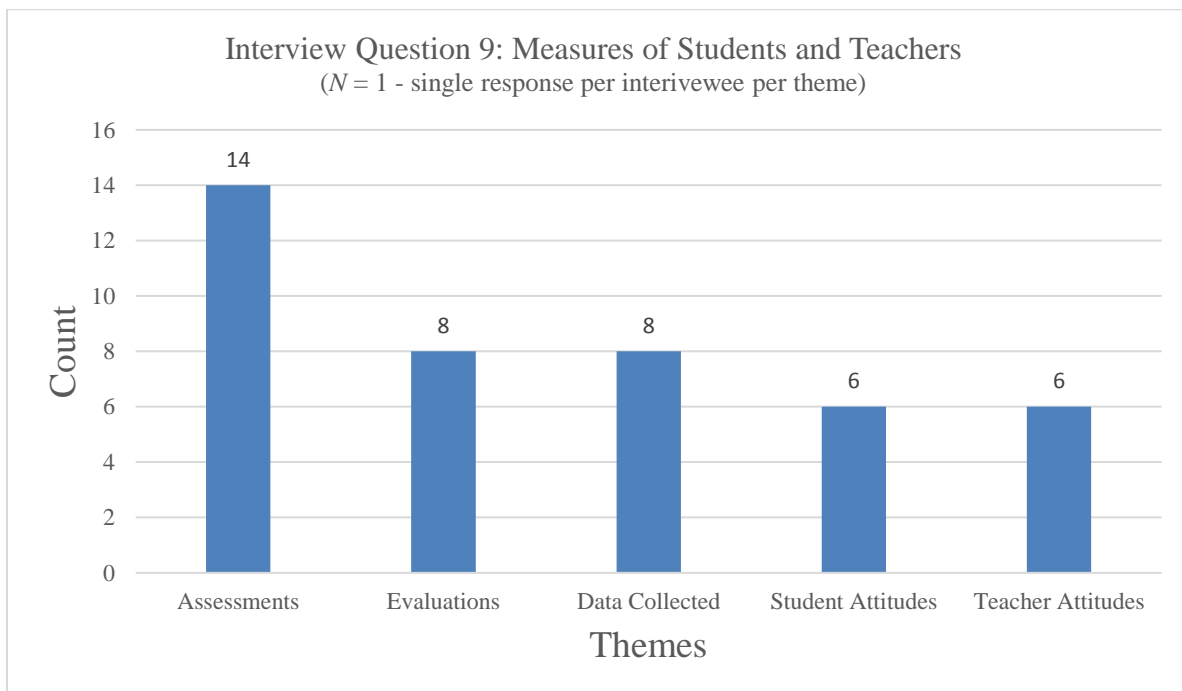


Figure 12. Measures of student and teachers' success. This figure illustrates the way in which administrators measure the success of their respective students and teachers.

Assessments. Of the 15 participants, 14 identified assessments as one of the formal methods of measuring student's success. Student assessments included state and district standardized tests given on either an annual or biannual basis. Each New England state had different required assessments for their students. Connecticut used several versions of

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standardized tests, which varied by the local school district. The Connecticut school districts in this study used the Connecticut Mastery Test, the Degrees of Reading Power, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress to measure students' progress annually in grades 3 - 8. Massachusetts required students take the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System for grades 3 – 8 annually. Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine required students to take the New England Common Assessment Program for grades 3 – 8 annually. Maine additionally required students to take the Maine Educational Assessments in grades 1 – 12.

All participating schools administered various assessments throughout the year regardless of whether the participants used the formal data to measure the success of students. P11 acknowledged “We are able to take that hard data and present it at district meetings and state meetings as proof that we are meeting our district and state goals” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). Similarly, P4, P7, and P15 agreed that hard student data was a quick measure of student progress. P15 stated “While hard data does not give a complete picture of our students' success, it is easy to chart and share with parents during conferences and with other stakeholders” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Though P5, P10, P13, and P14 were required to administer formal assessments annually, these participants used their data less formally. P5, P13, and P14 specifically used their formal assessment data to design graphs to show the school's progress. In these instances, student names were not used. Instead, graphs were coded by classroom or by grade level. P5 stated “We use our assessments to show students what the *can* do” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P14 stated “We want them [students] to see where we need to focus on improving” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

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Evaluations. Formal evaluations for teachers were required by all New England states participating in this study. Districts within those states also had required annual teacher evaluations. Administrators used these formal observations to determine if teachers were effectively conveying the academic information and made recommendations for improvement. Though each district described different evaluation methods, each method required a formal lesson observation scored on a rubric and a reflection session with the administrator and teacher. In most cases these evaluations took place annually. There were two districts that evaluated teachers more than once a year and two districts who conducted these evaluations every 1-3 years, depending on how long the teacher had been teaching.

The role of formal evaluations was to protect both the teacher and the administrator from any perceived personal bias. P3 stated “District evaluations are the cornerstone of our teacher evaluation system. We use these evaluations as measurable data to protect teachers from subjective, bias opinions. (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). P9 concurred, adding, “We want to be sure there is no legal recourse, so we measure a teacher’s success through formal evaluations. This way there is a paper trail from the school up to the superintendent’s office” (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016). Similarly, P14 stated, “Performance evaluations are data-driven so that teachers are fairly evaluated” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Though formal teacher evaluations and data-driven evaluations were the most commonly form of measure for teacher success, many of the administrators mentioned that they also used less formal evaluation methods to determine success. P11 stated “a good administrator follows the guideline put forth by the district for evaluation, but also knows that evaluations cannot

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measure the little successes and achievements along the way” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). These informal evaluations, however, were generally immeasurable and therefore, were not data-driven, which allowed the informal evaluations to be open to interpretation.

Data Collected. Various schools collected additional data throughout the school year to determine whether or not their program was successful. This data included, but was not limited to, behavior referrals, daily attendance, and climate and culture surveys from teachers, parents, and students. The data was compared to the previous years’ data and tracked for patterns and spikes or drops. The data was then analyzed by each respective school administration team to determine what, if any, interventions might be effective. P7 stated “we noticed a trend where our behaviors spiked right after standardized testing. We are hoping to combat that this year by rewarding students with a Field Day after completing the testing” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Similarly, P9 stated “attendance rates dropped a bit after testing periods. Our team attributed that to the rigor of the testing. In the third year, we held a PD [professional development day] the day after testing completed so students could recuperate” (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016).

Student attitudes. Of the 15 participants, six mentioned the change in students’ attitudes toward school and toward each other as a measure of success. P14 stated “on a whole, we have seen a positive change in our students’ attitudes. Part of that, I believe, is a reflection of our teachers’ attitudes” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016). P5 agreed, stating “the change in our students is not measurable. You can just tell by the number of smiling faces and the quality of their work” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Several participants

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stated that while the change in the students' attitudes were not measurable, it impacted the other measurable data collected, such as behavior data and attendance data.

Teachers' attitudes. Six of the 15 participants stated teachers' attitudes impacted the tone of the learning environment. P6 stated "if a teacher is having a rough day, we often see that reflected in the students' day or if a teacher has a negative attitude, we see that in our students" (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P11 agreed, stating "we have a positive staff who want to be part of this program. Our positive attitudes have helped shift our students' attitudes. Smiling teachers usually means smiling students" (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). Several participants agreed that having a positive staff who were willing participants of the SIG program created a positive learning atmosphere for students and impacted the tone of the school year.

Interview question 10 asked, "How did you measure the interim success through the development process? For instance, how did you know things were going to plan?" The data yielded three themes: (a) measurable data, (b) dip sticking, and (c) observations (see figure 13). Of the 15 participants, 12 used their measurable data to determine the success of the SIG program. Dip sticking was mentioned by 10 of the participants as an informal measure of success. Informal observations throughout the day was also identified as an informal measure of the interim success of the SIG program.

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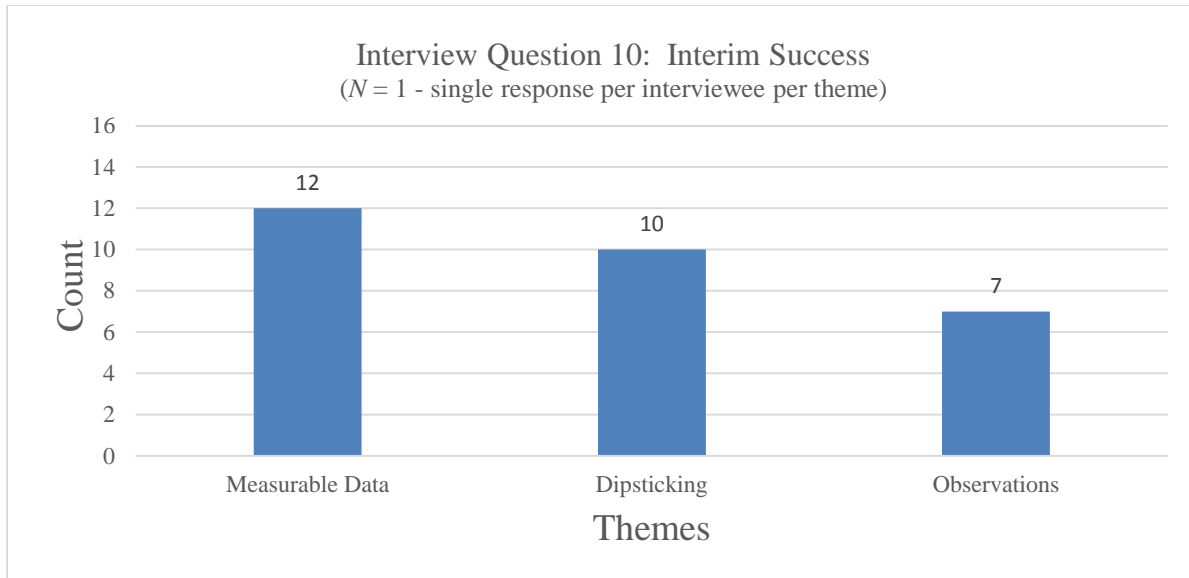


Figure 13. Measures of success for successful SIG schools. This figure illustrates how administrators measure the success of the SIG program at their respective schools.

Measurable data. Of the 29 responses for question 10, 12 (41%) directly correlated to formal measures of data, such as test results, data collected from online assessments, and daily data, including attendance and referral data. Participants identified this data as being pertinent to the SIG process, as this data was shared with both state and district personnel who oversaw the SIG program. P1 stated “Our leadership team keeps a close eye on our formal data, especially as we identify problem areas. We have to present this data at formal meetings so we try to analyze spikes and dips in our data” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). Similarly, P3 stated “Our formal data is important because we can substantiate our claims of success when we bring it before the Board of Ed” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Participants agreed that the measurable data played a vital role in formal meetings and in the continued success of the SIG program, as participants were able to adjust the program to meet the needs of the students, based on the previous years’ data.

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Dip sticking. Dip sticking, or unplanned interactions, comprised 10 (34%) of the responses to question 10. Dip sticking specifically pertained to the climate and culture of the building, consultant feedback, and non-data driven information gathered during bi-weekly staff meetings. A school's climate and culture were generally interwoven. The school climate set the tone for the learning and teaching done within the school. Climate was often a predictor of students' ability to learn in productive ways. A school's culture usually referred to the state of the school itself. Was the building being well-taken care of by staff? Were the colors welcoming? Was the lighting in working order so that students and teachers could work at their best level? The climate was often affected by the culture.

Several of the administrators made significant changes to the school building's appearance in order to create a positive school culture. P2 stated "we keep our culture bright by painting the walls a soft yellow. We have colorful artwork hung in the hallways and our janitorial staff keeps the floors clean as possible" (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P12 asserted "Our climate and culture are often indicators of how well our students perform" (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

P8 contended "A staff that cares about the building and each other breeds students that care about the school and other students. A positive climate encourages success" (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). Similarly, P15 stated that "People were happy to be here, happy to see our students, happy to help our school succeed. That indicates we have been successful" (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Participants found that the more positive and happy their staff were, the more positive and happy the students were.

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Observations. Observations comprised the final 7 (24%) of the interim measures of success. Observations in this study fell into two subcategories: formal observations and casual observations. While both of these subcategories spoke to the success of the SIG schools, many of the respondents used the terms in tandem. P13 specifically defined the role of both formal and informal observations in measuring the success of a SIG program, citing the need for both kinds of observations. P13 stated “A formal observation is usually done in the classroom while the teacher conducts the lesson. Informal observations include noticing a student smiling or laughing, or watching students engage in academic discourse” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

P4 and P7 both stated that informal, unplanned observations of the classroom environment gave them a better understanding of how the classroom was run and how students interacted with one another. P7 stated that he measured teacher and student engagement by simply observing the body language and facial expressions of all participants. P7 believed “These observations that I make in a matter of 2-3 minutes tell me more than any formal evaluation could” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Nine out of the 12 participants who identified observations as a measure of success indicated that observations were more accurate in measuring a program’s success than the evaluation process. P12 proposed “Evaluations are planned; observations happen randomly and at will” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

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Through detailed analysis, research question 3 yielded four key methods of measuring school success: (a) evaluations, (b) climate and culture, (c) attitudes, and (d) assessments (see figure 14). Of the 95 total responses for interview questions 8 – 10, 37 (39%) specifically addressed the use of evaluations to measure the success of the SIG program. Climate and culture measures comprised 20 (21%) of the total 95 responses for interview questions 8 – 10. Student and teacher attitudes were mentioned 20 (21%) times as measures of school success. Of the 95 responses for interview questions 8 – 10, participants addressed the use of assessments as measures of success 18 (19%) times.

Research question 3 dealt with how district and school administrators measured the success of the SIG program at their respective schools. Participants identified four common measures of success. The first measure of success was evaluations. This referred specifically to formal teacher evaluations that were required by either the district or state. Teacher evaluations measured the success of the teacher's effectiveness in their lessons. The second measure of success was observations. Observations referred to any informal, unplanned information that was gathered through watching students and teachers in different settings of the school. For instance, an observation referred to watching students interact in the hallway or teachers interact with students during a small group lesson. The third measure of success referred to the climate and culture of the school. This included the overall feeling of the people within the school. Participants believed that happy, positive climate and culture were important to the program's success. The final measure of success was assessments. This referred to any standardized test that students were required either by district or state policy. These formal tests resulted in the hard data that participants used to show growth and academic progress.

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Research question 4. In order to answer research question 4, the participants were asked three final interview questions pertaining to design and implementation process and their experience with SIG. Research question 4 specifically asked “Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?” Figure 14 detailed the recommendations that current SIG administrators agreed were important for new administrators as they began planning their SIG program. Research question 4 yielded six recommendations: (a) sustainability, (b) staffing, (c) leadership, (d) personality, (e) flexibility, and (f) communication (see figure 14).

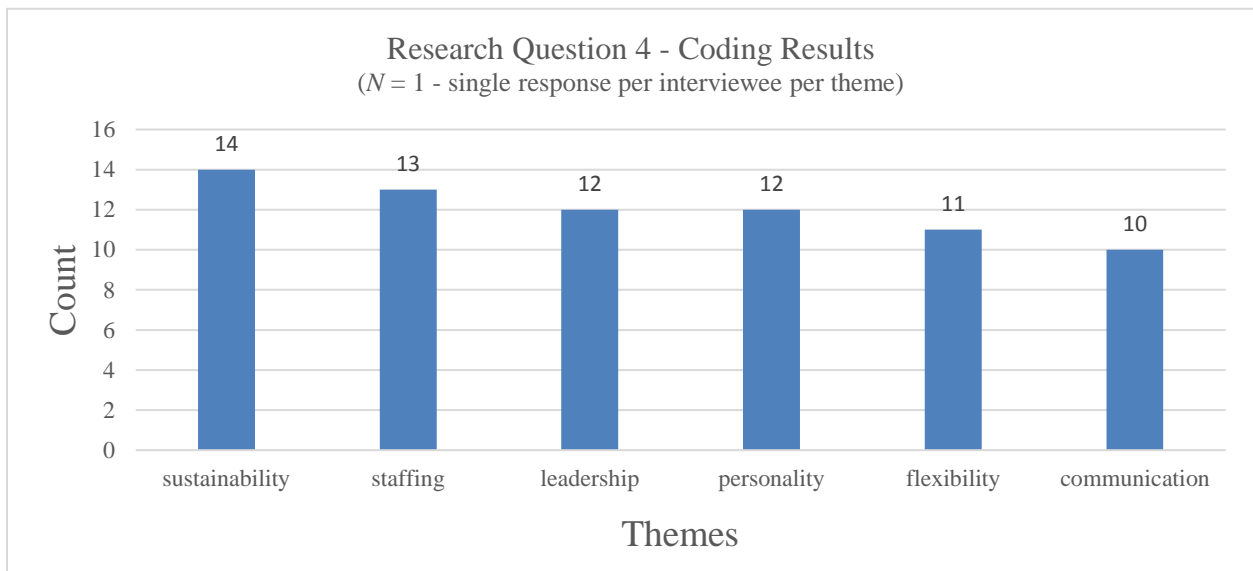


Figure 14. Recommendation for schools designing and implementing new SIG programs. This figure illustrates the recommendations that SIG administrators made for other schools who were designing and implementing a new SIG program.

The first question that correlated to research question 4 was interview question 11 which asked “What recommendations would you make for schools as they begin to design and implement a SIG program?” The data yielded four themes: (a) design, (b) people, (c) attitudes, and (d) application (see figure 15). Participants generally addressed issues that they had faced

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during the first year of their respective SIG program and identified areas that needed to be adjusted during the second and third year.

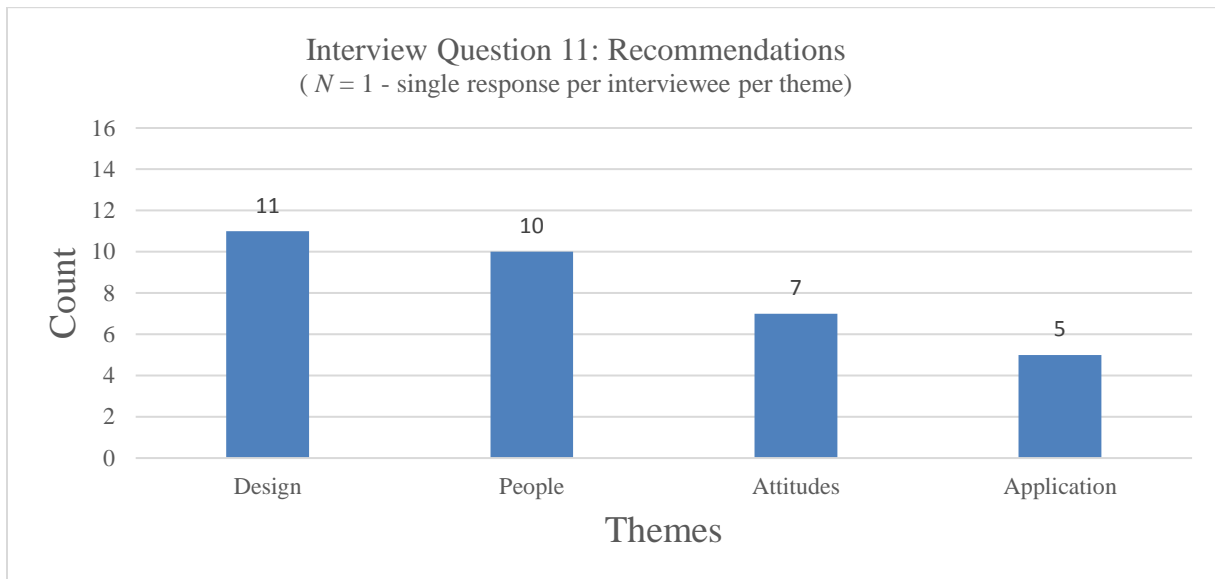


Figure 15. Recommendations for new SIG schools. This figure illustrates the recommendations that SIG administrators made for future SIG schools.

Design. The first theme, design, specifically dealt with the creation of the SIG program. Responses included collaboration, vision statement, mission statement, and having core beliefs and values. Of the 33 responses to this interview question, 11(33%) responses encouraged future SIG administrators to create a program that had clear goals and expectations for both students and staff members. P3 suggested “it’s almost easier to design a SIG program if your leadership team knows what the goals are upfront. It gives everyone a shared vision to build from” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). P7 stated “Use your staff and team members. Talk with them about your goals for each year and be flexible. Keep the lines of communication fluid so everyone knows what is going on” (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

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Similarly, P12 and P14 agreed that sharing the beliefs and values of the SIG program was important. P12 stated “your core beliefs and values drive the goals of the SIG program. If you want a staff that’s on board with the program, tell them what’s important for success” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). P14 suggested “sharing the program’s purpose with the staff and parents clears up a lot of uncertainty and alleviates the fear of the unknown” (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

People. The second theme dealt directly with the people involved in the SIG program. Of the 33 responses, 10 (30%) responses encouraged future SIG schools to be diligent in their selection of staff members. P8 stated “I would sit with each grade level and openly discuss the expectations of working in a SIG school. Having smaller meetings allows the administrator to get a better sense of who’s on board” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). Similarly, P12 stated “Offer those who do not really want to be part of the program an easy out – something that they can’t say no to. Let them know that it’s ok to go to another school – this program isn’t for everyone” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Additionally, P15 advised “Don’t force people to stay. It sets them and you up for failure” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Participants generally agreed that having a successful program meant that all staff members involved needed to want to be a part of the SIG program and had to support the process. Many participants who had difficulty with staff during the first year found that those staff members were not invested in the SIG program and did not want to be part of it. P4 stated “we identified a few staff members in the first year who were not on board. They were offered

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other opportunities the second year and were replaced with staff who did want to be part of the program” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Attitudes. Theme three, attitudes, closely linked to theme two, people. Of the 33 responses to question 11, seven responses (21%) dealt with the attitudes of the people involved in the program. These responses included adjectives such as positive, uplifting, and spirited. P6 specifically stated “You only want people who are going enhance your program – positive attitudes are a must” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P13 stated “your staff’s attitudes will set the tone of the building – be careful to remove the negative vibes” (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Participants agreed that people who were negative or belittled the purpose of the program should be removed in the following year and replaced with someone who believed that the SIG program would be successful.

Application. The final recommendation participants made was in regards to the SIG application process. The SIG application was 22 pages long and required supplemental materials. Five (15%) of the 33 recommendations directly dealt with completing the application process. P4 stated “Don’t get overwhelmed. Do the application in small portions and ask for help” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P12 also recommended “collaborate as a team when completing the application – don’t make one person do all the work” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Participants agreed that working on the application with a leadership team and sharing the responsibilities worked better than one person trying to complete it alone.

Interview question 12 asked “What would you have done differently if you were doing this again?” This question yielded five themes: (a) curriculum, (b) behaviors, (c) staffing, (d)

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information exchange, and (e) district changes. Curriculum, behavior, and staffing were also mentioned when participants described the challenges they faced when implementing the SIG program. For interview question 12, the responses mirrored that of interview question four. Of the 25 responses, nine (36%) dealt with implementing a better curriculum, six (24%) dealt with addressing behavior issues, and six (24%) dealt with staffing changes. P2 stated “I think this goes back to your question on challenges. Had we known what our issues would be, we’d have dealt with them earlier” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Three (12%) of the 25 responses acknowledged that having access to information from other SIG administrators prior to beginning the SIG program would have been helpful. Only one respondent believed that redistricting would have been helpful.

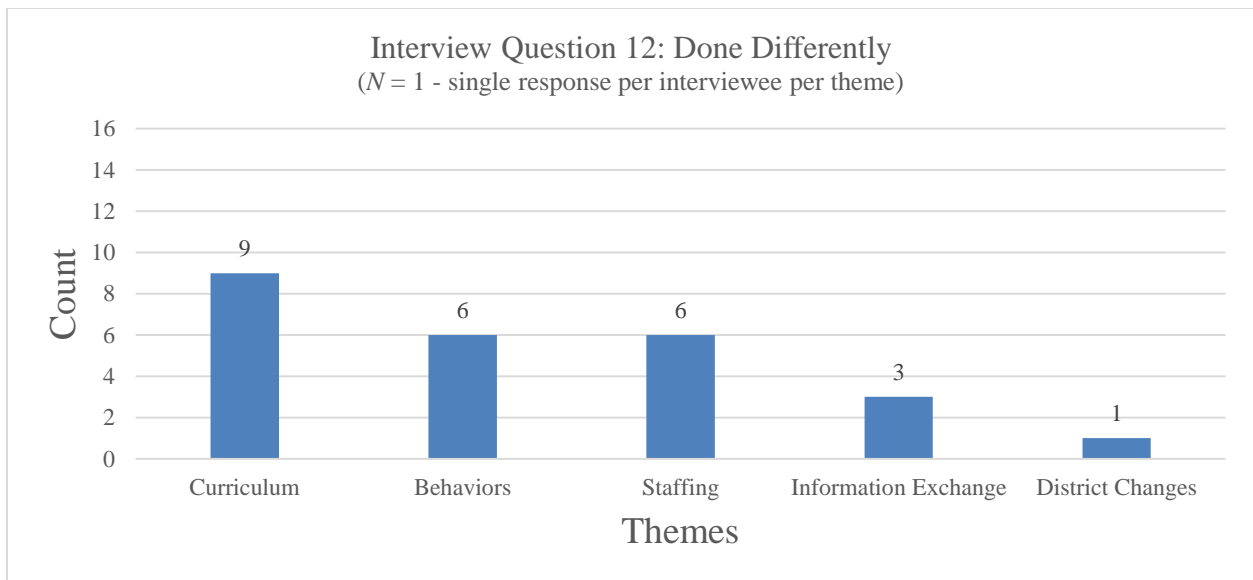


Figure 16. What SIG administrators would have done differently. This figure illustrates what SIG administrators would have done differently if they were able to create and implement a SIG program again.

Curriculum. Nine of the 15 participants agreed that having a different curriculum in the first year would have helped their respective school be successful. P4 stated “we had too many

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curriculum choices and picked the one we thought would be best for our program. It's hard to know until you are actually implementing the program" (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). On the other hand, P13 stated "we had to use what we were given as far as curriculum and adapting it was difficult. Knowing that, we'd have fought harder for a better curriculum" (P13, personal communication, March 10, 2016). All nine participants agreed that it was difficult to know what type of curriculum would be most effective until the program was actually implemented.

Behaviors. Six of the 15 participants identified behavior plans as an area that they would have approached differently, especially in the first year of the SIG program. P2 stated "we did not know what to expect for our behavior needs. We over estimated our need for behavior support, but there was no way to know for sure until the program began" (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016). On the other hand, P10 stated "we did not think we'd need a lot of behavior support in the first year. We were wrong. Looking back, though, we did what we thought was best" (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Staffing. Six of the 15 participants agreed that they would deal with staffing changes differently if they were to implement a SIG program again. P3 stated "I encourage SIG administrators to be firm in their staffing choices. It's a hard conversation to have, but it's an important one" (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P11 stated "Knowing what I know now, I'd have removed a couple teachers before beginning our SIG program" (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). All six respondents who identified staffing changes as something they would do differently agreed it is difficult to know what staffing changes need to be implemented until the SIG program has already been implemented.

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P15 stated “Hindsight is 20/20. At the time, we worked with what we knew” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Information exchange. Three of the 15 participants believed that exchanging information with other SIG schools would have been helpful to implementing a SIG program. P5 suggested “district and state officials should partner former SIG administrators with new SIG administrators to answer questions before implementation. Having someone who has already gone through the process as a guide would have been helpful” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Similarly, P6 stated “access to other SIG administrators would have been a good resource for us. Sharing information or best practices should be encouraged” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

District changes. One participant suggested that redistricting would have made a difference at her school. This particular school was located in a very large, urban district that housed more than 12 elementary school. This participant believed that her school district should have changed the population of the schools in order to spread some of the district’s neediest students among all 12 schools. This participant wished to keep her participant identification anonymous for this question.

Interview question 13 asked “Is there anything else you would like to share about your SIG experience that you think would be relevant to this study?” This question yielded four themes: (a) nothing, (b) attitudes, (c) leadership traits, and (d) flexibility (see figure 16). Out of the 16 responses, eight (50%) participants had nothing additional to share about the SIG program and process. Three (19%) of the 16 responses reiterated the importance of having people with positive attitudes as part of the program. Three (19%) of the 16 responses encouraged strong

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leaders and positive leadership traits, such as open and honest. Two (13%) of the 16 responses encouraged potential SIG administrators to be flexible and adapt their plans as necessary.

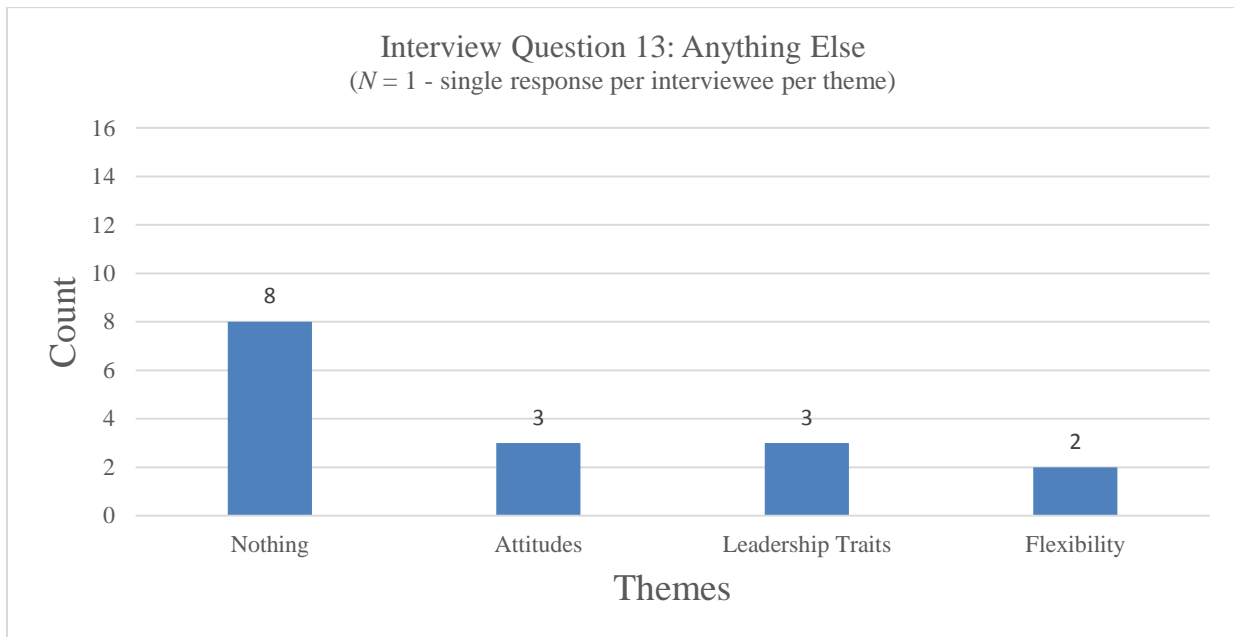


Figure 17. Additional comments. This figure illustrates the additional comments that SIG administrators made about the SIG program.

After detailed analysis of interview questions 11 – 13, the study yielded six key recommendations for schools who will implement similar SIG programs: (a) sustainability, (b) staffing, (c) leadership, (d) personality traits, (e) flexibility and (f) communication (see figure 17). Of the 72 responses to research question 4, 14 (19%) had to do with creating a sustainable program that could continue after the three-year period of SIG. Staffing recommendations made up 13 (18%) of the 72 responses. Leadership recommendations made up 12 (17%) of the 72 responses. Personality traits, specifically which to welcome and which to avoid, made up 12 (17%) of the 72 responses. Flexibility made up 11 (15%) of the 72 responses. Communication made up the remaining 10 (14%) of the 72 responses.

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Sustainability. Webster's Online Dictionary (2016) defined sustainability as "able to last or continue for a long time." For this study, sustainability referred to the school's ability to continue the interventions and partnerships once SIG funds were no longer available. Of the 15 participants, 14 mentioned looking toward the future when preparing the SIG application. P6 recommended "partner with outside agencies who are willing to find other sources of funding so that, after the three-year period, you can continue to have access to their services" (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Additionally, P3 and P7 spoke of leveraging resources through the state. P7 stated "Our state allows us to apply for annual scholarships from various companies who will provide us with either goods, software, or a small amount of money" (P7, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

P12 and P15 built relationships with local businesses and colleges as partners in education. P12 encouraged future SIG administrators to find educational partners who both benefit without costing either one additional funds. Similarly, P15 found local vendors and businesses who provided free educational programs to students that helped build students' knowledge backgrounds.

Creating sustainable programs allowed these schools to continue their pursuit of excellence and continued the work that the implementation of the SIG program began. Sustainability meant, for many of these schools, that their work was not for naught. P4 stated "for us, being sustainable means we believe that we can succeed on our own. It means that this program belongs to us" (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Staffing. Of the 13 participants who made staffing recommendations, 12 mentioned "having the right people" as a key element to a successful program. P10 believed "Teachers and

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administrators must not only ‘buy into’ the program, but believe that it can work and do everything in their power to make it work” (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016). P4 agreed, stating “positive people who want to be in the building and who are willing to put in all their effort to make the program a success are the people you want to be part of your program” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

P1 advised that “administrators should avoid those teachers that are combative, negative, and generally disruptive to the changes ahead. While it is good to have good-natured, respectful discourse regarding changes, it is not ok to allow individuals to intentionally degrade the process” (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). Similarly, P3 stated that “you know you have the right people in place when there is a positive vibe. It can’t be seen but you can feel the difference when the climate is upbeat and people are happy to be here” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). P8 found that “you can identify the people who are onboard by their questions, attitudes, and general disposition” (P8, personal communication, February 25, 2016). Overall, the administrators agreed that having positive people who believe that their students can succeed and support the implementation of the program are instrumental to the success of the SIG program.

Leadership. Of the 12 participants who discussed leadership, 10 extended that meaning to finding teacher-leaders who could take on some of the program’s responsibilities while still be an effective teacher. P11 stated “encouraging teachers and grooming them to be leaders among their peers gives them a voice in the school, and also encourages teachers to work collaboratively” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). P2, P4, P6, and P10 discussed the implementation and use of a leadership team, comprised of administrators,

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teachers, and other staff members who dealt with the day to day needs of the school. P4 stated that she relied on her leadership team throughout the year to take charge of various tasks, such as organizing fundraisers, organizing tutoring, and additional evening programs for families to attend. Similarly, P10 believed that administrators needed to share the responsibilities of running a school. P2 concurred, stating “We have a lot going on in our school and it’s hard for one person to oversee every aspect. Having a shared responsibility and delegating is part of effective leadership” (P2, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Moreover, P5 argued that “schools cannot be successful without effective leadership – whether it’s a leadership team or simply the administration. How can we expect our teachers to model positive encouragement if their leader is not modeling it for them?” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Eight (67%) of the 12 participants who mentioned effective leadership as an important factor in a successful SIG program also contended that collaboration was an important part of being an effective leader.

Personality Traits. Of the 15 participants in this study, 12 (80%) believed that having specific personality traits made leaders and teachers effective in SIG schools. Some of these traits included being positive, uplifting, joyful, passionate, and compassionate. P12 stated “When we started interviewing staff members who wanted to voluntarily move to our SIG school, we specifically looked at teachers who were excited and enthusiastic about the SIG program” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Similarly, P6 stated “We were looking for recommendations of people who were open to change, leaders in their other schools, and educational advocates. These people were often described as loving, generous, and kind” (P6, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

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Additionally, several participants admitted to not hiring teachers who were more interested in the stipend money than the actual program. P3 confessed “We actually did not accept two of our applicants who kept commenting on the additional income they would be receiving” (P3, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Similarly, P11 stated “Some people are just not meant for programs like ours. That doesn’t make them bad or ineffective teachers, it just doesn’t make them a good fit for our model” (P11, personal communication, February 29, 2016). The consensus of the participants was that SIG programs required dedicated, passionate people who were interested in fostering positive educational experiences.

Flexibility. Participants who recommended being flexible in the SIG program believed that being too rigid in the SIG program often led to more stress, anxiety, and ultimately the failure of the program. P5 stated “One of our consultants was very candid with us and told us to relax, be flexible. If something isn’t working, stop” (P5, personal communication, February 22, 2016). P12 advised “Just because something is written in the grant, don’t keep doing it if it’s not working!” (P12, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Similarly, P15 stated “Being strict or expecting everyone to fall into line will be the downfall of any program” (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

For several of the participants, flexibility extended beyond the classroom teachers and administration. P4 acknowledged “Our consultants would come in with a game plan, but knew that they might be called upon to help in other areas. They modeled flexible schedules to our staff” (P4, personal communication, February 22, 2016). Other participants agreed that volunteers, consultants, and other staff were often asked to complete tasks that may not have been scheduled for a particular day. P10 stated “Children don’t always follow what we expect

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them to do, and not always in a bad way. We can't be so rigid that we don't teach our children to explore the content of the lessons" (P10, personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Communication. Communication was identified by 10 participants as being instrumental in the success of their SIG program. Open communication required that the people involved in the school were honest and felt safe expressing their opinions or concerns. Throughout the interviews, several participants mentioned the importance of the climate and culture of the school and the role of communication in creating a positive climate and culture. P14 specifically stated "Part of our overall success was creating open lines of communication. Giving everyone a voice changed the way we all interacted with each other" (P14, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Similarly, P15 believed "Talking openly as a staff took a new level of trust. Open lines of communication changed our climate and empowered our people" (P15, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Of the 10 participants who discussed the role of communication, six (60%) believed that open communication extended to others involved in the school. P1 believed "Open conversations with parents are just as important because they have a stake in the success of the program too" (P1, personal communication, February 17, 2016). Similarly, P9 advised "Keep your lines of communication open at all times. We encourage our students to be honest and talk candidly with us" (P9, personal communication, February 26, 2016). P11 and P12 also encouraged administrators to have honest conversations with their consultants and volunteers because they also had valuable input and insights about the program.

Research question 4 dealt with recommendations participants would make to new administrators who were creating and implementing SIG programs. Participants believed that

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creating sustainable programs was important to a successful program. Sustainability referred to the ability of the program to continue after the SIG funds were no longer available. Participants believed that it was important to look at the future of the school, beyond the three-year grant. The second recommendation dealt with having a positive staff that believed in the SIG program and wanted it to succeed. Participants believed that the people involved in the program directly influenced the success or failure of the program. The third recommendation participants made was in regards to leadership. Participants believed that administrators not only needed to be strong leaders, but that they also needed to allow teachers to cultivate their own leadership skills. The fourth recommendation dealt with personality traits of employees. Participants believed that having staff members who were positive and uplifting was important because students' often modeled their own behavior based on the adults in the building. Participants also believed that it was important to remove staff who were negative or who did not believe in the program, as those attitudes created a negative learning environment. The fifth recommendation dealt with the flexibility of the administration and the staff members. Flexibility refers to the ability of the staff and administration to understand and deal with unexpected issues or changes to the day. For some staff members, this meant that they had to reprioritize their lessons or be willing to help in a different area of need. Flexibility also referred to changing pieces of the program that were not working in order to continue to be successful. The final recommendation dealt with the need for open, honest communication with all stakeholders. Participants believed that creating an environment that operated on respectful discourse and transparency fostered mutual trust and honest reflection.

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Summary

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with administrators who were identified as overseeing successful SIG programs in public, urban, New England schools. Chapter IV discussed the results of the analyzed and coded interviews and identified common themes that answered four research questions. In order to validate the findings, the inter-rater reliability process described in Chapter III was used. The results of the interviews were determined through the use of frequency charts and direct quotes. Themes that were common to at least 50% of the participants were highlighted in this study.

Research question 1 asked “What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?” All 15 participants agreed that collaboration was one of the key factors in the success of their program. Of the 15 participants, 12 suggested that having a vision was a successful strategy for implementing a SIG program. Of the 15 participants, 11 also suggested that creating a mission statement was a successful strategy when implementing a SIG program. Finally, 10 of the 15 participants mentioned the use of support staff in their program as a successful strategy when implementing a SIG program.

Research question 2 asked “What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?” All 15 participants mentioned various staffing challenges that arose during the implementation process and discussed how they dealt with the staffing challenges over time. Of the 15 participants, 13 discussed the challenges that curriculum posed when implementing a SIG program. Of the 15 participants, 13 agreed that growth also posed a major challenge, specifically monitoring growth and adjusting their plans as the needs of the school changed. Of the 15 participants, 11 felt that the school budget was one of the most

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difficult challenges when implementing a SIG program, especially as they looked at the sustainability of the program after the grant money was no longer available. Finally, nine of the 15 participants felt that behavior issues posed a challenge, in that, the normal six-hour school day was extended by an additional 90 minutes of instructional time and administrators were did not know what behavior support they potentially needed.

Research question 3 asked “How did participating schools measure the success of the School Improvement Grant at their respective schools?” Of the 15 participants, 14 discussed the evaluation process in place for teachers at their respective schools. Formal and informal observations of teachers and lessons were how most of the administrators judged the teachers’ success. Of the 15 participants 12 agreed that they judged the success of the SIG program at their respective school based on the observations they made during the school day, including the attitudes of students, teachers, and staff, as well as the level of engagement in lessons. Of the 15 participants 12 also believed the positive change in the culture and climate of their respective schools aided in the success of the SIG program. Finally, eight of the 15 participants also used the formal state and district assessments that students take throughout the year as a measure of their school’s success.

Research question 4 asked “Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement similar School Improvement Grants?” Interestingly, 14 of the 15 participants discussed the need to design and implement a SIG program that would be sustainable beyond the three-year grant period. All 14 participants agreed that looking at the long-term goals was important to making the program successful. Of the 15 participants, 13 believed that staffing was key to implementing a successful SIG program.

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Staffing issues including removing negative staff members and keeping and/or hiring staff who were supportive of the new initiatives. Of the 15 participants, 12 believed that leadership was important to implementing a successful SIG program. This included having positive, effective administrators and encouraging teacher-leaders to be active in the implementation process. Of the 15 participants, 12 also believed that specific personality traits were important to being successful. The identified traits included positive attitudes, joyfulness, kindness, and creativity. Of the 15 participants, 11 encouraged flexibility in the implementation of the SIG program, including flexibility in lessons, in the program, and with the staff in general. Finally, 10 of the 15 participants cited open communication as being a key factor in their success. This included open lines of communication between students, teachers, administration, and with parents.

These themes were further illustrated with frequency charts and participants' quotes. Data was displayed in order to easily compare the participants' responses. Chapter V will discuss the implications of these findings and how they contribute to creating and implementing a success SIG program.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Educational inequality has been an escalating concern in the United States (US Department of Education, 2010; US Department of Education, 2012; US Department of Education, 2015b). Over the last 60 or so years, politicians have unsuccessfully attempted to implement programs and reallocate funds so that all students in the US could receive high-quality educations (US Department of Education, 2009). However, social inequalities, specifically in high-minority, high-poverty areas, continued to plague our educational system. These social injustices affected educational opportunities and learning environments on a daily basis. It was often difficult for poverty-stricken areas to hire and retain high quality educators because of their inability to pay these educators competitive wages. As federal mandates became more rigorous, school districts with low-socioeconomic populations were failing to produce graduates who were college or career-ready. As low-performing schools were met with the possibility of being taken over by state agencies, school and district administrators began to collaborate in order to design programs that offered students additional learning time and additional learning opportunities. In order to obtain grant money from their state and from the federal government, these administrators designed and implemented programs using School Improvement Grant (SIG) guidelines. The struggles of these administrators and the ultimate success of their programs served as examples for future SIG administrators so that they, too, could structure a high quality educational program that met the needs of their students.

This purpose of this study was to identify the best practices used by successful School Improvement Grant (SIG) administrators when designing and implementing a SIG program in

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urban, public New England Schools. This study was guided by four research questions that were designed to identify the best practices of SIG schools. The research questions were as follows:

- What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?”
- What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?”
- How did participating schools measure the success of School Improvement Grants at their respective schools?
- Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?”

This study was limited to a small area of the country with a specific population of students in order to give a comprehensive list of best practices for that one area. Trying to include all urban, public schools in all of the United States would have been an unmanageable task, as far as the number of schools that would encompass. In the same way, trying to compile a list of best practices for all New England SIG schools would have been unmanageable due to the varying populations of students and varying locations of the schools. New England spans more than 600 miles, which was too much territory to cover in one study.

This study was designed to be a qualitative, phenomenological study with data that indicated and explained common experiences among successful SIG schools. A quantitative study of the schools in this study would have been plausible as each SIG school was required to report their students’ progress quarterly to the LEAs and SEAs. However, the quantitative data would only have shown whether the schools were (a) making academic progress, (b) increasing

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attendance rates, and (c) decreasing in and out of school suspensions. A quantitative study would not have yielded common best practices of the administrators of the schools.

Using semi-structured interview questions allowed participants to expound on their thoughts and include their opinions and insights as to why their specific school was successful. Participants explained the phenomenon of successful SIG schools based on their own experiences. The interview answers were then coded and grouped into common themes. The themes were defined and discussed, using direct quotes from participants to support the findings.

The results of this study provided common best practices of urban, public New England schools administrators when designing and implementing SIG turnaround or transformation models. This list was not all inclusive and was limited to the common responses from the participants in this study. Administrators of future urban, public New England schools may find this information useful as they design and implement their own SIG program. However, it was not the intention of this study to dissuade future SIG administrators from attempting other strategies when implementing a SIG program. It was the intention of this study to provide future SIG administrators with a reference, or guide, about practices and strategies that other administrators have found to be successful.

Findings

Research question 1 asked “What strategies or practices did participating schools use in implementing the School Improvement Grant?” There were four distinct strategies that SIG administrators agreed they used when creating and implementing the grant. The first of the identified strategies was collaboration. The literature defined collaboration as “two or more people or organizations working together to realize shared goals” (Marinez-Moyano, 2006, p.

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83). For the SIG schools, this meant that teachers worked together with each other, with administrators, with students, and with support staff in order to help students achieve academic progress. Collaboration was identified by all 15 participants as being beneficial to the success of each respective program.

The second strategy that successful participants identified was having a vision. A vision, as defined by the literature, was a description of goals that a school or educational organization strove to successfully achieve (Abbott, 2016). The participants in this study believed that having a statement that identified the goals and objectives of the school's SIG plan allowed all participants in the program to know what they were working toward (US Department of Education, 2011). Some of the participants agreed that, while they did not use a vision statement for their respective school, having one in place could have been beneficial.

The third strategy that administrators identified was having a mission statement. A mission statement was similar to a vision statement (Abbott, 2014). However, it generally described the day-to-day operational aspects of a school, its instructional values, and the commitment to education, students, and the staff (Abbott, 2014). As with the vision statement, participants in this study believed that knowing what was expected from all participants in the program guided the daily instruction in the classroom. Several participants did not have a mission statement, but believed that having one in place could have been beneficial to their respective programs (US Department of Education, 2011).

Finally, the fourth strategy identified by participants in this study was support. The term support referred to the various areas of need that each school identified as needing improvement, including, but not limited to, parent volunteers, consultants, and behavioral staff (Golden et. al.,

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2014). Administrators believed that these various support systems allowed the teachers to focus on their lessons and allowed students to focus on their learning. Several participants agreed that without the additional support staff that they hired for the SIG program, the school would not have been as successful and the students would not have made as much progress (Lehman, 2015).

Research question 2 asked “What challenges were faced by participating schools in implementing those strategies or practices?” Participants identified five common challenges that they faced during the implementation of the SIG program. The first challenge was finding the best staff members for the program and ensuring that the staff the schools already had in place believed in the program. Several participants found that it was difficult to know what additional staff they would need in the first year. Other participants found that they had overstaffed some of the areas of need and understaffed other areas of need. Most participants stated that by the second and third year of the program the staffing issues had been resolved.

The second identified challenge had to do with choosing or adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the students. Several participants found that there was an abundance of curriculum choices and struggled to choose one that would meet the needs of the greatest number of students. Other participants found that they did not have any choice in the curriculum and struggled to adapt what was already in place to meet the needs of their students. All participants in this study agreed that by the second year of the SIG program, the curriculum glitches were resolved.

The third identified challenge was growth. This challenge specifically referred to the lack of growth the schools experienced prior to the implementation and during the first year of the

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SIG program. As the individual schools entered the first year of the SIG program, the administrators and teachers were still learning how to balance the new program so that students were receiving the proper supports and making the expected amount of progress. Several participants stated that growth was slow at first, but as the staff and students adjusted to the new SIG program, students began to show more progress. By the end of the first year, most participants believed that their respective students had shown appropriate growth. Most participants agreed that by the second and third year, growth was no longer an issue.

The fourth identified challenge was budgeting the SIG funds appropriately. Participants stated that it was difficult to know what their schools would need during the first year of the SIG program. Most of the participants based their budget on data from the previous school year, in terms of hiring behavior supports, additional special education supports, etc. Some of the participants stated that they had spent too much of their budget on paid staff support the first year and not enough of the budget was allocated for other needs. On the other hand, some of the participants did not spend enough of their budget on the support staff their students and teachers needed. Participants found that they had to learn from their budgeting mistakes in the first year and reallocate funds to meet their needs the second and third years.

The fifth and final challenge that participants identified was in terms of student behavior. As part of the SIG program requirements, the school day was extended an additional 90 – 120 minutes. This additional learning time caused several of the participants to be concerned about inappropriate behaviors that might have occurred. In order to combat this, several participants hired too many behavior support staff to help teachers deal with behaviors that disrupted the learning process. Most of the participants found that the behaviors they were concerned about

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did not actually occur. In fact, several participants were able to cut down the number of behavior support staff in the second and third year. On the other hand, a few of the participants found that they did not anticipate the increase in behavior issues the first year and had to adjust and increased their behavior support staff in the second and third years.

Research question 3 asked “How did participating schools measure the success of School Improvement Grants at their respective schools?” Participants identified five common measures of success. The first identified measure of success was in the form of formal teacher evaluations. Formal teacher evaluations were conducted in the classroom and teachers were scored on a district-provided rubric. Annual formal teacher evaluations were required by each participant’s school district for every teacher in the SIG school. Each evaluation was completed by the school administrator who provided feedback to the teacher. The annual evaluation became a permanent part of each teacher’s personnel file.

The second identified measure of success was in the form of observations. Unlike the formal teacher evaluation, observations were unplanned and happened randomly throughout the day. Participants included classroom observations of lessons, observations of student interactions, and observations of student engagement. Several participants believed that the spontaneous observations that happened throughout the day were a better indicator of the success of the SIG program because they were often discretely made, without the observer being noticed.

The third identified measure of success was the climate and culture of the school. The literature defined the climate of a school as the tone of the learning environment, which can predict how well students are able to learn (Abbott, 2014). The literature defined the culture of the school as the physical state of the building (Abbott, 2014). Participants believed that by

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changing the culture of the school to a warm, welcoming, clean environment they could change the climate of the school to that of a positive learning environment. Several participants described updating the colors of the walls, hanging artwork, and keeping the hallways clean and neat. Participants believed that making physical changes to the school helped change the way students treated each other and set a positive tone.

The fourth identified measure of success was the attitudes of all the people in the school. Participants believed that having positive, joyful staff members who wanted to be part of the SIG program set the tone of the program. Participants identified several characteristics that they wanted as part of their respective program, including confident, helpful, happy, and caring. Participants also identified characteristics that they did not want to include in the program, such as negative, argumentative, and selfish. Participants agreed that having positive staff members modeled positive behavior for their students.

The fifth and final identified measure of success was student assessments. Participants believed that formal state and district assessments were important measures of success because they allowed students to demonstrate the learning that was taking place in the classroom. Participants used the hard data from student assessments when presenting their growth statistics to their district and state administrators. While participants agreed that formal assessment data was important, many believed that these assessments were not as important an indicator of success as the other four measures of success.

Research question 4 asked “Based on their experiences, what recommendations would participating schools make to other schools who will implement a similar School Improvement Grant?” Participants identified six recommendations for future SIG administrators as they begin

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the design and implementation process. The first recommendation participants made dealt with the sustainability of the SIG program. Sustainability refers to the ability of the program to continue or last for a long time (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2016.) Participants recommended that future SIG administrators devise plans for how they will continue to implement the strategies and interventions after the three-year funds are no longer available. Participants believed that creating and implementing a long-term program was important to continuing to cultivate growth in student academics.

The second recommendation participants made dealt with staffing issues. Several participants discussed the challenges that staffing issues posed. Participants recommended that future SIG administrators preempt those staffing challenges by being thorough in their screening process. Identifying staff who genuinely wanted to be part of the program and were excited about the changes was important to the success of the program. Removing staff who were negative or were not open to the changes taking place was also important to the success of the program. Participants believed that being proactive in the staffing choices could make the transition into the SIG program easier.

The third recommendation participants made dealt with leadership. This included having administrators who were open to change, fostering teacher-leaders, and modeling positive leadership practices. Participants believed that leadership should not be limited to one individual. Participants believed that fostering teacher-leaders within the school encouraged teachers to work collaboratively and encouraged administrators to delegate tasks so as not to become overwhelmed. Participants also encouraged the use of leadership teams who shared leadership responsibilities.

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The fourth recommendation participants made dealt with the personality traits of staff members. Participants agreed that hiring staff who were positive, uplifting, joyful, compassionate and passionate was important to the success of a SIG program. Participants believed that modeling these positive personality traits for students could change the way students viewed school and learning. Participants recommended that administrators avoid hiring staff members who were combative, argumentative, or negative. Participants believed that these negative personality traits could cause the program to fail because students might mirror these attitudes, which would negate the purpose of the program.

The fifth recommendation participants made dealt with flexibility. Participants cautioned that being too rigid could cause the program to fail. Several participants agreed that being open to changes and understanding that things do not always go to plan was important. Working with children often meant that plans change based on the needs of the students on any given day. There were many outside factors that changed the plans for the day, including home issues, weather, etc. Participants believed that modeling flexibility for students taught students that they must also be flexible and adapt to the situation.

The sixth and final recommendation participants made dealt with communication. Participants recommended that administrators have open lines of communication with staff, parents, students, and anyone else that is involved in the school day. Having open lines of communication fostered trust and allowed concerns or difficulties to be handled quickly and efficiently. Open communication also dispelled fears and apprehensions that arose from the implementation of the new program. Participants who were open and honest about the changes

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occurring in the program found that there were less obstacles when dealing with implementing those changes.

The findings of this study supported the four research questions. Participants' responses were generally correlated with each other, in that, several of the participants had the same or similar experiences as they created and implemented their respective SIG program. When looking at the coded data displays (figures 1 – 17 in chapter IV), the number of respondents for each theme was generally high. For example, research question 1 addressed the strategies used when implementing the SIG program. All 15 respondents believed that collaboration was important to the success of their respective program. Additionally, no less than eight respondents agreed on each theme for each research question.

In regards to the literature, the findings of this study aligned with recent studies of other SIG programs. The research conducted by IES from 2010 – 2016 focused on specific regions in the United States with specific populations. The intention of the IES was to identify best practices when dealing with specific populations in specific areas of the country. For instance, one of the studies focused on rural Mid-western states. The IES sampled 10 schools using SIG programs with this population of students. From that study, the IES identified the best practices of rural, Mid-western SIG schools which was published in 2014. The IES conducted similar studies, sampling different populations of students and published those best practices between 2014 – 2016.

The IES' findings indicated that best practices vary by student population and by region (Hurlburt et. al., 2014). The findings of this study also indicated that was true. The best practices for rural schools using SIG funds did not align with the best practices of urban New England

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schools because the needs of the students and the needs of the school were vastly different. This was further illustrated by the fact that all of the schools included in this study had similar populations of students, yet no two programs were designed or operated in the exact same fashion. It can be surmised, therefore, that while researchers can compile lists of best practices and make recommendations based on those best practices, not all SIG schools will need to implement the same practices to be successful.

Implications

Current research. While the findings of this study do not change the current understanding of the success of SIG schools, they did offer additional insight into some of the identified successful SIG programs. The findings of this study added to the knowledge and supported the findings of other researchers about SIG schools and can serve as a reference for future research. The findings also indicated that additional research needed to be conducted about other populations in other regions of the country in order to create a comprehensive understanding of SIG programs. As researchers continue to study successful SIG schools and build the knowledge base about SIG programs, this study can serve as guide to conducting future research.

Current researchers found that different populations of students in different regions of the country do not have the same educational backgrounds (Golden, et. al., 2014; Hurlburt et. al., 2014; Rose, 2015). While politicians over the last three to four decades have pushed for equitable educational experiences (i.e. No Child Left Behind, Common Core), researchers have found that is difficult, if not impossible, to provide all people with similar education experiences (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014). In recent years, politicians and educators have changed the

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term “equitable” to “high quality” educational experiences (Kirp, 2011). President Obama specifically addressed the need for high-quality teachers in every classroom and high-quality principals in every school. This change in terminology allowed educators to provide quality education to students without the challenge of attempting to meet unreachable standards that former educational policies (i.e. No Child Left Behind) set (Klein, 2012a). Educators were still held to the highest standards and students were still expected to reach set goals, but with more flexibility built into those standards and goals, as demonstrated through programs such as SIG offers.

Guiding SIG schools. The findings of the study can serve as a guide for urban, public New England schools who receive SIGs so they can: identify programs that have been successful in other urban schools; learn from examples of successful assessment strategies; accurately determine best practices for teachers, administrators, Local Education Agencies, and State Education Agencies. Determining best practices used in underserved urban schools can help LEAs and SEAs determine which schools in their areas can be used as model schools when new SIG schools begin their own programs. Overall, the findings of this study can provide vital information for SIG schools so that schools can identify the best practices for its population.

Non-SIG implications. Additionally, this research can be used by future policymakers as they determine how to best serve all students in all schools throughout the United States. While this research focused on a small group of schools with similar populations, it can be argued that educational curriculum and mandates need to acknowledge and account for the fact that not all students learn in the same manner and that different populations of students have different needs. Educators and students require flexibility in their teaching and learning methods in order to make

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the learning meaningful and appropriate. Research indicated that requiring all students to learn at the same pace and believing that any one curriculum will meet the needs of students in all schools throughout the United States is naïve and unreasonable. Moving forward, policymakers can use this and other SIG research to aid in the restructuring of educational mandates and policies.

Training. The research from this study can be prepared and used to train future SIG administrators and teachers in applying for and creating successful SIG programs. When school leadership teams and/or administrators decide to apply for the SIG money, the process can be overwhelming, as many have never written grant proposals. Using this study as a guide, training sessions can be developed in order to make the process less stressful and give administrators an idea of what to expect as they go through the SIG process. Training sessions can also be developed to provide strategies for dealing with difficulties that may arise throughout the process. This can be especially useful when initially presenting the program to parents and staff. Administrators would be able to answer common questions about the program and, hopefully, alleviate most of the concerns that people might have.

Consultation. In addition to providing initial training programs for future SIG administrators and leadership teams, this research can be used to develop a consultation program for SIG schools. Based on the research, consultants can be trained to help set up and maintain successful SIG programs. Services for consultation can be offered to future and current SIG schools as part of the SIG money allocation. As more schools apply for and receive SIG funds, there is a growing need for consultants to aid in the process of setting up and maintaining a sustainable program. There is a growing need for consultants to also help SIG schools identify

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and reach out to organizations that may be interested in working with SIG schools to provide students with additional support and educational experiences. By fostering relationships with various organizations, consultants can be the mediator between the schools and the organizations to help negotiate a program that is mutually beneficial in services and/or fees.

Future Directions

As new schools qualify each school year for SIG funding and begin to design and implement their own program, there will always be the need for literature and research into successful SIG programs. While the IES has currently conducted five case studies on various populations of SIG schools, there are a multitude of populations and regions that have yet to be studied and documented. For example, this study specifically targeted urban, public New England schools receiving SIG funding. Other studies of New England schools could focus on rural populations or schools with high ELL populations. This study was also limited to the New England area. Future studies could look at urban schools in New York or urban schools in Pennsylvania. At the time of publication, there were over 1200 schools receiving SIG funds in the United States and new awards are granted each year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This indicated that the possible studies of SIG schools were abundant. It also meant that the need for best practices of various populations were also abundant.

Recommendations. As new schools begin the process of applying for SIG funds, there may be hardships that interfere with the implementation process. While the schools in this study were deemed successful, all of the administrators discussed the difficulties they faced between years 1 – 3. Based on the experiences discussed in this study, there are four main areas of

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difficulty that all future SIG administrators should account for as they move forward in the process: (a) parent pushback, (b) budget intrusions, (c) staff pushback, and (d) sustainability.

Parent pushback. The SIG grant requires that all approved SIG schools extend the school day between 90 - 120 minutes (US Department of Education, 2014c). Several participants in this study expected parent pushback because of the additional school time, especially in the younger grades. Participants found that parents were concerned that the additional time in an active learning environment would negatively impact their children, in that, the students would be too tired or overstimulated for activities outside of school, i.e. baseball, swim lessons, dance, etc. Having open communication with parents and incorporating “downtime” such as snack and breakfast into their SIG day helped participants combat the parent pushback. Also advocating parental involvement, such as volunteering in the classroom or volunteering at school sponsored activities, allowed parents to be an active part of the program and dispelled the concerns quickly.

Budget intrusions. After conducting and finalizing the research, one participant contacted the researcher with an update on the impact of budget intrusions that were going to affect the SIG program. After discussion the difficulties this posed, other participants were contacted to discuss whether this was also a difficulty they faced; it was. Budget intrusions were often experienced toward the end of the school year when the district budget was discussed and decided. Unfortunately for some of the schools, the administrators had to reallocate some of their SIG funds because of staff layoffs or curriculum redesign. P7, for instance, had three teachers facing layoffs. P7 had to decide whether to use some of the SIG funds to keep the teachers on staff and cut back on the consultant support or allow those teachers to be laid off and

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lose three classrooms, making other classrooms larger, and keep the additional consultant support (P7, personal communication, April 22, 2016). Other participants also stated that they had to contend with the district budgets, especially when cutbacks affected the teaching staff.

P4 was also impacted by budget intrusions in the form of curriculum overhaul by the district. P4 was informed that part of their extracurricular budget was being reallocated to cover the costs of changing the curriculum that the district was using and for professional development days to present the new curriculum to teachers (P4, personal communication, May 5, 2016). P4 had several educational experiences slated to visit the school in 2016 – 2017 and was going through the SIG budget to see what funds could be adjusted so that none of the educational experiences had to be cancelled. At the time of publication, P4 had yet to reallocate the funds and expected to work through the summer with their leadership team to find the additional monies.

Staff pushback. As discussed in Chapter IV, staffing issues were central to many of the difficulties that SIG administrators experienced. As new SIG administrators move forward with their grant application and implementation process, it is imperative that the administrators try to focus on having a supportive staff and staff members that want to be part of the SIG program. Replacing or removing negative and combative staff members is important because their poor attitudes affect both the students and the rest of the staff members. Having positive people who understand and support the SIG program aids in its implementation, especially as administrators face potential parent pushback and budget concerns.

In addition, several administrators found that once the SIG program had been presented and explained to staff members, there was a clear division of which teachers were interested in

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being part of the SIG program and which teachers would rather not be part of the SIG program. Several administrators stated that those teachers who were unsure about the program were at least willing to try it and put in the effort needed to make it successful. Open lines of communication and having clear expectations seemed to make the transition easier for the staff who were part of the SIG program and curbed much of the staff pushback.

Sustainability. Creating a program that could/would last beyond the three years was the goal of many of the administrators in this study. By creating a sustainable program, the schools would theoretically continue to make the same academic progress and have rich educational experiences. By fostering relationships with various volunteer organizations and negotiating with paid organizations, many of the participants found that they could extend their program after the three-year period and continued to provide students with the additional support they needed in order to make AYP. P6 stated “we have to look to the future. This is a one-time deal. If we backslide after the SIG monies run out, we have wasted our resources and our time” (P6, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

Final Thoughts

Underserved schools throughout the United States continue to struggle to meet the standards set forth by the ED and state Board of Education. As expectations and standards increase, the inability for underserved populations to meet those standards has become glaringly obvious. The achievement gap has grown and underserved schools have been unable to purchase new resources or hire the additional educational staff the need to make progress because of budget cuts and/or lack of a flexible budget. As a result, under the ARRA, the ED was able to

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reallocate money in the form of competitive grants that underserved schools could qualify for and receive over a three-year period.

The School Improvement Grant funds were first distributed in 2010 to underserved schools throughout the United States who were committed to reorganizing their schools in order to make academic progress. Though the SIG has been available for the past six years, there is little information about best practices for successful SIG programs. This was due, in part, to the newness of the program, in that research had been conducted, but was not published until 2014. There are studies being conducted by the IES, commissioned by the ED, that were not published at the time this study took place. The studies that have been published were limited to very specific populations of students in specific areas of the country. There remained vast areas of research that had yet to be explored at the time this study took place.

As educators, policymakers, and educational advocates move forward in their pursuit of providing high quality education to all students in the United States, it is important to keep in mind that the United States is truly a country based on diversity. This diversity not only presents itself in the form of ethnicity and languages, but also in learning styles, locations, and populations. To believe that any one program can meet the needs of all of the children in the United States is naïve and idealist.

While the programs the ED currently has in place are far from perfect, it is clear that there has been progress in the pursuit of providing all students with a high quality education. Looking back over the last century, the education system has made a lot of progress. As long as school administrators and policymakers continue to strive for progress in education, changes to the education system are unavoidable. It is important that education does not become stagnant,

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but it is also important that educators and policymakers make standards and goals realistic and achievable.

Education can never be completely streamlined across all 50 states because of the diverse and varying needs of the student. While educators can and should hold their students to the highest standards, it is difficult to provide every student with the exact same educational opportunities. However, this does not mean that educators should stop striving toward excellence.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script

Hello. My name is Jessica Moro. I am a doctoral candidate in the Organizational Leadership doctoral program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. As part of fulfilling my degree requirements, I am conducting a study to investigate best practices of successful urban, public New England schools employing the School Improvement Grant turnaround or transformational models.

I came across your name from the US Department of Education website's list of approved School Improvement Grant awardees. You have been carefully selected to participate in my study as an administrator of a successful SIG school. Participation in the study is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. Participation entails a 60 minute in-person interview. Questions asked in the interview and an informed consent form will be sent to you in advance of the interview. Your participation in this study will be extremely valuable to new schools employing SIG turnaround and transformational models, as well as other scholars and practitioners in the field of education.

I would like to ask if you would be willing to be interviewed as part of this study.

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APPENDIX B

Human Subjects Training

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- Name: Jessica M Moro
- Institution Affiliation: Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- Institution Unit: GSEP
- Curriculum Group: GSEP Educational Division
- Course Learner Group: GSEP Educational Division – Social, Behavioral, Educational (SBE)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program

Email: citisupport@miami.edu

Phone: 305-243-7970

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

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COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- Name: Jessica Moro
- Institution Affiliation: Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- Institution Unit: GSEP
- Curriculum Group: GSEP Education Division
- Course Learner Group: GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)

Stage: Stage 1 - Basic Course

Report Date: 01/09/2016

Current Score** 85

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES MOST RECENT SCORE

History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	11/13/15	4/5 (80%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	11/13/15	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	11/13/15	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	11/13/15	4/5 (80%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	11/13/15	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	11/13/15	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	11/13/15	3/5 (60%)

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For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program

Email: citisupport@miami.edu

Phone: 305-243-7970

Web: <http://www.citiprogram.org>

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

School Improvement Grants: A Study of Urban, Public New England Schools

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica Moro, a doctoral student at Pepperdine University, because you are an administrator of an urban, public New England school that has successfully employed a turnaround or transformational model using a School Improvement Grant. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for you records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore the best practices of administrators employing the School Improvement Grant turnaround or transformation program in their urban, public New England Schools.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a recorded, in-person, 60-minute open response interview regarding your experience with School Improvement Grant funded programs in urban New England public schools.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include:

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- Identifying the successes and hardships of creating and implementing an academic enrichment program funded by SIG
- Identifying best practices when employing a SIG turnaround or transformational model.
- Identifying how schools measure the success of the SIG program and compile recommendations for future schools employing the SIG turnaround model

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid to participate in this study. However, you will be offered a free hard copy of the final dissertation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The principal investigator will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if she is required to do so by law, she may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require her to break confidentiality are if you tell her about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password protected computer in the principal investigators place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years. The data collected will be transcribed and coded. All identifiable information will be removed and known only to the principal investigator. Hard copies of transcriptions will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's locked home office. Recordings will be destroyed after transcription is completed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating. Your relationship with your employer will not be affected whether or not you choose to participate in this study.

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INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Jessica Moro or Dr. Farzin Madjidi if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

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APPENDIX D

IRB Approval



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 12, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Jessica Moro

Protocol #: 16-01-162

Project Title: School Improvement Grants: A Study of Urban, Public New England Schools

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Jessica Moro:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

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