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**Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions
On the Contributions of Teaming to Their
Pennsylvania "Blue Ribbon" Middle School Status**

A Thesis in
Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals on the contributions of teaming to their Blue Ribbon Program School Status. The definition of teaming by Paul S. George and William M. Alexander (1993) was used in this study. A survey and case study were utilized in this mixed methods research approach to explore teaming's impact on exemplary middle schools. Pennsylvania's Blue Ribbon Program Middle Schools were sent surveys that included a variety of questions and statements on teaming, and 47.7% of these surveys were returned in the one-time mailing. The case study utilized an interview process that involved 15 separate teacher interviews, an entire sixth grade team of 6 teachers, and the assistant principal from the studied middle school. The principal was informally interviewed for this study through meetings and phone conversations prior to and after the on-site study.

Various teaming components and processes were found consistently and pervasively throughout this study. Three key findings emerged about teaming's contributions in the studied exemplary schools. These included teaming's importance in promoting collaboration, teaming's connection to the middle school philosophy, and teaming's opportunities for teachers to share leadership. These findings were consistently supported by the data derived from the mixed methods research on teaming and its perceived impact on students' achievement and the school's Blue Ribbon Program designation.

The case study school's PAGE One structure added a new direction and moved away from its teaming with the PA State Board of Education's "Pennsylvania Achievement Gap Effort". This changed how the teachers used their common planning time and collaborative efforts, which moved away from its middle school philosophy and pure teaming when it

became a Blue Ribbon Program school in 1995-96. Teaming was perceived to enhance teachers' ability to influence students' learning and academic achievement, but becoming a PAGE One school changed how the collaborative efforts impacted subgroups' and all students' success. Finally, the middle school philosophy and teaming may be in jeopardy as middle level schools attempt to address the demands of NCLB and AYP.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, middle schools have experienced a surge in the use of teaming practices that supported the middle school philosophy and were designed to meet the developmental needs of young adolescents (Hackmann, Petzko, Valentine, Clark, Nori, Lucas, 2002). Teaming and its structure have played an important part in reform at the middle level. According to the Alexander and McEwin study (1989) commissioned by the National Middle School Association, teaming has steadily increased in middle level schools since they began to emerge in the 1960's. In 1997, Valentine and Whitaker found that more than 50% of the middle schools in the United States had incorporated teaming as the school's organizational structure. Recently in a research article, *Beyond Interdisciplinary Teaming: Findings and Implications of the NASSP National Middle Level Study*, 79% of the middle schools surveyed nationally reported utilizing teaming (Hackmann et al., 2002).

The reasons for the increased use of teaming are varied and could be debated, but it is a key component of the middle school philosophy according to Paul S. George and William M. Alexander (1993). In their publication, *The Exemplary Middle School*, they stated:

During the decade of the eighties, a number of national organizations (e.g. Carnegie, 1989) and hundreds, if not thousands, of school districts recognized that the interdisciplinary organization of teachers was the most distinguished feature of the middle school, and the keystone of its structure. In the presence of a stable interdisciplinary team organization, other components of the middle school program

functioned more smoothly. In the absence of the interdisciplinary team organization, they operate with considerably more difficulty, if they exist at all (p.247).

In the 1990's, the use of the term, interdisciplinary team, became synonymous with “teaming” as the description of the organization for instruction in the middle school (George and Alexander, 1993). Shaplin & Olds (1964) provided one of the earliest definitions of teaming that resembles the current usage found in middle schools. It tied the instructional organization to a team of two or more teachers working together with an assigned group of students in which they had responsibility for all or a significant part of the students’ instruction. Other terms such as team teaching, interdisciplinary, intradisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross-curriculum have been used as synonyms for the interdisciplinary team organization that we currently refer to as teaming.

George and Alexander (1993) specifically defined the criteria for the interdisciplinary team organization as:

... a way of organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share: 1) same group of students; 2) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area; 3) the same schedule; and 4) the same area of the building. These four (4) factors are the necessary and sufficient elements of interdisciplinary teacher organization. When all four are present, nothing else is needed; when one or more elements is missing, the team organization is less than complete. Interdisciplinary team teaching is not a critical element of the exemplary middle school; interdisciplinary team organization is (p. 249).

This study utilized this definition of interdisciplinary team organization in examining its importance. Within the shared schedule, as noted by George and Alexander, common team

planning time allowed teachers the professional opportunities to collaborate on their students' needs, the given curriculum and planned instruction to enhance student achievement.

Common team planning time was researched to determine if it was a key to provide the valuable planning time that is considered essential in team teachers' preparation and the instructional process. It was also examined to determine if it provided professional opportunities to meet, as a team, to connect the curricular and instructional needs to their assigned students (Dickinson & Erb, 1997). According to Flowers, et al., the common planning time allows team members the opportunity to review their students' needs and progress, to engage in problem solving, and to ensure that teams will function effectively (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999; George & Alexander, 1993; Hackmann et al., 2002). Teachers have promoted the importance of common planning time, and middle school administrators, likewise, have supported its value in the teaming process (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Erb, 1997; Erb & Doda, 1989).

George and Alexander (1993) emphasized in their definition that all four criteria are needed in the interdisciplinary team organization and felt strongly that these are essential to an exemplary middle school. Erb and Doda (1989) noted that when teachers take full advantage of the four basic elements of the team organization then numerous changes occur in their work life. These included better communications within the school, more teacher involvement in decisions, instruction that better serves the needs of students with a transformed curriculum, and teachers who find the pedagogy more rewarding.

Middle level schools were categorized with secondary schools in the 1997 U.S Department of Education Blue Ribbon Schools Program (BRSP). This program was

established in 1982 by the Secretary of Education to recognize outstanding schools across the United States. Its purposes include: (1) to identify and give public recognition to outstanding public and private schools across the United States; (2) to make available a comprehensive framework of key criteria for school effectiveness that can serve as a basis for participatory self-assessment and planning in schools; and (3) to facilitate communications and sharing of best practices within and among schools based on a common understanding of criteria related to success.

A set of eight criteria was used to evaluate schools applying for Blue Ribbon Schools Program status. The criteria were divided into four categories: (1) student-teacher-content interaction; (2) organizational, cultural, interpersonal factors; (3) the school's relationships with external stakeholders; and (4) student assessment and the application of assessment data to improve performance.

The term, teaming, in the Blue Ribbon Schools Program's nomination requirements could only be found in the overall framework in Part V, Learning- Centered Schools Criteria. The context in which it was mentioned implied that it was an option that schools may elect to use as part of their organizational pattern and that this may or may not follow George and Alexander's defined criteria. Part V, Section A, subsection A3 stated: " Explain how student services are integrated with other components of the school program, including how teams of school professionals work, if teams are used " (p. 9). This limited reference to teaming in the exemplary schools selection process for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program is contrary to the middle school philosophy and teaming's importance in the middle school organization. Middle schools found to promote exemplary, distinctive educational programs and school

structure have middle level administrators and educators who employ and advocate teaming (George & Alexander, 1993; Hackmann et al., 2002).

The framework for this study was built around the concept of teaming, its structure and processes, and what importance that it has played in students' success and achievement at an exemplary Blue Ribbon School. George and Alexander's definition and criteria of the interdisciplinary team organization was utilized for the term, teaming, as described in this study in answering how this impacted the success of students in the school. If a group of teachers were organized as a team to share the same group of students; share planning, teaching and evaluating the curriculum and instruction; and share the same schedule and building area, then to what extent and in what ways did this effect student learning?

Collaboration among team members during common planning meetings was examined to determine if this contributed to smoother operations in the teaming model as defined by George and Alexander (1993). Erb (1997) contended that teacher efficacy is a product of the teaming process and the collaboration documented during the common planning time and that teaming has a positive impact on student achievement. This served as a foundation for examining the importance of teaming in an exemplary middle school. This case study focused on George and Alexander's teaming model and examined the perceptions of teachers and administrators as to what extent it contributed to students' success and the attainment of the Blue Ribbon School Program's distinguished honor.

Research Statement and Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle level teachers and principals regarding the contributions of teaming, as defined by George and Alexander

(1993), to their school's achievement of the designation as a "Blue Ribbon School." There was extensive research and literature that addressed teaming at the middle level; however, studies that examined teaming's impact on a school obtaining exemplary middle school status have been limited. An in-depth study of an exemplary middle school combined with quantitative research provided key information about teaming's contributions that have been possibly driven by its organizational structure. The question: does teaming structure, as described by George and Alexander, impact a middle school's attainment of Blue Ribbon School status? The Blue Ribbon Schools Program's assessment criteria was researched and analyzed to determine if the teaming structure has had any impact in the studied exemplary middle school's success.

In this study of a Blue Ribbon Middle School's teaming, its organizational structure that teachers and administrators have implemented, and any importance that it has played to achieve this distinguished honor and exemplary status, was thoroughly examined. This research assessed the Blue Ribbon School Program's criteria that a middle school must meet to achieve this prominent status and whether teaming affected or impacted the obtainment of this prestigious recognition. This was evident in the exemplary middle school's self-assessment and the documented BRSP processes. Likewise, teaming's impact on facilitation of communications and sharing of best practices within and among schools was also reviewed as based on the 1997 Blue Ribbon Schools Program's common understanding of criteria related to success.

Specifically, this study examined the following questions: (1) How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an

exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria?

Significance of the Research

With teaming's increased utilization across the middle level in the last decade (Hackmann et al., 2002), educators at the middle school level view teaming and its organizational structure as an opportunity for teacher collaboration and teacher efficacy (Erb, 1997). Using George and Alexander's definition of teaming, information on student achievement and teaming's success were examined to make new knowledge available on the role of teaming. This case study of a Blue Ribbon middle school examined teaming's contributions to students' success and how collaborative teaching efforts impacted this when ample common team planning time was provided and when it was effectively utilized (Erb & Doda, 1989). The interdisciplinary team organization's common planning that involves instructional, interdisciplinary, curricular, and collegial interactions associated with teaming were analyzed in this studied Blue Ribbon Middle School and its exemplary programs.

Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, and Melton (1993) noted that interdisciplinary teaming is referred to as a "signature practice" or defining characteristic of an exemplary middle school. This practice was a focus in the exemplary school's case study to assess the valuable information on the essential components of the middle level teaming's structure and processes that contribute to its overall success and the delivery of effective learning for students. This knowledge will help to close the gap for middle level educators by offering ideas detailing teaming's importance to any middle school looking for new ways to improve

its teaming, providing helpful strategies to possibly become a Blue Ribbon School Program, and/or setting the foundation for schools if they are just initiating teaming.

Hopefully, this study will encourage more middle schools to incorporate teaming and its essential organizational structure and processes to enhance students' achievement and success. Detailing the key attributes, especially the effective use of the common planning found in an exemplary middle school's teaming structure, has provided the framework and importance for other schools to consider it.

This research documented the existence of the teaming structure, its components and processes, and what contributions it has made to improve school performance, student outcomes and achievement. This research provided a clear and valid picture of how one middle school has sustained a teaming structure to support its exemplary Blue Ribbon Schools Program status. Understanding the various components of teaming and their impact on school improvement as defined by United States Department of Education has inspired educators and provided practitioners a much richer description of teaming's role in the attainment of this exemplary status.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Brief History of the Middle School Movement

Donald Eichhorn, at a 1977 Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) conference presentation in Houston, Texas, stated that the middle school may have been the most dynamic educational development since 1960 (David, 1998). On October 4, 1957, when the Soviet's launched Sputnik, it created a national panic and a negative atmosphere directed toward our nation's educational system. This historic situation also created the impetus for educational change as new federal monies with an emphasis on specific educational programs, especially in the sciences and mathematics curriculum, provided for the development of many school improvements. This, along with societal changes, brought the realization that the education of young adolescents and their developmental needs had to be improved, and it promoted the restructuring of our middle level grades to target the needs of the 10 - 14 year old student (Dickinson & Erb, 1997). Thus, middle schools evolved, spurred by changes which were the result of the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The following offer a brief overview of the middle school movement and development that was encouraged by many educators but championed by Eichhorn and others who have been referred to in its history. A paradigm shift occurred when the middle school concept evolved, and it provided the opportunities to incorporate team teaching in the design of the middle level schools. Early proposals on middle level schools published in 1959, 1960, and 1961 emphasized and promoted team teaching, flexible scheduling, as well

as increased use of modern technology and improved facilities for teaching and learning (Van Til, Vars, & Lounsbury, 1967).

Middle schools had emerged in the twentieth century as a result of a school organizational structure that failed to provide an effective transition to meet the developmental needs of many students as they moved between the elementary school and secondary level's high school. The junior high structure was presumed to accomplish this, but it simply mimicked the high school. Its traditional secondary practices fell short and did not meet the needs of young adolescents (David, 1998; Dickinson & Erb, 1997). Promotion of the middle school concept and reform movement was the result of the work of numerous dedicated and inspired leaders and some that David (1998) recognized including William Alexander, Donald Eichhorn, John Lounsbury, Conrad Toepfer, and Gordon Vars. These educational leaders and others realized that the junior high model with its limitations and high school practices did not necessarily meet the needs of emerging adolescents. Consequently, they focused their vision and efforts on the creation of the middle level educational reform movement, which has since addressed programming and educational needs of the young adolescent.

These educational leaders along with many other educators have articulated this middle school philosophy born from their awareness that the middle level learner is a unique individual with adolescent needs that call for a distinctive educational program (David, 1998). Middle level educators have been persistent in their efforts to implement a school focused on the needs of early adolescence according to National Middle School Association (NMSA) research (George & Shewey, 1994). This philosophy was one school of thought and not an established principle, since early research that attempted to compare the emerging

middle schools with the junior high organizational structure produced mixed results. As noted by NMSA, the early 1960's and 1970's was a time when experimentation and innovation began to bring clarity and definition to the middle school concept; however, the research efforts were largely unproductive. The reasons included prematurely emphasizing holistic comparisons between schools named "middle" and those named "junior high," and those researchers who presumed that differences in the school name, grade level, or vague differences in stated philosophy were reflected in outcomes such as academic achievement at the school level.

These mixed results were coupled with research conducted by opponents of middle schools and their desire to demonstrate that no substantial improvements accompanied these emerging schools according to George and Shewey (1994). Adding federally ordered desegregation, increased student population, and building needs with the lack of facilities to this dilemma, the research outcomes for middle schools were disappointing for academic achievement and measurable differences in the school organizations according to NMSA. But, middle level educators advocated and promoted the middle school's distinctive educational programs and structure, in which teaming was an important component of this organizational pattern (Doda & Lounsbury, 1981).

An integral part in the middle school movement has been to promote a learning environment where all pre- and early adolescents can be successful with their similarities, differences, and uniqueness (David, 1998; George & Alexander, 1993). David cited Eichhorn's view of youngsters in this transitional school level as "...a specific age group in a distinct stage of development" (p. 45). In 1966, Eichhorn defined the term as transescence, i.e., "...the stage of development that begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends

through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent intellectual changes that appear prior to the puberty cycle to the time in which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes would be this stage" (p. 3). According to David, Eichhorn felt that this stage was occurring at an earlier time in our youths' biological development for any of the organizational models since the late 1960's and that it no longer adequately served the transescent. This view still seems valid as the middle schools, many of which include 5th and 6th grades in their organizational structure, continue with their philosophy in attempting to address these pre- and early adolescent needs. Thomas S. Dickinson (1997) reflected about middle schools and their teams by stating that "the bottom line, teams exist for students and their best development, not for adults," and "... means having a singular focus on young adolescents" (p. 6).

A paradigm shift occurred as the middle school concept evolved, and it provided the opportunities to incorporate team teaching in the design of the middle level schools. Van Til, Vars, and Lounsbury (1967) noted that early proposals of the middle school published in 1959, 1960, and 1961 emphasized and promoted team teaching, flexible scheduling, increased use of modern technology and improved facilities for teaching and learning. These ideas remain a focus in today's educational setting. However, middle schools have had additional stresses with a constant changing technology, a global society, and an ever increasing demand on our youth to measure up to their peers. In 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was created to prepare our youth for their future, and it has created additional stress at the middle educational level. Many educational needs have been addressed in the public middle schools with the increased use of the teaming process that has

been included in the varying organizational patterns and configurations for grades 5 through 9 (Hackmann et al., 2002). Students' achievement of the state educational standards and performance outcomes has been influenced by a myriad of factors that middle level educators must address in its reform (Williamson and Johnston, 1999). Teaming and its organizational structure have positively impacted the best teaching practices and students' achievement scores that are now paramount in the Blue Ribbon Program's qualifications.

Characteristics and Factors that Distinguish Middle Schools

Characteristics that distinguish middle schools from the elementary and high schools concentrated on the needs of 10 to 14 year old children and their development and growth tied to physiological, emotional, social and psychological needs of these youth. This age group has been found in middle schools that contain grades 5 through 8, 6 through 8 or other combinations of these particular grades housing the transescent youth as previously described by Eichorn (David, 1998). The curriculum and instruction included learning skills, general studies and personal development, and the middle school has bridged the transition between an elementary school's student-centered approach and the high school's subject-centered approach. The middle school organization and its programs have emphasized skills of continued learning, individualized instruction, exploratory experiences, a high priority to the intellectual components of the curriculum including integration of it, and interdisciplinary teaming (George & Alexander, 1993; Hackmann et al., 2002).

Middle schools' teacher teams have varied in size but range from two teachers to six or more. Common planning time and having a common group of students with classrooms located near each other are traits found in middle schools that have teaming. Flexible

scheduling has been a characteristic found in exemplary middle schools where team teachers can group and regroup learners. This flexible schedule and teaming structure have supported instructional and learning needs and has allowed teachers to deliver quality education to students (Hackmann & Valentine, 1998). At the middle level, the school structure has varied with multiple grades and varying student numbers divided in teams designed to meet the needs of its students as determined by the communities they represent.

Small Schools, Communities, or Teams

Susan Galletti (1998), Director of Middle Level Services at the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP), noted that it becomes increasingly difficult for large schools, even with teaming, to provide instructional leadership where it promotes teacher and student leadership. She proposed small schools and noted "... various advantages such as lower incidence of negative social behavior, equal or better achievement - especially for ethnic minority students and students of low socioeconomic status" (p.26). She stated, "...a greater sense of belonging that promotes confidence, self-esteem, and sense of responsibility for self direction, and a higher rate of parent involvement are other factors in smaller schools that may positively influence student achievement and attitudes" (p. 27).

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) felt that schools should be considered communities and not just people doing a lot of things together. They provided the example that creating communities of relationships and of place might mean splitting large schools into smaller schools that do not exceed 400 students. Breaking up large schools is hard to do as described in James Conant's 1959 influential report, where the emphasis was to praise the large schools that could afford the desired, specialized instruction and comprehensive programs when

compared to small schools that supposedly couldn't at that time. David Hill (2001) cited this as a reason why "today, about 70% of the nation's high school students attend schools enrolling more than 1,000 students..." (p.34). He highlighted a crusade led by Tom Vander Ark to split big high schools into smaller learning communities. Vander Ark made his position known during his tenure as superintendent of Seattle's Federal Way at the time when its new high school construction was being considered. His initiative was defeated when the district built a high school that would accommodate 1,350 students. He subsequently resigned to become Executive Director for Education in the Gates Foundation. Vander Ark stated, "It's no accident that almost every elite private high school in this country has about 400 kids. When you get much bigger than that, all the teachers don't know all the kids" (p. 35). Toch referred to this idea in his chapter titled, "The Human Side of Schools," and stated, "The closer ties between students and teachers in small schools result in a level of genuine caring and mutual obligation that is found far less frequently in comprehensive schools. Those are largely intangible qualities, but they are crucial ingredients of successful schooling, for when students and teachers feel mutually responsible to one another, they tend to work harder on one another's behalf" (p. 266).

These attributes and others found in a small school environment have been cited for teaming as well (George and Alexander, 1993; Erb and Doda, 1989); however, the practicality of big schools being reduced to small enrollment buildings in the vast majority of school districts across the nation is unrealistic. Cost of new buildings alone would be a major hindrance to this idea. Therefore, educators work with the infrastructures of our communities and attempt to provide the best practices that small communities of learning provide through

the potential of teaming. In schools with a strong sense of community, Kelly (1999) stated, “students are more likely to feel valued and less likely to fall through the cracks” (p. 8).

Thomas Toch (1991) wrote similar thoughts and described how smaller schools have a greater sense of closer ties between students and teachers. He felt that this environment enhances a genuine caring and a mutual obligation when compared to large, comprehensive high schools where it is very difficult to establish this. Toch noted that in many instances, a sense of community is better promoted in a small school environment compared to a larger school setting and cited John Goodlad, Ernest Boyer, and Ted Sizer who have “...urged schools to reorganize into “houses” or “schools-within-schools” to gain the advantages of smallness” (p. 268). This could apply to all grade levels. Could this be tied to teaming possibilities? In the following passage, Toch (1991) described the rigid, impersonal climate of many large public schools in the 1970’s and 1980’s:

The majority of the public junior and senior high schools in the United states are drab, uninviting institutions, almost prison like, with cinderblock walls and long, often ill-lit corridors that are commonly cordoned by heavy metal grates at the end of the day. The coldness and impersonality of such surroundings is heightened by the huge size of many schools. Only a quarter of the nation’s 22,000 secondary schools (those with no grade below seventh) enroll 1,000 or more students as cited from *Digest of Education Statistics* (1988). Nor is it unusual to find high schools with 2,000, 3,000, or even 4,000 students and junior high schools of 1,500 or more, especially in urban school systems. In such schools, students are so many numbers in a computer, the principal a voice heard over a public-address system or a face glimpsed amongst the crush of bodies during “passing period” between classes. Guidance counselors, or

“career technicians” as they are called in many schools, frequently must cope with caseloads of 500 students or more (pp. 235-236).

Could this have been and could it still be the rationale needed for schools-within-schools or teaming? It certainly contributed to these schools’ bureaucratic climates. Does the previously described bureaucratic statement still hold today for our secondary schools, especially middle schools, in America? Hopefully not, but as Jerry Rottier (2000) cited from data reported in 1997 by Valentine and Whitaker, 50% or more of the middle schools in the United States have incorporated teaming and according to Hackmann et al. (2002), this number has increased to nearly 80% in recent research. This has occurred while urban schools’ enrollment numbers declined slightly and suburban schools have increased in their size. Has teaming or schools-within-schools effectively enhanced the school and classroom environments for students to succeed in the middle level?

The National Middle School Association's position paper (Lounsbury, 1996) noted that developmentally appropriate larger middle schools are broken down into "houses or schools-within-a-school", replicating the socioeconomic composition, which may be further subdivided into interdisciplinary teams that build a sense of community and promote curriculum integration. This has been promoted through flexible scheduling and staffing which can accommodate the need for teachers in all areas to interact with colleagues whether or not they are formally assigned a team. Flexibility of grouping, scheduling, and staffing has been highlighted in exemplary middle schools where teachers design and operate much of the program according to Swain and NMSA. Teams of teachers then have had the opportunity to collaborate across teaching specialties sharing responsibility for such things as literacy and other curriculum development, guidance/student advocacy, and student life programs.

Thomas Sergiovanni, in his presentation at Millersville University in the spring of 1999, highlighted his work with middle schools in his home area that utilized a "family" team approach that had their own nuances. Many of these teams had their own unique interdisciplinary units and activities that met the curriculum requirements. Children's middle level teams were chosen by the parents and the participating students based on their personal preferences or the prior experiences of another sibling member for a given school "family" team. This "family-team" practice was popular because of the specific opportunities offered by the team and the family's familiarity with the team's staff or teaching styles.

In searching for the practices and conditions that support a "sense of community" that has a presence of beliefs, feelings, and relationships that connect members (teachers, administrators, and parents) to each other, one must consider that middle level teaming provides the opportunity for this to occur. Susan Belenardo (2001) stated: "Even though much rhetoric has been devoted to the importance of a sense of community in schools, a clear understanding of the organizational elements that contribute to its presence does not exist (Driscoll 1989; Segiovanni 1994)" (p. 34). She cited numerous authors and their research in pursuit of the identified dimensions of a sense of community, which included shared values, commitment, a feeling of belonging, caring, interdependence, and regular contact that were utilized to measure its presence and strength in middle schools that were surveyed. Belenardo stated, "...sense of community is a key in middle level schools to strengthen positive relationships between school members and families that become a natural and expected part of the organization" (p. 42-43).

Has the teaming structure, its organization and process at the middle school level enhanced the sense of community? Belenardo (2001) stated, "a strong sense of community,

even if among a small group of more knowledgeable and involved parents, creates the supportive structures that draw more members.” and continues “...is strengthened if the principal leads the school with strong administrative decision-making and technical skills, and if teachers communicate effectively with parents about students’ work and progress” (p.43). Belenardo’s work certainly suggests that middle level schools can benefit through an organizational process that promotes involvement activities for all families, which strengthen the sense of community.

Teaming and Interdisciplinary Teaming's Structure

Teaming implies the efforts of two or more persons working together toward a common goal or mission. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) further implied that team members have complementary skills along with their commitment to the common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves accountable. In education, teaming has become a key part of the organizational processes at the middle school level. Middle level teaming entails a group or team of teachers who work specifically with a group or team of students.

Alexander and George (1993) cited Shaplin and Olds (1964) in their book (one of the few written on the topic of teaming three decades ago), which defined teaming in a manner that, with some adjustments, is a good working definition. They defined it as “a type of instructional organization, involving teaching personnel and the students assigned to them, in which two or more teachers are given responsibility, working together, for all or a significant part of the instruction of the same group of students” (p. 249).

The teaming concept has evolved with the expansion of the middle school movement. In the spring of 1999, the Pennsylvania Middle School Association (PMSA) did a study, which defined interdisciplinary teaming as two or more teachers working together with the same group of students utilizing a block schedule period of time. Robert David and PMSA (2000) compiled data that has been differentiated by rural, urban, and suburban designation with the following data on Pennsylvania middle schools, which had reported interdisciplinary teaming:

1. Rural - 142 of 243 schools that responded plus 57 considering it
2. Urban - 43 of 70 that responded and 23 are considering it
3. Suburban - 221 of 275 that responded and 49 are considering it

These were the responses from the total of 715 questionnaires that were sent to middle level schools as identified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Of the 588 responding schools, 69% of them were utilizing an interdisciplinary teaming approach. Another 129 schools responded that they were considering the implementation of the interdisciplinary team organization. When this was added to the 69% total of responding middle level schools already utilizing it, a total at 535 schools or nearly 91% of the responding schools were using and/or considering the use of interdisciplinary teaming.

In teaming, there have been numerous types of schedules that utilize its flexibility. A building's team should have the discretion to coordinate and change within its schedule any of its core classes to meet the students' needs (Clark & Clark, 1997). Opportunities to meet during a common planning period provide the supportive structure to plan changes in the team's schedule within the school's daily, weekly or extended schedule (Alexander and George, 1993). Empowering teachers to have control of their team's schedule has been

important in encouraging flexible scheduling and to meet the team and student needs. The teaming schedule structure, characterized with flexibility and empowered teachers, has impacted the delivery of quality education to students; conversely, the lack of teaming and poorly designed scheduling has hindered rather than helped the educational process (Erb, 1997, Hackmann et al., 2002; Hackmann & Valentine, 1998).

Recently, a national survey indicated that 79% of the middle schools were utilizing teaming (Hackmann, et al., 2002), and it examined and identified best practices that have contributed to the success of all students across urban/non-urban and various socioeconomic lines. Teaming in the middle level schools may now be considered the operational norm with the benefits of past, as well as current, best practices research as noted by NMSA (George & Shewey, 1994). This might be determined by the fact that teaming has been widely utilized and seen as the organizational pattern accepted by the majority of middle schools (Hackmann et al., 2002). George and Shewey noted the desirable characteristics of middle level schools as defined by three major organizations had striking congruence in their published lists. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, ASCD, the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, and the National Middle School Association, NMSA (Calwelti, 1988; Alexander and McEwin, 1989; and Carnegie Council, 1989) conducted these studies.

Interdisciplinary team organization was one of many similar characteristics delineated in these studies. Others included advisory programs, flexibility in schedule and grouping, enriched curriculum experiences, broadened opportunities for student recognition and success, increased active instruction and learning, articulation to schools above and below, shared decision-making, and parent and community involvement according to George and

Shewey (1994). They stated, "a solid national consensus about the most central features of effective schools for early adolescents has emerged" (p. 27) and that all the previously mentioned characteristics are a part of this.

Pitton (2001) stated that in making a difference for middle school students, teachers need to be supported by the school district's funding to provide the time, money, and other resources to develop their understanding and ongoing professional development of teaming, curriculum, and student centered learning. She advocated teaming for addressing the integrated curriculum to which students become hooked and excited, though this can be a scary step for many teachers. Pitton stated, "teaming provides the answer..." by allowing teachers to work together in developing new curricula while designing the relevant learning experiences that make these connections and that teaming "...makes this process more comfortable" (p. 18).

The increasing percentage of middle level schools that are structured with interdisciplinary teams as of 2002 may reflect that its organizational structure and programmatic features are tied to academic excellence which needs to be examined more thoroughly (Hackmann, et al., 2002). George and Shewey (1994) stated, "many state, regional, and district groups have surveyed schools to determine the extent to which recommended programs had been implemented" (p. 28). Their findings indicated that interdisciplinary teaming was a central feature in schools that demonstrated the greatest implementation of essential middle school concepts. Teaming was found to be prevalent in those purported exemplary middle schools. This study's research has examined the interdisciplinary teaming's importance and the organizational structure found in PA Blue Ribbon middle schools and a central Pennsylvania exemplary middle school. It focused on

teaming's importance and impact on the student achievement and the school's success to become a Blue Ribbon School.

George and Shewey (1994) cited the research of Alexander and McEwin (1989) reported over several decades on the dramatic changes implemented in middle schools. They noted another regional perspective conducted by Bedford in 1993, and looked at the implementation of middle schools in Long Island, New York. They stated "a majority of the responding schools featured interdisciplinary teaming with the use of common planning time in many of them" (p. 29). If a middle school was deemed exemplary or outstanding such as those in the outlier studies, researchers examined the characteristics of these successful schools (George and Shewey). The designs utilized in the outlier studies "...focused on the identification of schools that had an outstanding record of success" and key factors included "... academic achievement scores on standardized tests, attendance rates, behavior in school and out of school, parental satisfaction, and reputations for excellence at the local, state or national level. Once these criteria had been satisfied, the schools became the subjects of intensive in-depth investigation" (p.11).

George and Shewey (1994) noted that in the late 70's and early 80's emphasis among restructuring middle schools focused on the importance of the school organization and its impact on school effectiveness. "This new awareness of the importance of school organization among middle school educators made the research in school effectiveness clearly relevant to the concerns of those educators" (p.11). This evolved from the poor results of the changes to revitalized curricular and instructional strategies within the newly reorganized middle schools. The awareness of how teachers and students were organized for instruction and its impact on learning became the new focus of study.

Nancy Doda, at the PAESSP State Conference on October 16, 2000, presented key points to principals on leading highly effective teaching teams. She emphasized the importance of effective leadership and referred to a collaborative work culture established where teachers work together collaboratively with the principal and others. She defined "Habits of Highly Effective Middle Schools" noting several key characteristics of effective middle schools that include: act as a learning organization, focus team planning on curriculum, instruction and assessment, de-emphasize grades while re-emphasize learning, replace power discipline with concern and support, define expected performance, use time well and empower students. Doda suggested that the focus of teacher teams be on these and other beneficial actions that encourage and promote learning and student achievement/success.

Doda emphasized relationships as fundamental to school life in "Learning Communities." Several key points presented to educators to consider in establishing an effective Learning Community included the following: devoting time and effort to quality dialogue, talking about student learning and student work, making everyone a learner first, conducting long-term customized professional development, having teams that team for RESULTS, keeping all staff in the loop, embracing diversity and others. Doda noted other ways that educators could support and provide leadership to become an effective Learning Community, which included the importance of collecting and analyzing data, focusing on results, working on inclusion of all staff and the quality of dialogue. Several tips and cautions included using the vast wealth of the staff through "in-house" professional development and to map the school's curriculum for coherence, cohesion and meaning. Could the teaming structure enhance these opportunities and improve student achievement?

Ironically, it is noteworthy that there are still middle level schools that do not implement the teaming concepts, and there is little, if any, formal teaming at the elementary or high school levels. This is a puzzling reality but parallels the diversity of practices in the business world. The school's organizational structure usually reflects the school's community support, its economic commitment and philosophy of education, and its knowledge and understanding of the teaming concept. Thomas Erb (1997) stated, "teaming has moved beyond the status of being an interesting, but untested, innovation, and toward being an established practice that has been shown to make a positive difference in young adolescents' lives" (p. 311). When educational, political, and business/community leaders promoted the teaming concept, it has provided opportunities for all students (Erb, 1997; Erb and Doda, 1989; George and Alexander, 1993; George and Oldaker, 1985).

Schools with teaming proved to be more effective than other, traditionally structured schools (Erb, 1997; Felner, R., Jackson, A., Kasak, D., Mulhall, P., Brand, S., & Flowers, N., 1997; NSDC, 1999). Broad-based research has been done to affirm teaming's value in the middle school's evolution, but have educational leaders explored the best practices that consistently make those schools' students better prepared and academically successful as found in Blue Ribbon Schools Programs? This case study of an exemplary BRSP middle school examined its effectiveness and whether these attributes advocated in teaming have been valued and worthy of consideration for successful application across the middle level. Educators need to thoroughly examine whether teaming's importance is vital to their school's success.

Clark and Clark (1997) noted, "... many middle level educators consider interdisciplinary teaming to be the cornerstone of responsive middle level schools" (p. 267).

Is this increased frequency of teaming because of its structure that provides smaller focus groups, interdisciplinary strategies that better utilize the staff with effective collaboration, and/or the increased opportunities to personalize instruction for these early adolescents? Educational leaders need to examine and address these issues. A research model that utilized a case study to explore the work situations of teachers in a traditional comprehensive high school focused on the factors that supported or limited collaborative instruction and the role of administrative attitudes and policies to support the teachers' collaborative efforts (Lehr, 1999). He contended, "...a more productive alternative to the insular work environment experienced by most high school teachers is a setting in which collaboration is the norm" (p. 106).

Is successful collaboration at the middle school and high school dependent on the teaming structure with support for its implementation? The teaming approach, if research based and tied to the middle level education's success, could become more widely entwined in all levels of the educational organization (K-12) through such investigative knowledge. In promoting teaming's structure and its collaborative opportunities, exemplary schools that garner these key components of the George and Alexander (1993) definition for interdisciplinary team organization may be key to its acceptance on a larger scale. Lehr (1999) found in his secondary schools' study that the structure and support for collaborative teaching needed to include "...voluntary participation aids professional growth; adequate planning time is crucial; effective collaboration requires training; and collaboration thrives on high visibility" (p.108). These seem to parallel George and Alexander's view of providing the organized structure of interdisciplinary teaming; sharing the same group of students, the same schedule with flexibility, the same part of the building and having common

planning/meeting time, and allowing teams the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in all the interdisciplinary areas assigned to the team.

Key Components and Advantages of Teaming

Key factors in teaming have been previously described in its definition, but several items need to be stressed as “processes” which can be improved in a good interdisciplinary team organization. George and Alexander (1993) stated, “Teaching, at any level, can be thought of as a chain of decision making, ...and at the middle school level, educators have felt a commitment to several principles guiding the decisions about teaching. Instruction in the middle school, most educators agree, focuses on helping students understand themselves as unique individuals with special needs and important responsibilities. Instruction attempts to guarantee every pupil some degree of success in understanding the underlying principles and the ways of knowing in the academic disciplines. Certainly, instruction aims to promote maximum individual growth in the basic learning skills, while at the same time it permits the widest possible exploration of the world of knowledge and of the personal interests of each student” (p.141).

The work of George and Oldaker (1985) has associated interdisciplinary teaming with improved student achievement and personal development as well as better school climate and discipline (Erb and Doda, 1989). Lee and Smith (1993) noted that one facet of school restructuring involves collaboration among teachers from different disciplines. Recommending interdisciplinary teaming in middle schools, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) argued that this practice reduces disciplinary problems and helps foster a sense of community among teachers and students. Teachers’ focused academic

collaboration was found to increase students' engagement in academic tasks, helped clarify learning goals, and led ultimately to higher achievement (Arhar, Johnston, and Markle, 1989). George and Alexander contended, "... effective instruction fosters the ability to work and learn independently and cooperatively on the part of every pupil" (p.142). Obviously, decisions about instruction made in effective middle schools or by the teaming process and/or by each teacher of a team have been strongly influenced by these noted commitments.

Thomas O. Erb (1997) noted students that were teamed not only increased their academic achievement, but they exhibited more positive behaviors in class and reported more positive attitudes. This was especially true when teachers effectively used and had more common planning time. These schools' students were compared to those with less than a well-implemented middle school or non-middle level type school. Erb contended, "effective interdisciplinary teaming significantly changes how teachers work", and continues, "therefore, changes in teacher performance need to be delineated before teaming's effect on students can be studied. Research shows that those schools that practice teaming have changed how teachers work and brought about positive student outcomes" (p. 309).

Erb (1997) associated teachers with high "teacher efficacy" as believing that they can positively affect students' performance and think that teaching influences student learning; this was regardless of the students' abilities or family background. He stated, "Ashton and Webb (1986) reported that teachers on interdisciplinary teams believed that students could learn and that teachers could positively affect their students' lives" (p. 309). Contrasting this were the teachers who were in a departmentalized settings where they were less confident that all students could learn and/or that they could have a lasting impact as Ashton and Webb cited Doda's unpublished University of Florida dissertation research (1984).

Ashton and Webb (1986) studied teachers in departmentalized situations or middle schools lacking the organization of the previously defined interdisciplinary team structure, and they were compared to teachers of middle schools where they did have this. Characteristics of non-teaming middle schools include: lack of common planning time, subject oriented staff; and lack of any interdisciplinary activities. When these schools were compared in the cited research, effective interdisciplinary teaming significantly changed how teachers worked and impacted changes in teacher performance. Schools that practiced teaming and enhanced teachers' effectiveness brought about positive student outcomes through this structure according to Erb (1997).

Lee and Smith (1993) described interdisciplinary teaming as one element of responsive practices in middle schools and cited MacIver and Epstein (1991) who warned that the form and implementation of such teams of teachers are important and not just instituting the practice. Implementation depended on the school's support for the practice (for example, providing common planning time for the teams).

Lee and Smith (1993) cited "...two studies (Lee, Dedrick and Smith 1991; Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong 1992) have provided empirical support for the relationship between staff collaboration in high schools and teachers' feelings of efficacy and satisfaction. Such benefits for teachers also translate into increased learning for students (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Rosenholtz, 1989) suggesting an indirect relationship between collaboration among teachers and outcomes for students. Research supporting the benefits for students and teachers of increased collaboration, however, has been mostly anecdotal – specific to settings and circumstances" (p. 168).

The essential and critical structures of team planning, i.e., common planning time, team building plan periods, and the coordination of interdisciplinary activities, promoted decision making that is collaborative and focused on student growth (Erb, 2001; George & Alexander, 1993; NMSA, 1995). Students, who have difficulties as well as keen success, are discussed in team planning sessions along with interdisciplinary instructional strategies and team building activities that benefit their learning.

Teaming seems to have become a key component in the efficiency of not only the middle level schools but in business and industry as well. In fact, most organizations depend on some aspect of teaming to accomplish the tasks of their groups. Advocates of teaming realize the opportunities that the team structure provides to their groups and to everyone who is impacted by the team's efforts and final products, whether it is a new or improved material, item, or in education, a student's academic improvement. We usually associate teaming with athletics and measure its effectiveness by how many wins or championships a team has obtained. Today in education, we look at teaming as a process, an organized structure and a way of operating at the middle level that leads to student success. We also see this in successful business practices.

Teaming has become an important part of the middle level structure and its effectiveness to enhance instruction, and student success has been impacted by some of the best practices found in this research and shared among educators (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002; Williamson & Johnston, 1999). Additional research has delved into how the team teachers' demonstrated effectiveness would impact the students' success and achievement (Hackmann et al., 2002).

Effectiveness of the teaming structure at the middle school level has been well documented in the literature. Teaming with its components and processes has evolved with the middle school movement over the last 30 plus years to its current status and acceptance. This could be considered a paradigm shift in education as middle level schools have become very common along with their created teaming organization/processes established in its design and structure.

Robert David (1998) cited William Alexander who stated, "... the true rationale of the emergent middle school had been rooted positively in the nature of the child and his development, rather than negatively in the inadequacies, even failures, of existing institutional arrangements" (p. 29). Some of Alexander's concepts that have had continuing importance in the middle level's structure include, but are not limited to, "...grade organization and grouping and an interdisciplinary organization with a flexibly scheduled day" (p. 37). Also, "middle level educators should work collaboratively with parents and other family members, and ...in teams that have common planning periods. The middle school also serves the unique developmental needs of young adolescents and provides opportunities for learning how to develop decision-making and problem solving skills as well as varied and effective instructional strategies should be widely utilized" (p.38). All of these have importance and impact the effectiveness of the middle school's success and student achievement, the key focus of teaming's goals.

Negative Factors or Disadvantages of Teaming

Depending on the respondent, some have stated that teaming is costly because of the added staff members needed to provide reasonable class size and the various programs that focus on the middle school philosophy. In a junior high school that is similar to the high

school system, a teacher can teach more sections of a subject in a 6, 7, or 8 period day schedule. They would most likely not have any common planning time and/or necessarily, the same students in common with the other subject teachers. Subject-centered instruction with limited opportunities to personalize instruction and an overloaded schedule would be the result of the junior high schedule. Teaming would allow for fewer sections and therefore cost more for staff to teach a large student population.

Sandee Schamber (1999) has given examples of everyday events in teaming where good intentions may inadvertently erode the effectiveness of the team. The following points can lead to less effective teaming, undermining the practices and teaming process that could impact the team's success and student achievement. Schamber noted that one practice might be supporting fellow team members beyond professional growth whereby a team planning session can lose sight of its primary purpose, the growth and development of students, and may become a gripe or therapy session. Another example would be to discuss team business with individual team members (side barring) that could be devastating to the trust needed in effective teaming, especially if it is construed as being team business conducted behind the backs of other team members. Un-involvement of team members in controversial team decisions, going outside the team without team consensus to seek opinions on issues, or a member who speaks for the team when they are speaking from a personal perspective have been causes for resentment among team members. Bad team practices may have team members sense a lack of support of the team decisions and more importantly, it may lead to confusion among students on presented information or strategies. Sharing team plans with students before they are finalized may cause frustrations if plans are changed. Schamber

(1999) stated "...such announcements erode the bonds of teaming and these team members are not perceived as team players" (p.13).

Other impeding items on effectiveness of teaming deal with discipline issues where a teacher requests team support "after the fact." This can stress team relationships especially when administrators or parents have later challenged the individual team member's decision. Teams often do support the members who are experiencing difficulties, but the optimal position would be to extend professional courtesy which involves team members in the initial decision making process especially with discipline issues.

Schamber (1999) stated, "teaming puts teachers together in a professional relationship which is unlike any other relationship in the field of education. Effective teaming takes time and effort to develop; good teams require deliberate effort. Frequently, good intentions go awry, and unfortunately, middle school team members are not immune to the casualties of good intentions. All too often, team members who have the team's best interests in mind actually engage in behaviors which undermine the team effectiveness of their team and erode the trust between team members, which is the basis for effective teaming." Chamber continued, "team members need to remain positive, supportive, and respectful of each others personal and professional space and that failure to do so, results in resentment and hard feelings, which leads to the deterioration of team effectiveness" (p.10).

The team's leaders and administration must be cognizant of the teaming "pitfalls" and must provide guidance, support, and positive reinforcement of good practices. Leadership is important in good teaming practices holding staff accountable with high expectations.

Teaming's Impact on Student Achievement

According to W.K. Kellogg Foundation (NSDC, 1999), interdisciplinary teaching teams can and do make a substantial impact on student learning in the middle level. W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Middle Start Initiative research examined the progress of high-poverty schools as measured by their performance on the Michigan Educational Assessment of Progress (MEAP), the state's mandatory test. The following findings about teaming, where teachers planned and worked together as a group and shared the same group of students for a portion of the day, included:

These schools with high levels of common planning time had the greatest improvement in MEAP scores. The schools that had teaming for five or more years had the highest MEAP scores. When teaming and high levels of common planning time were combined, the schools with high percentage of at-risk students were most dramatically impacted by these factors (p.5).

NSDC (1999) noted that implementation of certain changes which included teaming and common planning time enabled those schools with higher percentages of at-risk students to cut the gap with the more affluent schools. According to the NCLB Act, this one assessment, a standardized test, reflects the learning and achievement gains of all students in each state. While this is debatable, it is the standard way in which the students across Pennsylvania have been compared with the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) tests, which are given in third, fifth, eighth and eleventh grades. Starting in 2006, testing will be done in the 3rd through 8th grades plus 11th grade. NCLB's legislative impact on the Blue Ribbon School Program's selection process must now consider a school's standardized tests results to achieve the exemplary school status.

According to Erb (1997), the benefits of interdisciplinary teaming are no longer theoretical as evidence indicates that teaming leads to higher achievement in math, reading and language arts skills. Erb drew this from the research efforts of Lee and Smith (1993), which included analysis of teaming's impact on achievement from data extrapolated from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) base year of 1988 (Ingels, Abraham, Spencer & Franklin, 1989). "They drew data from the base year of the NELS to generate a sample consisting of 8,845 students that represented 377 public, Catholic and independent schools," and found, "...in schools that were less departmentalized and more teamed, students scored higher on standardized achievement tests in both math and reading" (p.310).

Erb (1997) also cited the research of Robert Felner at the University of Illinois, which involved more than 25,000 students in 52 schools with enrollments from 200 to 2000 students. These schools represented different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and were located in rural, suburban and urban areas. Felner and his research team incorporated recommendations from the Turning Points Report, (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), which included interdisciplinary teaming. Erb (1997) noted these researchers found in schools with a high level of implementation of the Carnegie Council's recommendations that "a direct correlation between increasing levels of implementation and student success in mathematics, language and reading based on state standardized tests" (p. 310).

Teacher's Efficacy and Leadership Impact on Teaming

Thomas O. Erb (1997) in his article, "Meeting the Needs of Young Adolescents on Interdisciplinary Teams: the Growing Research Base," described two types of efficacy:

Teaching efficacy refers to teachers' expectations that teaching influences student learning. Teachers with high teaching efficacy believe that teachers can positively affect students' performance, regardless of the students' abilities or family backgrounds.

And the second,

... Personal teaching efficacy which refers to individuals' self-assessment of their teaching competence (p. 309).

Erb (1997) noted Ashton and Webb (1986) who cited Doda's unpublished 1984 doctoral dissertation stating "...that teachers on interdisciplinary teams believed that students could learn and teachers could positively affect their students' lives," as compared to those teachers in more departmentalized situations, "...were less confident that all students could learn or that teachers could have a lasting impact" (p. 309).

Teacher efficacy and interdisciplinary teaming are very important when one considers the declining stability of the family and other institutions that historically have been engaged in rearing and nurturing youth. This declining stability has increasingly placed that responsibility on educational and youth services according to Toepfer (1998). He cited Johnson's research from 1996: "One in three households in the United States is now headed by a single parent, and nine in ten single-parent families are fatherless; and today, only 23 percent of American children are being raised by two parents" (p.165). This seems unusually high and in light of this, Toepfer also noted in his research "...children of divorced parents had lower high school and college completion rates than those children whose parents did not divorce" (p. 165). Does middle level teaming and its teachers make an impact through

teacher efficacy? Does the team concept, with its dynamics, support the current family structure?

George and Shewey (1994) cited James Coleman (1966) on his study and its controversial data, which concluded, "...the only really significant factor in academic achievement was the socioeconomic status of the children who attended a school" (p. 8). It was implied that race and socioeconomic status were the determining factors in academic achievement, placing schools and teachers as inconsequential and having made no difference in the lives of children according to George and Shewey. According to Jacobson (1997) in his review of a national longitudinal study that highlighted the long-term effect of divorce upon children, researchers and educators felt that students' academic success and emotional status had been influenced by the significant change in the family structure over the last three decades with the increased divorce rate and single parent families.

The issue of children's educational success being affected by poverty is very controversial. This may or may not have an impact on students' achievement. According to George and Shewey (1994), Coleman's 1966 study emphasized the "home effect" that infuriated educators and offended many others with its implication that children of the poor could not learn. George cited the research on "teacher and school effectiveness" and referred to Slavin's studies (1989), which established that "...teachers do make a difference and that poor children can learn well" (p. 9). George and Shewey (1994) reported positive results on student achievement scores based on the major efforts of school improvement undertaken in many schools that reinforced Slavin's effectiveness research. "These successful research efforts became known as the outlier studies" and the term "...referred to research focused on the careful scrutiny of the most successful examples of a subject that could be found ..." (p.

9). These studies concentrated on the analysis of what makes the best become the best whether in schools or in the corporate field. In corporate studies, the focus was on the corporation's high productivity and profit over long periods of time. George and Shewey (1994) stated "in education, it became the search for and study of the most successful teachers and the barrier-breaking schools," and "sought examples of teachers and schools that demonstrated to have made a significant difference in the lives of students; they identified classrooms and schools where students made gains that went far beyond what could have been predicted or expected" (p. 9).

There have been numerous studies done on the home effect, school effect, teacher and school effectiveness, and other related terms that focus on student success. Educational researchers went into these schools to document and identify key teacher behaviors, which correlated with increased achievement. Roger Shouse (1998) states "whether the achievement effects of school restructuring result from specific practices or from a general process, an additional question remains," and needs addressed as well as, "...should we expect these effects to be widespread across all schools or more strongly felt in certain types of schools?" (p.678). With interdisciplinary teaming being utilized across the nation's middle schools at an increased level (79%) as reported by Hackmann, et al. (2002) and with its significant expansion, could this be one of those positive effects? Shouse's research (1996a) provided evidence, along with Hallinger & Murphy's studies (1986) that "... certain school practices and characteristics can have a dramatically different impact across school urbanicity and average socioeconomic status." Shouse (1998) also suggested the need for educators or researchers "to identify differential patterns in the effects of systemic restructuring before broadly prescribing it for the ailments of public education" (p. 678).

Interdisciplinary teaming at the middle school level may be one of those restructuring practices that has been gaining a broader acceptance and utilization because of its importance. Shouse concluded from his research that "...communality is linked to a more restructured type of school organizational culture, academic press to a more traditional organizational culture" and " ...this is not to suggest that the two characteristics must necessarily conflict. Prior research indicates, in fact, that although friction may occur between them, they can also work together to improve student achievement" (p. 697).

Shouse's research (1998) explained the impact that traditional and restructuring practices and characteristics (separately and/or together) had on urban and non-urban middle level students' success in their math achievement scores found in the data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88) Base Year Survey. William Boyd and Roger Shouse (1997) state "at the local level, restructuring may be perceived as an agenda of practices deemed necessary for improving student learning" (p. 677), and in this study, teaming at the middle level might be considered one of these restructuring characteristics and/or practices.

The Rutter Study (1979) and its findings represented key research that has influenced many succeeding research reports on school effectiveness. The rigor of its research design and focus on some components of the middle school concept, including teaming, added to its significance in the study of twelve junior high schools in London.

According to Neuman and Simmons (2000) and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform's research in the most effective schools, "...every member of the educational community has the responsibility and the authority to take appropriate leadership roles" (p. 9). They defined "distributed leadership" as principals, teachers, staff members, parents, and

members of the entire educational community including students who, through their shared leadership, share the work and commitment. This included "... setting clear priorities, developing a shared vision, examining professional practices, providing a strong accountability system, and reorganizing school or district structures to support student achievement" (p.10). Neuman and Simmons stated "effective leaders create an environment in which everyone can do his or her best work – an environment that is safe, comfortable, and effective and has an intellectual focus" (p.12), and noted that creating and sustaining this environment is more easily accomplished in small schools or developing small learning communities within larger schools. Teaming has many of these characteristics that impact and provide an avenue for teachers to be involved in decision-making roles and the opportunity to know their students well in a small learning community.

Thomas Toch (1991) stated: "Only after the restructuring of teachers' responsibilities became a priority within the teacher-reform movement following the Carnegie report in 1986 did the NEA begin touting the projects as experiments designed to grant teachers a greater say in the running of their schools. The union merely relabeled the projects once 'restructuring' became popular, in the same way it seized on the 'excellence' theme in wake of *A Nation at Risk*" (p.184). Toch cited NEA's heralded successes of restructured nationwide schools (TABS, Mastery in Learning, Operation Rescue, etc.) and their limited site-based decision making as having little resemblance to that which was urged in this reform. He referred to the Miami and Rochester projects and their creation of "management teams" and "faculty committees" that enabled teachers to truly have an impact on decision making in general and in the areas of budget, staffing, and instructional matters, etc.

In 1979, Rutter published his findings on twelve London middle level/junior highs in the 1970's which confirmed the importance of an academic emphasis citing high expectations, direct instruction, etc. but concluded that the critical difference of the successful schools was a positive psychosocial environment. It was determined that this enabling force impacted and made possible the teachers' success with the academic emphasis where students were active learners. The researchers noted: "The academically successful schools were those where the teachers and the students were able to see themselves as part of the same group, as members of the same team, and sharing the same educational perspective" (p. 13). This "ethos of caring" characteristic identified in the successful schools cited in the Rutter Study was central to the American middle school concept of the 1990's, and its emphasis included teachers working and planning together, promoting increased responsibilities and participation of students, and establishing stable teaching and student groups; all tied to the heart of the middle school movement. Rutter's conclusion focused on unity and whether or not the school effectively addressed the social side of learning where teachers and students identified themselves as part of the same group/team. He states "unity is what made it more likely that students shared the educational perspective of the faculty, and what, therefore, led ultimately to higher academic achievement" (p.13).

Conclusion of Literature Review

Teaming's implementation has the potential to change a major feature in schools as organizations through its collaboration and interdisciplinary planning components (George & Alexander, 1993). Accountability tied to academic achievement can be addressed in middle school's teaming components, which include common planning time that may break down

communication barriers and encourage teachers' collaboration. But teaming's success will depend on the cooperative efforts of all educators involved on the teams and their efficacy and support to enhance students' success. Continuous school improvement has been an initiative that educators across the country have pursued, and it is a part of the Blue Ribbon Schools Program goals (1997). Williamson and Johnston (1999) noted that the current middle level reform movement complements teaming's importance as more middle schools have implemented its use as a critical element of the middle school philosophy and contributes to greater student achievement and success. Interdisciplinary teaming can provide the structure for effective planning time to enhance teacher collaboration, curriculum integration, instruction, and other programmatic features (Clark & Clark, 1997, George & Alexander, 1993, Hackmann et al., 2002, Valentine et al., 1993). Middle level teaming's organizational structure can provide an avenue for shared accountability and improved student achievement.

According to the literature review, there have been numerous improvements and reasons for utilizing teaming to advance student achievement. In the Lee and Smith (1993) summary of findings, “ Students who attended schools that encouraged team teaching evidenced higher achievement ... and ... that early adolescents fare better in schools in which their age group is not isolated and that they are likely to demonstrate higher achievement and more engagement with academics in smaller schools” (p. 180).

The benefits from teacher efficacy and teacher collaboration have been reinforced and supported by structured common planning time and schedules that administrators and staff together design and promote to maximize the interdisciplinary teaming strategies. It is imperative to have the appropriate support and leadership as cited in the research on teaming

(Arhar, Johnston, and Markle, 1989; George and Alexander, 1993; MacIver and Epstein, 1991). The support of the teaming structure has provided the impetus to encourage teachers to be advocates for their students and subject matter while strengthening the teacher efficacy associated with teaming (Erb, 1997; Ashton and Webb, 1986).

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Problem

Increased interdisciplinary teaming across the nation at the middle level (Hackmann, et al., 2002) has brought to the forefront the issue of its importance to the middle school's success and enhanced student achievement. Various components of teaming have supported more collaboration and in-depth professional discussions, collegiality, teacher efficacy, and teacher involvement in the decision-making processes for the school (Erb, 1987; Erb and Doda, 1989; George and Oldaker, 1985). Faculty morale in this supportive teaming environment has made teaching an attractive profession and has focused on student success (Erb and Doda, 1989; Erb, 1997). Students have benefited from the positive teaming environment with smaller groups, better communications, an effective social-emotional climate, and clear behavioral and academic expectations (Clark and Clark, 1997; George and Oldaker, 1985; Rutter, 1979).

Exemplary middle schools have many or all of the listed attributes associated in an interdisciplinary teaming structure and have received the recognition because of their significant student achievement and success. This study explored, in depth, the role that teaming has played in a designated Blue Ribbon Middle School. The rigors associated with the Blue Ribbon School Program's assessment were extensively reviewed to determine how teaming and its support had impacted the studied exemplary middle school's success in gaining this distinguished status. This study examined a selected Blue Ribbon School Program's teaming through these key questions: (1) How and in what way was teaming

important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played an integral part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria? This studied exemplary school was in its first year as a Page One School, which changed the teaming for the 7th and 8th grades to grade level teaming/meetings plus intradepartmental meetings. This was incorporated into the study to contrast its past teaming practices and current mix as 6th grade maintained its teams.

Rationale for the Approach

The nature of this research was exploratory and focused on “how” and “in what way” questions. The rationale for this approach was to investigate the previously detailed questions through the participants’ perspective (teachers and principals) to gain a better understanding of what importance teaming has had in an exemplary school’s environment and not necessarily the researcher’s view. This examination of human beings in qualitative research has attempted to find a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).

According to Rist (1982), qualitative research has exuded, “...that the most powerful and parsimonious way to understand human beings is to watch, talk, listen, and participate with them in their own natural setting” (p. 440). Merriam (1998) noted qualitative research, being an umbrella concept that deals with several forms of inquiry, helps us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption as possible of the natural setting. “Understanding” has been a significant term in qualitative research,

especially when constructing a specific phenomena and in this study, developing an understanding of teaming and its importance as perceived by a middle school's teachers and building administrators.

According to Owen (1982), qualitative research has been based on naturalistic inquiry and/or the study of people, where they are, and what they perceive. Hatch (2002) noted key terms that include natural setting, participant perspectives, researchers as data gathering instruments, extended firsthand engagement, interpretist emphasizing understanding, wholeness and complexity, subjectivity, emergent design, inductive and logical data analysis and reflexivity. All these have been essential terms in qualitative research that were engrained in this study. This qualitative study's rationale for the selected research approach of choice attempted to generate an understanding of teachers' and principals' perceptions of teaming's importance in this exemplary middle school and how as a Page One School, this has changed.

Research Design

With the qualitative approach established as the preferred approach in this study, the research design served as the overall layout for it. The key questions of this research drove the design of this study and lent themselves to a case study approach that seemed most appropriate. In exploring the "how" and "in what way" questions of teaming's importance in an exemplary middle school's success, this study utilized a case study design. According to Yin (1994), the case study has been the preferred strategy for these types of questions, as it ... " allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events ..." (p.3). Yin further stated, " the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p.3). According to Patton (2002), the case

study design, a comprehensive research design, has utilized an all-encompassing logically designed method putting together specific approaches to data collection. This particular research has been applied in this exploratory case study design to examine the perceptions of educators in an exemplary middle school recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the Department of Education. It delved into the questions previously presented to the teachers and principals on their perceptions of the importance of teaming in the recognized success of their outstanding schools.

In order to identify critical areas of concern to be investigated, a survey was sent to thirty-three identified exemplary Pennsylvania middle schools' teaching staff and principals prior to conducting the intensive interviews at the selected Blue Ribbon School. The survey research focused on Pennsylvania middle schools designated as Blue Ribbon Program schools from 1990 to present. This research and the conducted intensive interviews at the selected Blue Ribbon Program School along with other data collection and documentation provided and led to thick rich descriptions of the studied phenomenon focused on teaming.

By utilizing a survey, quantitative data was linked to this qualitative study. This mixed methods approach, using the surveys returned from the Pennsylvania designated exemplary middle schools and the formal case study of one, allowed the researcher to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. Greene, Carcacelli, and Graham (1989) who extensively reviewed mixed-method studies, "... proposed that such studies can help sequentially and can expand the scope and breadth of a study by using different methods in different components" (p. 269). In this research, the results of the survey helped to identify critical areas that provided the researcher data to be further investigated through the case study process. A major reason to combine methods has

been that the quantitative data, the representative sample that happens to be Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle Schools in this study, helped the qualitative side of the study in its design (Sieber, 1973).

The study's use of a survey of other exemplary middle schools in Pennsylvania enhanced the design of this exploratory case study. It helped to identify the essential elements of teaming to explore in this case study and to further develop the interview questions on the "how" and "in what way" was teaming important. The survey sought data on the previously asked questions about teaming using a Likert-type scale. The response rate, which the researcher sought to be optimal, did not have follow-up inquiries for those who did not respond. Ultimately, the researcher utilized the data, which was gathered from these collected surveys, to enhance the construction of the interview questions and provide a larger context for the case study school.

This case study design retained the holistic and meaningful characteristics as described by Yin (1984, 1994) of real life events in its investigation. The case study was conducted at an exemplary middle school in central Pennsylvania that was accessible to the researcher.

Site and Sample

A central Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle School was selected as the exemplary middle school for this case study. Permission from the selected school and district administrators was obtained prior to the start of the study. The researcher appreciated the cooperation and permission granted by the administration at the selected school and district. Although there were a limited number of exemplary middle schools that were surveyed, 35

middle schools in Pennsylvania have obtained Blue Ribbon Schools Program Status since 1990. This included the pilot school and case study school. Adequate data was supplied that gave the researcher the opportunity to generate rich descriptions for the more in-depth study of the selected Blue Ribbon School. In this study, the role of teaming was the focus of the questionnaire; information that was collected was utilized to design the interview questions and helped provide a context. Teaming's role and importance were reflected in the teachers' and administrators' descriptions in response to the "how" and "in what way" questions developed for this research of the exemplary school. The case study was driven by these questions. The survey was distributed to teachers and principals of 33 identified Pennsylvania exemplary middle schools prior to the interviews at the selected case study school. Representative teacher(s) or team of teachers and each building's principal were asked to complete the four questionnaires sent to each school. The researcher was satisfied with the questionnaire's return rate from 18 of the 33 exemplary Pennsylvania middle schools of the one-time mailing. Of the 132 surveys sent to these schools, a total of 63 were returned. This represented a 47.7% return. The 22 respondents in the case study displayed openness and eagerness to discuss their teaming practices in their school.

The completed questionnaires were sealed in separate envelopes and in most cases, returned in the larger envelopes that had been provided to each school and submitted with the principal's survey. Seventeen of the respondents were principals, out of a possible 33 administrators' responses from the exemplary schools. Principals represented 51.5% of the possible school administrative respondents (17/33). The rest of the returned surveys, 46 of the total 63 surveys, were teachers. This represented 46.5% of the possible teachers' surveys (46/99) from the 33 exemplary schools. The respondents' teaching grade levels were evenly

distributed for these middle level schools except for 5th grade, which had less and in many cases may not be a part of many middle schools. The survey had three data sections that included an open-ended response, 46 questions with a Likert-type of scale, and a ranking of 10 statements, of which respondents selected the five most important in teaming.

The questionnaires provided respondents with the opportunity to answer the specific questions openly and candidly. The use of this initial survey was to gain insight and was less intensive than the more formal and in-depth interviews that were conducted by the researcher in this case study. This enhanced the development of this single case study by exploring the importance of teaming at all the surveyed Pennsylvania exemplary middle schools that had the same designation in being Blue Ribbon Schools.

Research Strategies/Instrumentation

This research study was carefully conducted. The researcher was cognizant of the human subjects' concerns and was in total compliance with the *Pennsylvania State University's Graduate School Thesis Guide* (1998) under the "Use of Human or Animal Subjects in Research" section. "This requirement is part of the University's policy on ethics in research..."(p. 18) and is for the protection of the participants' confidentiality and anonymity in the surveyed Pennsylvania exemplary middle schools and in the case study school's interviews and interactions with personnel as conducted by the researcher. "Graduate students must receive approval for the use of human subjects in their research, including survey research and it must be obtained through the Office for Regulatory Affairs" (p. 19). The Office of Research Protection (ORP) at Penn State University approved this study on May 13, 2005. This approval included the survey's cover letter (Appendix A) and

the survey (Appendix B). The collected data was gathered in a confidential manner as specified by the ORP. This confidential process was assured for all responses of the 46 teachers and 17 principals in the survey's inquiries and through the personal and team interview process of the case study. All person's confidentiality was assured in accordance with the University's policy on ethics in research as well as professional codes and federal regulations that deal with social science research (Merriam, 1998).

The mixed methods approach format was utilized in the research strategies of this study. It incorporated a quantitative component with the survey of the 33 exemplary middle schools conducted prior to the case study's qualitative approach for the selected Blue Ribbon Middle School. The quantitative instrument drew upon survey questions generated from the review of the literature dealing with middle level's teaming structure and its impact on the students' achievement. The questionnaire, as an exploratory survey, gathered data that added to the overall understanding and goals that focused on the contributions of teaming, which were further explored in this case study. The survey served not only to shape the case study interview questions but also provided a wider context within which to nest the findings from the single case study school.

These surveys were given to the principals of the Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon middle schools and a representative staff. The researcher had asked the principal to select staff from various grades in his/her exemplary middle school to complete the surveys. The respondents were balanced among grade levels. It was left open to the staff's discretion to answer these as a team or as an individual and for all to return the surveys in a stamped addressed envelope. A minimum of 4 surveys that includes the principal survey was sent to each school for completion with self addressed stamped envelopes. This meant that of the 33 exemplary

schools, there was a potential of 33 principals' responses and 99 responses from teachers/teams.

The Pennsylvania State University ORP approved both the questionnaire (Appendix B) and its cover letter that explained the purpose of this study. The first page contained a demographic component that distinguished responses from the varied staff of the exemplary school. The criteria that were measured in this survey were derived from the review of the literature on teaming. The survey design helped provide a wider context and shaped the case study interview questions. The questionnaire focused on the perception of the impact and importance of the teaming's structure and processes. This helped in the formulation of the interview questions utilized in the case study of the selected Blue Ribbon middle school. The survey questions made use of a Likert-like items based scale with descriptions that range from "strongly disagree" with a rating of 1, "agree somewhat" which has a 3 rating, and "strongly agree" that would be a 5 rating. The survey tallies were collected and noted in Appendix C. In addition to these questions, a ranking of ten items associated with teaming were addressed as well in the quantitative data collected. A brief narrative for respondents to express the importance of teaming to the success of their exemplary school was included in the survey. This added to the case study's data collection and analysis. The questions asked for factual information as well as perceptual beliefs in assessing the importance of teaming in these exemplary schools.

This survey was piloted to provide the researcher with feedback on the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, which helped finalize and strengthen the format. An exemplary middle school, located near the selected central Pennsylvania case study school, was designated as the pilot school. The piloted Blue Ribbon Middle School's principal and

past principal were asked to complete the survey as well as 3 teachers or teams. This piloting process included the opportunity afterwards to critique the survey and to add any comments or questions, note clarity issues and/or any concerns that needed addressed to make this survey a better tool to collect data. This also helped shape the interview questions for the more in-depth case study and was critical in obtaining an overall, panoramic view of exemplary middle schools' perspectives on teaming. A thorough and understandable survey tool enhanced the efforts to look more in-depth at a specific, single case study.

As previously noted, the survey provided the researcher with data that was incorporated in the interview questions of the case study leading to the richness and depth in understanding of the teaming's complex phenomenon. The rich descriptions promoted by the qualitative portion of the study were constructed from the interviews with teachers and principals of the selected exemplary middle school. These interviews were conducted in a central Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle School, the natural setting that qualitative research has deemed so important (Rist, 1982, Owens, 1982, Hatch, 2002). The principal of this selected case study was contacted for his interest and support of the study, and formal letters were sent to the principal and the district's superintendent to gain approval for the middle school's staff and administrators to participate in the study. This was important as it provided the researcher the convenience and opportunities to access documents that were examined for additional information in this study. The Introduction Letter for the Interview (Appendix D) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix. E) were shared with the principal.

The specific type of interview format had been thoroughly detailed in the Data Collection section of the proposal. The interview protocol (Appendix F) included the questions to be asked by the researcher, and it was shared with the case study's principal.

Merriam (1998) noted the importance of piloting the interview protocol before utilizing it in the field. The data from the pilot allowed the researcher to improve the survey instrument by analyzing the feedback from the participants. The interview process was piloted with middle school teachers and administrators. This practice prepared the interviewer for the rigors of the formal interview process.

“The Interview Guide” which Merriam has referred to also as a schedule “...is nothing more than a list of questions you intend to ask in an interview” (p. 81). This was important to the entire process. It incorporated the following: clarity, neutrality and how to begin the interview, questions to avoid, and an interview guide that may be as general or specific as needed. Other considerations in this process included the method of recording and evaluating data that were approved by The Pennsylvania State University ORP.

As an active member of the Pennsylvania State Principals Association, the researcher contacted his colleagues of the central Pennsylvania area Blue Ribbon Middle Schools to gain access for this study. The rapport with these fellow principals had laid the groundwork for the questionnaire and the case study’s interview process. The administrators as well as the teachers were informed of the details and foundation of this study in their initial meetings and interactions with the researcher. Discussion centered on shared expectations about the process of the study and the development of explicit expectations between participants to maintain and improve the quality of the conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participant time commitment and the products that the researcher produced in this study were also discussed.

Demographics were generalized in the descriptions and presented information. The interviews were conducted with the exemplary middle school’s administrators and selected

representative teachers, team leaders and even an entire team of teachers, which provided a focus group. The focus group/team responses allowed for more interactions with less defensive or guarded responses. Additionally, the opportunity to interview other staff within the school was the last component of member checks to enhance the follow-up information. This was noted in the study's request letter to the principal and staff. It was explained in the interview process as well, and the researcher noted that this may be a valuable and needed process to help in the final analysis.

Data Collection

In a qualitative study, Stake (1995) suggested that the data collection has no particular beginning moment. The data collected included the researcher's earliest observations, interactions and perceptions in the processes utilized. The researcher's role, as a middle school principal, brought prior data and background information to the case study before it commenced. The data from the surveys along with the data from the case study had provided a wealth of information. According to Owens (1982) and his view of naturalistic inquiry, "...it will primarily employ direct contact between investigators and actors in the situation as a means of collecting data, use emergent strategies to design the study rather than a priori specification, develop data categories from examination of the data themselves after collection, and not attempt to generalize the findings to a universe beyond that bounded by the study" (p. 7).

The quantitative data collected from the "Questionnaire on Middle Level Teaming's Prevalence" (Appendix B) described earlier provided the base knowledge, a wider context, and insight for this qualitative study's interviews and its data collection in producing the

research findings. The techniques in this case study included interviewing and documenting analysis that generated rich descriptions associated with qualitative research. The focus of the interviews in the case study was to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. This allowed the researcher to discover the participants' perspective and probed issues about the participants that the researcher could not directly observe. It was obvious that researchers can not observe everything especially when considering feelings, thoughts, intentions and other aspects that were critical in emphasizing understanding, wholeness and complexity (Hatch, 2002). The interview afforded the opportunities to map multiple realities and has been essential for building understanding for the intended reader and researcher.

Patton (2002) noted that qualitative interviewing starts with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. Interviews enabled researchers to explore a person's expressed thoughts, experiences, and stories that produce thorough descriptions associated with qualitative studies. Unstructured interviews, as described by Fontana & Frey (2000), were open ended with informal conversational interviews being the most extreme of these. Merriam (1998) noted that the semi-structured interview provides more flexibly worded questions in a somewhat structured environment.

In this study, semi- or unstructured interviews were used as these promoted maximum flexibility in gathering the information in whatever direction and form it appeared. Usually, most interview questions flowed from the immediate context. "Unstructured" did not mean that conversational interviews were unfocused. It was critical that the researcher tied the sensitivity of concepts and overall purpose for the inquiry back to the research questions in the interview process. Fontana & Frey (2000) noted that the interview process is guided by

sensitizing concepts and the overall inquiry's purpose tied directly to the established research questions.

An interview protocol (Appendix F) was established in these semi- and unstructured interviews. It utilized the key themes/concepts and the established research questions to guide the interview process. The blended approach in the interview process according to Patton (2002) offered the interviewer flexibility in probing and in determining appropriate times to thoroughly explore the given subjects and to even venture into new areas of inquiry not originally anticipated in the interview instrument's development.

The unstructured interviewing process provided more data than the structured types of interviewing. Interviewing has been one of the most common and powerful ways in which researchers attempt to gain a better understanding of human beings. As a qualitative study using an unstructured and/or semi-structured interview process, the researcher needed to establish a good rapport with the interviewee and project the desire to understand the interviewee's perspectives. The researcher believed the employed unstructured interview had provided the most data with the greatest depth. The interviewer planned and tape-recorded the interviews, which Merriam (1998) noted was the most common way to record interview data, and "this practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis" (p. 87).

A great deal of the collected data was centered on the semi-structured and unstructured interview process, but utilization of some document analysis (Blue Ribbon School Program documents of the school, etc.) based on the interviews added to this case study. Merriam (1998) noted that data collection is about asking, watching, and reviewing. In the interview process, the opportunity to observe given documents that had related to the exemplary middle school's teaming was presented to the researcher. These documents,

besides the Blue Ribbon School Program data, included such items as general school reports, curriculum data, team minutes/agendas, and faculty meetings' agendas and minutes. This key information about teaming and the Page One School Program added to the rich descriptions.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) noted that data analysis has strived for depth of understanding, and it provided the opportunity to combine critical data strands in a manner that builds understanding. In qualitative research, data analysis has involved an emerging process similar to data collection that has employed a specific technique or specific plan to accomplish this. Yin (1994) noted data analysis has consisted of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise rehashing the evidence to address the initial propositions of the study. He believed the “how” questions associated with the theoretical propositions were very useful in guiding case study analysis.

The researcher chose forms of data analysis that best served the study and the reader in the quest for understanding. Creswell (2003) stated, “the process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data” (p. 90). He provided six generic steps that can be combined with specific research design steps for data analysis. They included: “organize and prepare the data for analysis, read through all the data, begin detailed analysis with a coding process, use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis, advance how

the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and a final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data” (p. 191).

The study’s questions, though not theoretically based, had set the research questions, inquiries, and literature review and drove the data analysis. The questions offered possible categories to focus the content for the data analysis. The interview process centered itself on these questions that were coded. The coding process organized the descriptive data as it related to the relations associated with the “how” and “in what way” questions that dealt with teaming’s importance, key components and any similarities and differences found in each interview. With the descriptive data categorized, any emerging themes or patterns were noted. Merriam (1998) noted conceptual categories and properties exist separate from the data that help the researcher identify these categories. The constant comparison of the responses from the participants helped construct the categories. According to Merriam (1998), this process of category construction is data analysis, and it begins with identifying the research propositions, gaining insight on these propositions throughout the literature review, and finally constructing categories that assist in the process of comparing data gathered during data collection. The categories reflected the purpose of the research, essentially serving as the responses to the research questions.

As the case study proceeded, the researcher shared study products with the participants. This served as a “member check” and supplied appropriateness of descriptions, clarifications, explanations and analysis (Yin, 1994, Miles & Huberman, 1994, Merriam, 1998, Hatch, 2002, Patton, 2002). The participants will have an opportunity to review the study’s final products but will not be able to censor the research. This meant there was no veto agreement. Obviously, the schools and the participants had anonymity in this study.

Analyzing and reporting the quantitative data in this mixed methods research was also important and, as the survey's data was examined, it added to the case study interview's focus. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided researchers helpful advice that included entertaining mixed models where "... quantitative and qualitative inquiry can support and inform each other," and further emphasized the importance of staying self-aware by stating "...how useful it is to maintain a part of your attention on the processes involved in analysis—from the selection of research questions through coding, the creation of displays, data entry, conclusion drawing, and verification" (p. 310). This advice was incorporated in the analysis of the quantitative portion of this research study.

The survey's quantitative data from the responding Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle Schools was examined and tabulated for use in the data analysis. This data was analyzed and focused on the specific categories that included 1) the importance of teaming at the exemplary middle school, 2) history of teaming's existence and implementation at the responding exemplary school, and 3) whether the exemplary middle school's teaming included the George and Alexander definition's four key components and its impact on student success as per the Blue Ribbon School program criteria. Examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial questions of the study have all been essential processes in the data analysis (Yin, 1994), and these were incorporated in the study's quantitative analysis.

Items of significance in the quantitative data were determined by the exemplary schools' responses and the analysis of the highest and/or lowest averages for the survey's various teaming statements. Utilizing the "Likert Scale" five point system, the rating's averages were noted for each statement as they were placed under the coded categories. In

the importance of teaming category, analysis of the questionnaire's section that utilized a ranking of 10 teaming statements was analyzed and summarized. The brief remarks solicited from the questionnaire's participants were also analyzed for the importance of teaming at their exemplary middle school.

The quantitative data analysis was important in the qualitative study. It helped the case study's design and focus while expanding the scope and breadth of the study (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). The survey's data helped in the comparison of the responses from the participants and category construction for this data analysis (Merriam, 1998). Sieber (1973) noted several reasons for the combined methods with quantitative data helping with the qualitative study's design. It helped during data collection by supplying background data, receiving overlooked information, and in avoiding "elite bias" that Sieber defined as talking only to high-status respondents.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity concerns were addressed throughout this study. Validity concerns were addressed by piloting the survey at an area exemplary middle school. The researcher was familiar with the demographic information of this piloted Central Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle School. This familiarity and professional relationship allowed the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of the questionnaire as it related to the study's focus of teaming's contributions to a school's exemplary status. The pilot study school's current and past principals' and teachers' critical input supported this. The quantitative portion of this study was sent to and completed by about half of the 33 Blue

Ribbon Middle Schools identified in Pennsylvania since 1990 by the U.S. Department of Education.

Designated staff members at the pilot school were asked to answer all the questions on this questionnaire. The respondents were instructed to evaluate each question for clarity and bias as suggested by Creswell (2003). The respondents had the opportunity to rate the entire survey for its ability to address the topic of teaming and its importance. A comment section was included for any in-depth explanation that respondents desired to address in a given questionnaire statement.

Creswell (2003) noted the researcher hopes to strengthen the reliability of the questionnaire by addressing the validity of the questionnaire through the piloting process. Patton (2002) referred to the concept of “critical case sampling.” that permitted the researcher to select the site(s) that provided the most information and greatest impact on the development of this understanding while helping to eliminate bias in choosing cases. This study focused on a very uniform group of teachers and administrators within an exemplary middle school of this critical case sampling.

In the qualitative section of this study, several strategies were employed to address reliability and validity. Utilization of triangulation helped to address validity concerns, and Yin has stated, “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (p. 91). In this study, triangulation as per Mathison (1988) equated to utilization of multiple methods and data sources of evidence to enhance the validity of the research findings. Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and others noted that triangulation referred also to finding similar meanings for data from multiple independent

sources. Yin (1994), likewise, referred to the development of converging lines of inquiry, which is a process of triangulation of using the multiple sources of evidence.

In this case study, the identified teachers and administrators of the selected Blue Ribbon middle school in this sampling were analyzed on an individual basis. One team of teachers was interviewed as a whole and acted as a focus group in the study. Additional opportunities for triangulation occurred through the assessment of numerous documents reviewed during the study. Examples of documents that were analyzed included faculty meeting minutes/agendas, Blue Ribbon School Program committee reports/forms, newsletters to public, and other types of relevant school reports. Mathison (1988) noted that the ability to build different images of understanding that increased the potency of the findings. Hopefully, triangulation has provided this in this study.

Another method utilized to address validity concerns was member checks. The opportunity to share the study products with the participant was encouraged. It provided continual checks throughout the interview itself to validate the interview process. This was used throughout, for example, “this is what I (researcher) heard you say, and is that what you (respondent) meant?” This ensured that the data was not misinterpreted because of researcher bias according to Merriam (1998). Member checks’ utilization offered accuracy of descriptions, explanations, and interpretations.

Interviewing all other building administrators and also some non-team leaders of this Blue Ribbon Middle School addressed validity concerns. These interviews included the member check method as well. In interviewing the building administrators, follow up information was offered, informally, from other non-building administrators such as superintendent, assistant superintendent, and/or other administrators.

The researcher's role was another key component in assuring valid interpretations in this case study and included the work of Hatch (2002) cited earlier regarding key components of qualitative research. The researcher's background, being a middle school principal with 23 plus years in administration, will be an important factor for the reader to take into account. This may draw attention to potential research bias. It permitted the researcher to also quickly assimilate within the natural setting of the participant and to clearly understand the phenomena from the perspective of those living it as well as comfortably served as the data-gathering instrument. It also allowed the researcher to remain flexible in relation to his influence on the study. Other important considerations such as the history of the researcher and his role within this position were addressed. In knowing the researcher's background, Merriam (1998) noted readers of this study will better understand the focus or lens through which all data and the data analysis will be filtered.

The development of thick, rich descriptions that clearly detail phenomena as experienced through the participants' perspectives has addressed reliability in this study. The multiple methods utilized for the data collection and flexibility of procedures for data analysis have lent themselves to the development of the thick rich descriptions that were reflective of the participants. The reader's confidence in the study's ability to build a sense of understanding in regards to the phenomena in question has been supported by the results of the thorough coverage of the propositions that guide the study.

Limitations

This mixed methods research, quantitative and qualitative study being exploratory in nature, utilized surveys and interview questions generated from the researcher's studied

literature and professional knowledge. Being a single case study, this may have a limitation in exploring middle level's teaming structure and its impact on student achievement and the middle school's success. In the studied exemplary middle school, student achievement was a key area and now, the NCLB Act has increased pressure for any school to achieve this Blue Ribbon School Program status.

The bias of the author, being a middle school principal, may have impacted the development in his questionnaire design and interview questions. The surveys given prior to the case study were limited to the 33 Pennsylvania middle schools that were past Blue Ribbon Schools since 1990. Answers on the survey targeted key points to be emphasized in the interview process. The honesty on this survey, or lack of it, provided a limitation in this study. The voluntary return of the surveys was a factor and limitation. The researcher relied on the building principal to support and encourage the participation of his/her staff in these surveys, and likewise, in the case study and any follow-up interviews. Seventeen of the 18 schools returning surveys had principals' responses that were included with teacher responses. The understanding of the principalship has certainly assisted the researcher in developing thick rich descriptions that were so vital to this qualitative research. The principal's background may have also served as a limitation according to Fontana & Frey (2000) in that the interviewer may influence both the methods of data collection and the techniques utilized in reporting findings.

Being a single case study may have been perceived as a limitation. Yin (1994) stated, "the case study has long been stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science methods, but it is commonplace among all disciplines, used by many distinguished scholars, and has become a preferred method" (p. xiii). This study's design of a critical case sampling of an

exemplary school's teachers and administrators may have a limitation in that the selection has a highly homogeneous set of participants. Kennedy (1979) cautioned that a homogeneous group limits the ability of the researcher regarding range of generalizations that can be suggested to the readers.

Finally, this research was limited to a single case study and a limited number of surveys returned from the 33 identified Pennsylvania BRSP middle schools. The researcher was satisfied with the questionnaire's return rate from 18 of the 33 exemplary Pennsylvania middle schools of the one-time mailing. Of the 132 surveys sent to these schools, a total of 63 were returned. This represented a 47.7% return. Twenty-two respondents in the case study displayed openness and eagerness to discuss their teaming practices in their school. The research attempted to identify specifically described "best practices" for middle level instruction associated with the teaming process at these Blue Ribbon Middle Schools that were surveyed and involved in the case study. It has been difficult to focus on any generalizations in the teaming practices found to contribute to its success, but attempts have been made to identify possibilities drawn from the survey and case study results. Stake (1995) noted that constructivists encourage providing readers the rich descriptions for their own generalizing. He stated "the emphasis is on description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, people, not only commonplace description but thick description, the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case" (p.102).

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This study examined perceptions of middle level teachers and principals regarding the contributions of teaming, as defined by George and Alexander (1993), to their schools' achievement and designation as a "Blue Ribbon School." There has been extensive research and literature that has addressed teaming at the middle level; however, studies that have examined the impact of teaming on a school obtaining exemplary middle school status have been limited. This mixed methods study provided key information about the perceived contributions of teaming and its organizational structure to the attainment of the Blue Ribbon School award. The study entailed surveying participants in Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools and conducting an intensive case study of one of these exemplary middle schools.

The primary question considered by the study was: does the teaming structure, as described by George and Alexander, impact a middle school's attainment of Blue Ribbon School status? The Blue Ribbon Schools Program's assessment criteria have been examined in the review of the literature in order to ascertain what the extent literature says about the role of teaming and its possible impact on school success.

The study examined the teaming structure that schools had implemented and the perception of the role this played in achieving their school's exemplary status. This research assessed the Blue Ribbon School Program's criteria that a middle school must meet to achieve this prominent status and the perceptions of whether teaming affected or impacted the attainment of this prestigious recognition.

Specifically, this study examined the following questions: (1) How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria? This chapter presents the data from this research of the surveyed Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle Schools and the interviews from the case study of a central Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle School.

The Survey's Findings

How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status?

Overall, survey respondents clearly identified the school's teaming efforts as significant in their achievement of the Blue Ribbon status. The importance of teaming as perceived by the respondents through their written comments was emphasized and supported with rich descriptions in 19 of the returned surveys. Responses of 17 principals and 46 teachers were very similar in their perceptions of teaming's contribution to their schools' success and designation as a Blue Ribbon Middle School. Principals' survey responses represented about 27% of the total returned surveys (17/63). Administrators' responses affirmed and/or exceeded the overall agreement or disagreement perceptions on most of the 46 survey statements found in the questionnaire. In the first survey statement where 62 of 63 respondents agreed that "adequate common planning time enhances instruction," all 17 principal respondents agreed with this. Another example, "negative student behaviors are

seldom improved by teacher collaboration,” had 58 of 63 responses that disagreed and sixteen of the seventeen principals concurred. “Team meeting time is utilized for planning interdisciplinary curriculum activities” had 55 of 62 responses that agreed compared to all 17 principals who were in agreement. In the survey’s teaming responses, principals and staff consistently perceived factors that identified interdisciplinary planning and the utilization of common planning time for team and individual planning. Of the four principals who wrote comments, one stated, “the teaming approach and student/parent programs were factors that contributed to school’s success.” One of the teachers responded with an extensive statement that captured many other teachers’ comments about teaming and its contribution to the exemplary school’s success:

Working as teams allowed us to work together with students and parents to give the students a strong base here with a connection to the home, reinforcing goals and standards in both places. Working in teams definitely contributed to sharing and cooperating, working as a motivational force for all involved. I can’t say enough for teaming; it makes everything more effective. It gives students a sense of family (base); teachers can discuss students, find consistent problems, address needs, meet together with students; having a “we” not “me” attitude and feeling of connectedness and high morale.

Another teacher at this same school added, “using current research on the successful middle school programs, our school implemented successfully a variety of student-centered programs, many of which continue to this day.” However, long-term sustainability is not certain as the same respondent noted that “today those programs are challenged by a younger staff not yet familiar with the middle school philosophy and overly concerned with state

assessment scores to the point where they want to remove some middle school initiatives and increase instructional time.”

Respondents ranked what they perceived as the top five important teaming items (see Table 1). “Teaming provides opportunity for teacher collaboration” and “teaming enhances teachers’ ability to influence student learning,” the highest ranked teaming statements, both received 42 responses out of the 63 (67% of returned surveys). The raw data’s frequency counts were very close for the top five statements with a difference of 4 between the highest total tally of 42 and 38 for the 5th highest statement’s total tallies.

Table 1
Ranked Teaming Statements

Statements About Teaming...	Ranking Scale: 1- Highest & 5 - Lowest					Total Ranked Responses
	1	2	3	4	5	
Provides opportunity for teacher collaboration	15	9	7	5	6	42
Enhances teachers ability to influence student learning	7	11	10	9	5	42
Influences the effectiveness of middle school philosophy	11	4	5	7	12	39
Enhances students' academic achievement	9	10	4	9	7	39
Increases teacher's impact on student achievement	7	9	12	4	6	38
Improves better communications between teachers	6	7	6	7	8	34
Improves planning for interdisciplinary curricular activities	0	3	7	7	11	28
Promotes an interdisciplinary curriculum	3	4	5	8	5	25
Provides time to achieve curricular goals	0	1	0	2	1	4
Allows more teacher leadership/empowerment opportunities	0	0	2	0	2	4

Table 2 captured key perceptions associated with teacher collaboration. Ninety-eight percent of the surveyed respondents had selected responses of agree somewhat to strongly agree for “adequate common plan time enhances instruction” (62/63). This statement had the highest total tallies for any single category of the study having 52 responses as “strongly agree” of the possible 63 total responses.

Teaming provides opportunity for teacher collaboration. Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1 SD	2 D	3 AS	4 A	5 SA	
Adequate common teaching planning time enhances instruction. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	1	2	8	52	63
Team meeting time is utilized for planning interdisciplinary curriculum activities. (55/62 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	6	1	19	21	15	62
Negative student behaviors are seldom improved by teacher collaboration. (58/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	41	17	2	2	1	63
Sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs. (63/63 agree to strongly agree)	0	0	0	18	45	63
Collaboration has helped me become a more confident teacher. (61/61 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	5	25	31	61
The team believes it can solve any team problems it encounters through its collaborative efforts. (61/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	2	14	34	13	63
The teaming structure/process has enhanced collegial relations. (59/61 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	2	6	22	31	61
The teaming process weakens the teacher’s individuality and creativity. (63/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	35	28	0	0	0	63
Collaboration on instructional strategies is a regular discussion item in team meetings. (57/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	3	3	16	26	15	63

Collaboration was perceived by the respondents to be a key item in the importance of teaming in the schools' achievement in becoming a Blue Ribbon School. Ninety percent of the respondents (57/63) felt "collaboration on instructional strategies is a regular discussion item in team meetings." All respondents (63/63 or 100%) agreed, "sharing the same group of students facilitated teacher collaboration on student needs." This statement had the second highest total for the strongly agree category (45/63) in the entire survey. Another collaborative statement, "the team believes it can solve any team problems it encounters through its collaborative efforts" had 96.8% of the responses (61/63) in the agree somewhat (14), agree (34), to strongly agree (13) categories. Collaboration was the focus in these statements on instructional strategies, sharing the same group of students and solving problems as a team, which were perceived as significant in the school's teaming efforts.

Other teaming statements' responses that involved collaboration and its perceived importance included "team meeting time is utilized for planning interdisciplinary curriculum activities," which had (55/62) or 88.7% agreement responses. The statement, "the teaming structure/process has enhanced collegial relations" had 96.6% (59/61) agreement among respondents. All respondents (61/61) concurred, "collaboration has helped me become a more confident teacher." In the responses noted in Table 2, the highest ranked survey statements highlighted collaboration's impact on common planning time, sharing the same group of students, enhanced collegial relations, and enhanced teacher's confidence. The results from these survey statements reflected the high ranking for "teaming provides opportunity for teacher collaboration," which was one of the two top ranked teaming items and reflected the respondents' perceptions on the impact of teaming at their Blue Ribbon Schools.

Another perceived area of significance on how teaming impacted these schools' exemplary status dealt with the teamed teachers' influence on students' achievement (see Table 3). Respondents ranked "teaming enhances teachers' ability to influence student learning" as an important team item, positively with 42 of the 63 surveys (67%).

Teaming enhances teachers' ability to influence student learning. Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1	2	3	4	5	
	SD	D	AS	A	SA	
Teachers believe that they can positively affect all students' learning through the teaming process. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	11	27	25	63
Teacher efficacy in teaching his/her subject has been negatively impacted by the teaming structure. (60/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	38	22	3	0	0	63
Serious and sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning happen primarily inside subject departments. (46/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	7	39	13	4	0	63
Teaming makes no significant difference in most of our students' learning. (61/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	40	21	2	0	0	63
Collegiality enhances teachers' instructional strategies. (62/62 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	3	31	28	62
Subject departments are more likely than the teaming structure to promote serious efforts to make substantive change in teaching and learning. (46/62 disagree to strongly disagree)	8	38	10	5	1	62
Teaming contributes to teachers' ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	1	4	29	29	63

All of the respondents' agreed that teachers believe they can positively affect all students' learning through the teaming process. The respondents' perceptions (62/62 or 100%) agreed that "collegiality enhances teachers' instructional strategies" and "teaming

contributes to teachers' ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students" (62/63 or 98.4%), which was also a highly regarded response. Collegiality, teacher efficacy and the students' success appeared to be influenced by teaming.

As Table 3 reveals, the converse or negative statements on teaming's effect of students' learning and teacher efficacy generated little support and thus, indirectly supported teaming's importance. The statement, "teaming makes no significant difference in most of our students' learning" had 61 respondents (96.8%) who disagreed. Likewise, the negatively worded statement regarding teacher efficacy had 95% of its responses (60/63) in the disagree categories.

Teaming's perceived importance on middle school students' success and achievement found in Table 4 was documented in the survey responses from the Blue Ribbon Schools respondents. The survey's data supported and established this - "teaming enhances students' academic achievement," - as the third highest ranked teaming statement with 39 of 63 responses (62%). Several statements designed to assess respondent's perceptions of the impact of teaming on students' achievement were notably positive. For example, the statement that "student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning" drew agreement from 98% of the respondents (61/62). For the statement, "student achievement is a focus of the teachers' individual and team planning," all responses (63/63) were positive. The statement, "teachers' goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement," had similar patterns with 96.8% agreement responses (60/62). Ninety-eight percent of the respondents (62/63) perceived positively that "the team's teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students' achievement" endorsing the team's impact on student achievement. Ninety-five percent of the survey respondents (58/61)

agreed, “the teaming structure has played an important role in our obtaining the Blue Ribbon School Program Status.” It appeared by the high percentage of supportive responses from these exemplary schools’ surveyed respondents that the team structure provided teachers’ team planning to enhance students' learning and achievement.

Table 4
Teaming Enhances Students’ Academic Achievement

Teaming enhances students’ academic achievement. Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1	2	3	4	5	
	SD	D	AS	A	SA	
Teaming does little to enhance the academic achievement of our students. (62/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	46	16	0	0	1	63
Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning. (61/62 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	2	23	36	62
Student achievement is a focus of the teachers’ individual and team planning. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	0	5	33	25	63
State Standards/Assessments Expectations in Math & Reading will weaken teaming utilization. (44/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	20	24	11	5	3	63
In teaming, teachers’ goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement. (60/62 agree somewhat to strongly)	1	1	5	39	16	62
The team’s teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students’ achievement. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	1	0	2	30	30	63
The teaming structure has played an important role in our obtaining the Blue Ribbon School Program Status. (58/61 agree somewhat to strongly)	2	1	10	16	32	61
Teaming is costly and is expendable with achievement requirements of NCLB Act. (53/62 disagree to strongly disagree)	36	17	4	3	2	62
Our school’s teaming process & structure had little impact in gaining the Blue Ribbon School designation. (53/60 disagree to strongly disagree)	27	26	4	2	1	60

Another significant perception of teaming gleaned from the responses of the surveyed exemplary schools’ respondents dealt with the teachers’ influence on student growth and

achievement (see Table 5). The statement, “teaming increases teacher’s impact on student achievement,” highlighted perceived contributions of teaming in the school’s success and possibly, the obtainment of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status.

Table 5
Teaming Increases Teacher’s Impact On Student Achievement.

Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1 SD	2 D	3 AS	4 A	5 SA	
Teaming contributes to teachers’ ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	4	29	29	63
Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning. (61/62 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	2	23	36	62
Collaboration on instructional strategies is a regular discussion item in team meetings. (57/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	3	3	16	26	15	63
Teachers believe that they can positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	0	11	27	25	63
In teaming, teachers’ goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement. (60/62 agree somewhat to strongly)	1	1	5	39	16	62
The team’s teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students’ achievement. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	1	0	2	30	30	63

A supportive statement, “teachers believe that they can positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process” had all 63 responses (100%) in the agreement categories and 52 responses (82%) were either agree (27) or strongly agree (25). Another agreeable response (62/63) for the statement, “teaming contributes to teachers’ ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students” had 58 evenly distributed between agree (29) and strongly agree (29) categories. Another example of the teamed teachers’

influence found in the statement, “student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning,” had 98.3% or 61/62 of the responses in agreement. The statement, “the team’s teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students’ achievement,” captured this positive perception and had 98.4% (62/63) of the responses in agreement with 30 equally found in the agree and strongly agree categories.

How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school?

The second research question focused on the factors important to the implementation of teaming at the surveyed exemplary schools. The factors identified by the respondents as influencing the implementation of teaming included the staff’s focus on children, leadership, and the team’s connectedness affecting staff, students, and parents. These factors appeared consistently across respondents at the exemplary schools and are associated with the middle school philosophy. Student achievement was an important goal in the implementation of teaming.

Staff’s Focus on Children.

The staff’s focus on children was significant to the implementation of teaming as the team’s structure promoted collaboration to accomplish this at the studied exemplary schools. It has been a focal point of the teaming process, the middle school philosophy, and the goal for all students to achieve success. A teacher wrote, “we have an incredible staff who truly cares about students and are committed to providing each child with the best possible

educational experience.” A principal’s written comment supported this as he noted that his school had “an extremely dedicated and student-centered staff and faculty.”

The survey statement, “in teaming, teachers’ goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement,” had 96.7% of the responses (60/62) that agreed. All respondents (100%) supported that “students achievement is the focus of the teachers’ individual and team planning.” The perceptions of the respondents reflected the positive contributions of teaming in influencing the student learning needs, learning of the at-risk students, and increased chance of student achievement. At the surveyed exemplary schools, 100% of the respondents felt teamed teachers expect to enhance each student’s social/emotional development.” All respondents believed that “they can positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process.”

Building and Team Leadership.

Another area of significance that emerged as a key element in the implementation of teaming and the team’s structure was leadership. Both building and team level leadership promoted collaboration which contributed to teaming’s success at the studied exemplary schools. One respondent pointed to the “vision” of the school’s principal, who eagerly embraced initiatives that would benefit students and staff. One teacher noted that good leadership, along with the dedicated staff, provided the school with trust and flexibility that were essential in these efforts. A teacher wrote, “I believe much of our success in attaining Blue Ribbon Status stemmed from the leadership of our principal.” Another teacher at this school reiterated the leadership’s impact, evident because leaders placed a great importance on valuing the expertise, experience and contributions of their faculty to meet the many

needs of the young adolescents. Teaming afforded this opportunity. A teacher who cited “the feelings of connectedness and high morale” in working as a team, captured this by noting “as a school, we seemed to be unified in our desire for excellence, reflecting the drive and leadership of our principal.”

The statement, “our school staff and students exhibit a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other,” had 100% of the respondents in agreement, which encouraged team leadership. All respondents (100%) perceived that “good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibilities for planning, teaching, evaluating curriculum and instruction” and promoted opportunities for leadership among team members. The surveyed respondents felt strongly (98.4% or 62/63) that “our school’s staff is committed to the teaming structure and process,” and supported teacher leadership.

Connectedness Fostered by The Middle School Philosophy.

The middle school philosophy was a significant factor in the implementation of teaming; this philosophy indicated a team structure that promoted collaboration in which teachers, students and parents had “a connectedness” at the studied exemplary schools. Concerning the middle school philosophy, one teacher remarked that teaming gave students a sense of “family” and connected. Most of all, it allowed teachers the time to discuss students, to identify consistent problems, to devise ways to address needs, and to meet together with students. A “we” not “me” attitude, feelings of connectedness and high morale seemed to add to the school’s unified approach to implementation. A teacher summed it up with, “team teaching has been the most important factor in achieving Blue Ribbon School Program status. Our teachers are the second reason. The school functioned as a cooperative

group.” Finally, the teacher noted, “we are a community that is a part of larger communities which are dependent on each other along with a school-wide commitment to excellence.” As schools implemented the middle level philosophy, a teacher wrote that this philosophy was evident by “the willingness and commitment of teachers and administrators to put the needs of students first, and that the teaming approach offers many diverse programs to enhance and encourage student learning at all levels.”

In this study, the third highest ranked teaming statement, “teaming influences the effectiveness of the middle school philosophy,” had 62% of all survey responses (listed in Table 1). Teaming was perceived by the study’s respondents as a key factor in the middle school movement, the middle school philosophy, and its implementation at the studied exemplary schools. As noted in Table 6, survey respondents saw a clear relationship between the middle school philosophy and the implementation of teaming. “Sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs” influenced the staff’s focus on students and their connectedness, and it had all responses in agreement.

Teaming influences the effectiveness of middle school philosophy. Survey Statements	Teaming Influences The Effectiveness Of Middle School Philosophy					Total Survey Responses
	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					
	1 SD	2 D	3 AS	4 A	5 SA	
Common team planning time is not essential for middle schools. (63/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	50	13	0	0	0	63
Sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs. (63/63 agree to strongly agree)	0	0	0	18	45	63
A team’s effectiveness is enhanced by having its teachers’ classrooms located in close proximity to each other. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	8	23	32	63
Our school staff and students exhibit a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	10	29	24	63

Table 6 (continued)

Table 6 Teaming influences the effectiveness of middle school philosophy. Survey Statements	Teaming Influences The Effectiveness Of Middle School Philosophy Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1 SD	2 D	3 AS	4 A	5 SA	
Our team’s teachers expect to enhance each student’s social/emotional development. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	5	31	27	63
In our team’s organization, a sense of community is reflected by the actions of the teachers and students. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly agree)	0	0	7	22	34	63
Good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	0	4	21	38	63
Our school’s staff is committed to the teaming structure and process. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	4	23	35	63
Teaming enhances development of a shared vision between teachers, students and families. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	0	3	26	34	63
Our community supports this school’s teaming practices. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	2	37	23	63
The principal's involvement in teaming is not necessary to promote an effective teaming process. (49/63 disagree to strongly disagree)	19	30	1	10	3	63
Teaming has had a positive impact on team teachers’ professional development and growth. (60/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	3	7	32	21	63

“Our school staff and students exhibit a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other” along with “in our team’s organization, a sense of community is reflected by the actions of the teachers and students” had 100% agreement of the overall

responses. All respondents agreed, “teaming enhances development of a shared vision between teachers, students and families,” which connected and tied the middle school philosophy to the team’s implementation. The connection between implementation of teaming and the middle school philosophy at these exemplary schools seemed apparent in the survey’s overall responses that were also endorsed by the community’s support of the teaming practices (98% agreement).

Of special interest in Table 6, several of the survey items appear to link the middle school philosophy and leadership with the implementation of teaming. For example, “our team’s teachers expect to enhance each student’s social/emotional development,” had all its responses in the agreement categories and supported the middle school philosophy’s importance and established teaming. The perceived significance of the middle school philosophy and teaming was found in the statement, “good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching and evaluating curriculum and instruction,” and had 100% of the survey responses in agreement. The respondents’ perceptions found in the surveyed exemplary schools’ responses appeared to promote leadership among team members and to endorse implementation of teaming. The statement, “our school’s staff is committed to the teaming structure and process,” had 98% of the respondents (62/63) in agreement and appears essential to the middle school’s philosophy and implementation of teaming.

In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria?

The data suggest the four key components of teaming played critical roles in the success of the respondents’ schools. Specifically, the components include shared grouping,

responsibilities (planning, teaching, curriculum, etc.), common schedule and planning time, and occupying the same area of the building. The contributions of each of these components to the exemplary schools' teaming and students' success were the focus of this question and discussed below.

Common Schedule and Planning Time.

Respondents identified several positive impacts that a common schedule and planning time provided. First and perhaps most significantly, it afforded them opportunities to communicate and collaborate and to focus on the needs of their students. One teacher noted that cooperation and communications were important factors. Common planning time and the same schedule focused instruction and curriculum. Another teacher added, "effective communication among teachers, counselors and administrators is a vital factor for the school's success and continued improvement," and this was reinforced by the teacher's statement, "this is absolutely enhanced by common, daily team planning time."

This notion of a common schedule and planning time as a key element was reinforced in the survey statements found in Table 7, "Teaming improves better communications between teachers." The survey statement, "adequate common teaching planning time enhances instruction," endorsed this and had 62 of 63 (98.4%) respondents who agreed and supported common planning time's benefit. "Teacher communications with students and their parents/guardians are effectively accomplished through the teaming process," had 98.4% of the survey responses (62/63) spread across the agree categories and supported the impact of common plan time and the benefit of team's collaboration and communications.

Table 7

Teaming Improves Better Communications Between Teachers

Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaming improves better communications between teachers.	SD	D	AS	A	SA	
Adequate common teaching planning time enhances instruction. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	2	8	52	63
The increased number of building level meetings required by team planning is too demanding. (42/61 disagree to strongly disagree)	9	33	14	4	1	61
New teachers have few opportunities to address their needs in team meetings. (56/62 disagree to strongly disagree)	32	24	5	1	0	62
Teacher communications with students and their parents/guardians are effectively accomplished through the teaming process. (62/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	12	19	31	63

Shared Group of Students.

A team implies a group of people and in middle school teaming, this is perceived as a group of two or more teachers who share a common group of students. One teacher noted that having the “same group of students and flexible schedule,” was important for a team as well as “common planning time and individual planning time.” The shared group of students was found in “strong teams” and was a contributing factor in the examined exemplary schools’ success. A teacher at a Blue Ribbon School with a school population of 25% special education and 1% ESL, contended they achieved success with their strong teaming. Sharing the same group of students connected the components of the definition of teaming.

Perceived advantages of a team’s shared students found in the survey responses included the statement, “sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs” had 100% in agreement. The surveyed respondents’ supportive perceptions

of shared groups in their team's organization echoed this in the statements, "a sense of community is reflected by the actions of the teachers and students" with 100% in agreement (63/63) as well as "teaming enhances development of a shared vision between teachers, students and families."

Planning, Teaching, and Evaluating Curriculum and Instruction.

The teaming component's criteria that dealt with responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area promoted interdisciplinary opportunities. One respondent committed that teaming allowed the "freedom to explore new and innovative methods of teaching and encouraged teachers to share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction." Another teacher cited teaming as: "creativity in providing unique and exciting learning and extra-curricular opportunities which motivate students to take full advantage of the educational offerings at school." A third teacher emphasized "continued work with mapping curriculum to state standards was a key to their success and working with identified students for remediation." Teamed teachers shared curriculum responsibilities and many of the teamed groups included special education students.

As Table 8 illustrates, the interdisciplinary statements, "teaming improves planning for interdisciplinary curricular activities" and "teaming promotes an interdisciplinary curriculum," had only 40% of the ranked team survey responses. The statement, "good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction," had 100% of the respondents in agreement and supported this specific component of the team's definition. This is perceived to be a very

important part of the middle school philosophy, especially in the interdisciplinary approach to enhance curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.

Table 8
Teaming Promotes
Interdisciplinary Curriculum
And Curricular Activities

Survey Statements	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree					Total Survey Responses
	1 SD	2 D	3 AS	4 A	5 SA	
Teaming improves planning for interdisciplinary curricular activities & Teaming promotes an interdisciplinary curriculum. (39/61 agree somewhat to strongly)	3	19	17	8	14	61
Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning. (61/62 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	1	2	23	36	62
Our middle school does not provide additional common team planning time for teachers' efforts to do interdisciplinary instruction. (42/62 disagree to strongly disagree)	22	20	8	9	3	62
Good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction. (63/63 agree somewhat to strongly)	0	0	4	21	38	63

In teaming, teachers' perception of shared responsibilities has promoted collaboration and empowered the team's teachers in planning, teaching and evaluating curriculum and instruction. "Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning" had 98.4% of responses in the agree categories, which also related to the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction that focused on the students' success.

Teams Sharing the Same Area of the Building.

The fourth criteria of teaming emphasized in George and Alexander's definition (1993) dealt with the importance of the team of teachers and their rooms being in the same area of the building or in close proximity to each other. One survey respondent noted "there is a system, a net if you will, that covers students at this middle school. The professional staff and support staff, as well as the administration, work at great lengths to make sure this is a safe place for kids."

Sharing the same area of the building had been addressed in the survey's statement, "a team's effectiveness is enhanced by having its teachers' classrooms located in close proximity to each other," and had 100% of the responses in agreement. Close proximity of the teamed teachers' rooms in the building appeared to enhance the team structure and support of the team's schedule and activities. In sharing the same students and the same area of the building, staff perceived this to provide an efficient instructional environment. The perception of a team's sense of community promoted by the actions of teachers and students can be reinforced when the team shares an area of the building with efficient use of facilities and instructional time. This is more defined in the case study's data.

The Case Study's Finding

The case study was completed at a central Pennsylvania rural middle school that received Blue Ribbon School status in 1995-96. The school is located in a school district that draws students from two small boroughs and an adjoining township. This community's population is approximately 17,450 and 22% of the composition is under age eighteen. The

median income is approximately \$37,835 with job opportunities at various businesses, industries, and higher education institutions.

Beginning in the 1985-86 school year, this middle school had teaming with two teams per grade in 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Teaming continued for the next two decades, and the Blue Ribbon School Program recognized this middle school in the 1995-96 school year. Currently, there are 600 students at this school with a minority population that consists of 18% of its total middle school population of which 11% are Black and 5% are Hispanic. The school has 29% of its students in the economically disadvantage category. In 2005-06, this middle school became a PAGE One school. This new designation eliminated the previous teaming arrangements for grades 7 and 8 while retaining the original middle school teaming practices in 6th grade. This PAGE One initiative was adopted as part of the school's effort to close the achievement gap between all student subgroups and to meet NCLB requirements.

The researcher conducted this on-site research by collecting the data from voluntary interviews with staff that were coordinated by the principal. Fifteen separate teacher interviews were completed as well as a sixth grade team interview with six teachers for a total of 21 teachers. The individual interviews included six 8th grade teachers, seven 7th grade teachers, and two 6th grade teachers. Six teachers from the 6th grade were a part of the team interview. The assistant principal was also formally interviewed. The principal was informally interviewed for this study through meetings and phone conversations prior to and after the on-site study.

The original interview questions were adjusted to add discussion about the inaugural year of the new Page One structure to which this middle school had recently committed as part of their reform efforts. This new organizational structure changed the school from a

totally teamed structure for all grades to the reformed 7th and 8th grade structure that included double periods of math. It moved these grades away from teams of 100-shared students with five or six teachers. This change still provided for double plan periods, with one being the teacher's individual plan. The 7th and 8th grades had grade level meetings for teachers, rather than smaller team meetings found in the 6th grade. Intradepartmental planning occurred on alternating days of the cycle during the second plan period.

The 6th grade in this middle school maintained two teams with approximately 100 students and five or six teachers on each team. Teacher schedules included the individual plan every day and the intradepartmental meetings on alternating (opposite) days of when the 6th grade had their team meetings.

As one of the goals of becoming a PAGE One middle school, the school's staff and administration committed to improving student achievement by increasing instructional time in math (double period) and reading (separate reading class coordinated with language arts class plus Sustained Silent Reading - SSR) within the school's daily schedule for all 7th and 8th graders. Subject teachers meet in intradepartmental meetings for curriculum planning and designing, analyzing and pacing lessons in preparation for their quarterly assessments designed to address the state standards/anchors and benchmarks of the PSSA. This middle school, as part of a rural district, has maintained consistent achievement over the years before and after its designation as a Blue Ribbon School. The recent concern has been the increasing minority population and other subgroups. These students are the focus of the school's PAGE One initiative to close the achievement gap with the overall student population.

The survey data were used to focus the questions used in the case study interviews and focus group. The interviews examined these questions: (1) How and in what way was

teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria?

The following statements and phrases represent the perceptions of the interviewed staff about the impact of teaming on obtaining exemplary school status. The teachers representing grades six, seven, and eight and all subject areas, a team of sixth grade teachers, and the assistant principal were candid in their responses about teaming's impact and the changes that have occurred from its past purely teamed middle school. The interviewed 8th grade staff had teaching experience from four years to 26 years, the 7th grade staff had teaching experience ranging from first-year to 32 years, and 6th grade staff's teaching experience ranged from seven years to 34 years.

How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status?

The overwhelming perceptions of the interviewed staff at this exemplary school can be captured by statements like, "teaming was very important" and "[it] provided time to work together, provided support between teachers and the students, and having the same group allowed opportunities to discuss students' concerns, strengths and weaknesses and to meet these adolescents' needs." The interviewed staff often concurred with these sentiments and emphasized that having the same group of students enhanced "getting to know students and staff better, as well as teachers helping each other, working well together, being a good

support system and focusing on socialization/support of students.” These recognized perceptions in the quantitative study consistently appeared to support the teaming approach. The importance of teaming was framed in the following themes: the teachers’ ability to influence student learning, the opportunity for teacher collaboration, the enhancement of students’ academic achievement, and the leadership opportunities for team members.

The Teachers’ Ability to Influence Student Learning.

The teachers’ ability to influence student learning through teaming was described as an important factor of the school’s success both in the previously reported survey items and now in the case study’s findings. A vast majority of interviewed respondents felt strongly that teachers believe they can positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process and that teaming contributes to teachers’ ability to positively influence learning of at-risk students. As the assistant principal noted, “some of the most important recommendations have come from peers/colleagues, and these suggestions and strategies improved teaching to help students and their learning styles.” The 6th grade team members echoed this, noting the obvious “importance of sharing ideas, being a learning community, and practicing shared instructional strategies that work and target the needs of all students.” Interdisciplinary themes have promoted key concepts across the curriculum and helped improve students’ understanding. Community service, science and social studies have been key areas of the interdisciplinary themes.

The teachers’ perceptions that teaming enhanced their ability to influence student learning were found consistently across respondents. As one 8th grade teacher noted, “teaming permits opportunities to do a better job as a teacher, gives teachers a lot more

confidence, enables ideas to be bounced off other team members (especially for new teachers) and creates a team atmosphere with better communications.” There was considerable unanimity across staff at all grade levels that such teaming arrangements were especially beneficial to novice teachers. Respondents noted “teaming is a definite advantage as a first year teacher” and “...is very good for new teachers.”

Teaming Provides Opportunity for Teacher Collaboration.

Teaming was also seen as providing opportunities for teacher collaboration. A vast majority of the interviewed staff felt strongly that adequate common plan time had enhanced instruction and sharing the same group of students facilitated teacher collaboration on student needs. The teachers were consistent in their views on teaming’s impact on teacher collaboration. One teacher with over 20 years experience stated, “that’s what it’s all about!” Another teacher with 12 years experience stated “it was a key part of teaming, tied things together, got ideas/better ideas from other staff, helped teachers get out of a comfort zone and take risks.”

Collaboration on instructional strategies became regularly discussed in team meetings as noted by respondents. A member of the 6th grade team stated, “they planned out the entire week of plans and coordinated test days.” Another teacher with 28 years experience cited along with coordinating of tests, projects and homework assignments, “the team discussed student behaviors and helpful strategies in knowing and understanding each child.” A learning support teacher with 26 years experience noted as teams met daily, “teachers discussed students’ needs and match curriculum and remediation for students.” The interviewed educators’ perceptions reflected the team belief that it can solve any team

problems it encounters through its collaborative efforts. This was reinforced by an 8th grade social studies teacher's reflection on the curriculum and instruction found in the team's collaboration that "tied things together, got ideas/better ideas from other teachers, and allowed them to get out of comfort zone and to take risk." One 7th grade science teacher with eight years experience noted, "bonding with co-workers as smaller teams and working together empowered them to help resolve team needs."

The 7th grade teachers agreed with teaming's collaboration opportunities, and they felt strongly that this was definitely important, especially with interdisciplinary activities. It was even "more important when they were teamed and shared the same students" prior to the structure as a PAGE One School, because it allowed for "more creativity." The 6th grade staff members concurred with all the teachers in the other grades about the importance of teaming in providing opportunities for teacher collaboration to help student achievement. The 6th grade teachers still had team planning on three days during the six-day cycle to meet as a team. They have enjoyed the opportunities to collaborate, and a math teacher stated, "I can not imagine how to work without the team." In teaming, "collaboration has helped each teacher help one another because of the individual strengths that are shared."

The assistant principal, reiterating the staff's views, also supported the importance of teaming to the school's success and the impact teacher collaboration had on the whole program. He commended his staff "on their rotation of leadership within the teams and the roles that each team member played in the team process, which reinforced the importance of collaboration in addressing the interdisciplinary curriculum, discipline, and parent contacts." Likewise, the instructional needs of the students were an important consideration in the team's planning and collaboration on instructional strategies. The assistant principal noted,

“teaming motivated students to do their work. Students did not slip through the cracks as they were placed in a tutorial setting and had to earn their way out by getting better grades.” If the team had a formal activity such as a fieldtrip or intramurals, then one of the team’s teachers in their collaborative efforts would stay behind with those students involved in the tutorial program.

Teaming Enhances Students’ Academic Achievement.

Another important factor associated with teaming was enhanced student achievement. Respondents felt strongly that student instructional needs were an important consideration in the team planning and that student achievement was the ultimate goal of the teachers’ individual and team planning. Teamed teachers’ goals tended to reflect realistic expectations of student achievement, and they believed that their teaming structure had improved the chances of students’ achievement.

Perceptions of teaming’s importance on the school’s success and student achievement were consistent for all staff at each grade level. The teachers noted that teaming enhanced student academic achievement because team meetings had increased staff communications, which were important in “discussing and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students.” One new 7th grade teacher, who was a former student at this middle school, felt teaming definitely impacted students’ achievement and preparation for high school. He and others noted that teaming aided “the identification of students with difficulties and needs.” A teacher with 10 years teaching experience expressed that “it allowed for more remediation within the team’s schedule.” A first-year science teacher felt teaming promoted opportunities to discuss a variety of strategies and techniques that helped meet the students’ needs and

achievement. A young teacher noted that “teaming helped students by letting them know that teachers are behind them and support them.”

The 6th grade team of teachers affirmed the importance of teaming to enhance academic achievement noting, “it has helped students do better.” The team espoused the advantages of the “team’s flexibility and empowerment to change their schedule,” to meet the students’ needs. The flexibility to change the schedule was highlighted by respondents from all grade levels. One teacher on the 6th grade team mentioned that the “students knew their teachers talked about their progress and achievement.” Other grade level respondents and the assistant principal also noted this. A sixth grade math teacher stated that “all students can’t be expected to do well in all subjects, but having five or six teachers to help with needs on the team has been helpful to all students in any subject, especially those who have struggled.” The assistant principal endorsed the prior statements noting, “teaming helped motivate students to achieve.” In the team’s discussions, they “constantly discuss students’ strengths and weaknesses and were open about letting students know that they were talking about them.” In fact, “kids have been called into their team meeting to address their achievement or behavior.” The assistant principal stated “teams know their students and know everything about them,” which helped students succeed with their different learning styles and needs.

Several respondents also felt teaming contributed to teachers’ ability to positively influence student learning. They held strong beliefs that they could positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process. The team’s flexibility of instruction with the rotations of academic resource time provided enrichment and addressed specific needs of all students. Learning support students were given additional focused attention in the team’s

academic resource period. One 6th grade science teacher noted, “when personality clashes occurred, the team had opportunities to move students.” The interviewed teachers felt similarly about the impact on student achievement in the teaming environment, as one teacher with 10 years experience mentioned, “teachers were positive role models for their students.” The respondents perceived that students saw the team of teachers working together with a personal, caring attitude toward each other, and this motivated the students to work hard. As one respondent noted in some cases, “one teacher may not have clicked with a child, but another teacher would provide the needed support for the student.” Another new math teacher noted that “all teachers pushed the individual child to succeed in their small teams.” One social studies teacher with 12 years experience added, “teachers have learned a lot at team meetings about students’ strengths and weaknesses. They sometimes talked about the negatives but more about the positives and concentrated their efforts on the positive approach.”

Leadership Opportunities in Teaming.

Several respondents alluded to the fact that “the leadership and team roles rotated with various members,” and the 6th grade team’s staff noted that they were the “liaison with parent contacts, administration, team’s homework hotline, the recorder of team minutes, newsletter, activities, showcase and bulletin board displays.” It was noted “all team members helped, pitched in, and took turns in the various roles.”

Teachers from each grade level concurred that leadership opportunities in teaming benefited the team. Staff members were encouraged to take a more active approach as teaming empowered them to do their own thing as a team. The 8th grade respondents cited

shared decision making, especially with interdisciplinary projects, and taking turns as the team leader as two primary leadership opportunities.

However, one special education teacher in 7th grade dissented from the majority view and felt that her new role as a language arts teacher in the PAGE One structure was better than her previous role in teaming as a special education support teacher. She was now a co-teacher with a reading teacher who shared a common group of students. This teacher felt more involved and accepted when teaching all students since the special education students were now totally included in the regular classes. Previously, special education students were pulled out for math, language arts and reading with only the special education teacher. In the PAGE One, structure where the intent was to close the achievement gap between the subgroups including those students identified with special needs, this language arts teacher and a reading teacher shared the planning and the instruction for all students. She felt more empowered and had more leadership in this new structure as co-teacher.

How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school?

This second research question focused on what factors were important in the implementation of teaming at the case study's exemplary school. Key factors in their effort to implement teaming centered on the administrative leadership's influence and the middle school philosophy. In discussing the importance of implementing teaming, staff at all grades emphasized that students' needs had to be addressed. Prior to their middle school's creation, the junior high was the organization structure. One teacher with over 20 years experience noted "the biggest difference between the middle school compared to the old junior high was

that in teaming, the staff was closer and kids became family.” The implementation of teaming had provided all kinds of support, helped to identify students’ needs right away and to gain different viewpoints and strategies that helped students. Comments such as: “knowing the children on the team, understanding their issues, discussing their behaviors helped them with coordinating services with the team, guidance, and even for homework of absent students” reinforced the implementation and importance of teaming. Teaming facilitated coordination of projects, tests and homework, which made it easier on the students.

The assistant principal’s experiences and perceptions reflected the factors that were important in teaming’s implementation. He had been a 7th grade math teacher on a team at this school when they achieved the Blue Ribbon School Status. He concurred with the others on the importance of the middle school philosophy and noted that in addition, “teaming provided a wonderful, refreshing opportunity to work with colleagues. The collaboration in the double prep/team planning time addressed a lot of student needs, interdisciplinary, and thematic units.” The teams were “always able to plan tests and homework schedules that centered around the students.” Their daily planning and leadership enabled, “a lot of communications and advocacy for the students.” The assistant principal noted that in his opinion, “teaming helped lead them to their Blue Ribbon School Program status.”

The Leadership Influence of the Principal and Teachers.

The building principal was instrumental in the creation of the teaming structure and with facilitating the staff’s acceptance of the middle school philosophy. The principal clearly retained trust and credibility with the staff at this school. The teachers supported the

administration's new PAGE One initiatives in an effort to close the subgroups' achievement gap with all students as required in the NCLB Act. The building principal's positive leadership motivated the staff to embrace this new initiative, just as they wholeheartedly committed to the teaming effort earlier.

The strong school level leadership empowered teachers to take active roles in the implementation of the school's designated teaming and now in the current PAGE One structure found in 7th and 8th grades. The administration promoted the concept of team leadership that first developed with its implementation of the teaming effort. An 8th grade teacher with 12 years experience noted in the implementation of teaming "everyone pulled together and with the administration's support, even got the community involved." The assistant principal recalled, "administrators met with teachers at their team meetings and encouraged rotation of leadership on the teams." He agreed that "teaming allowed more teacher leadership opportunities." Another 8th grade teacher with 20 years experience expressed that "the teams bounced ideas around and went to the principal and received administrative feedback." One teacher with 22 years experience compared the old junior high setup prior to the middle school's teaming as teaching in isolation. The administrator's support of the middle school opened up the window of opportunity as a team to do a better job as a teacher and to empower them. Teachers provided support to each other and especially to the new staff. A member of the 6th grade team reflecting on leadership roles said, "we took turns in the team leadership, shared team minutes across the entire middle school, and discussed and solved problems."

The Middle School Philosophy.

“Teaming influences the effectiveness of the middle school philosophy” was a factor found in the surveyed exemplary schools’ responses (noted in previous quantitative data) and reinforced by the respondents in the case study. The data from the survey and interviewed respondents indicated that the school staff and students exhibited a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other, and that the school’s staff was committed to the teaming structure and process, which are key components of the middle school philosophy. The team organization appeared to engender a sense of connectedness and this was reflected by the collaboration and actions of the teachers, parents and students. The assistant principal noted in talking about teaming, “it’s the whole thing, ... it promoted a more nurturing environment for this school’s 6th grade teams as it has acted as a good transition into the middle school, which the students liked.” A reading teacher with four years experience stated, “students at this age level are dealing with the need to be a part of a group but are also preparing to be on their own in the high school with the various subject areas.”

The 6th grade staff felt strongly about implementing teaming and its importance in the middle school philosophy. One of the very experienced teachers on the interviewed 6th grade team said, “if no teaming, then it is not a middle school, and teaming is key to the middle school philosophy.” A 6th grade math teacher noted that “teaming was originally designed to meet the needs of these students in the smaller groupings and allowed teachers to focus on all students in teaching the low, middle and high ability students.” One 6th grade science teacher mentioned that the “middle school has the toughest age group to teach” which impacted their implementation of teaming.

The respondents viewed the middle school philosophy as an important part in this school's implementation of teaming. A sixth grade teacher with almost 30 years experience stated, "teaming is the middle school philosophy and backbone of the program." The interviewed 6th grade team of teachers reiterated this as well and noted, "the team looks at the total child's needs and discusses students' difficulties." They meet with parents in team conferences and collaborate on "what works and doesn't work" within the team meetings. The team members also emphasized, "the time and commitment with the teaming schedule" promoted the middle school philosophy's importance. Daily team planning enhanced field trip, activities, events, promoted bonding with co-workers and with group/team of students, enabled teachers to see the other side of students, and encouraged parent-team conferences.

A seventh grade teacher with four years of experience believed that the implementation of teaming while "very important in influencing the effectiveness of the middle school philosophy, is also key to this age group and its school setting." Other interviewed 7th and 8th grade staff affirmed, "teaming is the middle school philosophy" and "very important in meeting the students' needs" as a factor in its implementation. The 8th grade teachers reiterated the other grades' views on the importance of teaming tied to the middle school philosophy that influenced its implementation. Several staff noted, "teaming is the middle school philosophy and focuses on the whole child," implying that it is impossible to implement one without the other and was key in the implementation of teaming.

In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria?

This question examined and focused on the specifically defined criteria for the interdisciplinary team organization as a way of organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share: 1) same group of students; 2) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area; 3) the same schedule; and 4) the same area of the building. These criteria for teaming and common team planning time were further explored in the case study and examined in the context of the school's success in becoming a Blue Ribbon School program.

Shared Group of Students.

Across respondents, it was consistently noted that keeping the same group of students together was considered to be very important in the students' achievement and school's success. An 8th grade teacher with 26 years experience felt that having the same group of students on a team was very important, because "teaming leads to consistency, getting to know students very well and in hearing different teacher viewpoints of each child, and helps to find out more about the students and patterns of their behaviors." The school's staff echoed this view.

Respondents cited numerous benefits derived from having the same group of students: consistency, discussing students' strengths and weaknesses, working together on strategies to help improve students' achievement, re-teaching material and providing accommodations. In working with the same group of students, a teacher with seven years experience expressed that "the team worked together on strategies to improve the students'

achievement.” Collaboration enabled the teamed teachers to become aware of students’ strengths and weaknesses. A social studies teacher with 12 years experience felt that “staff knew the kids very well” and noted that having a shared group “made it easier to discuss with colleagues and parents the students’ needs and desired accommodations.” As part of a team responsible for sharing approximately 100 students, one 8th grade language arts teacher with over 20 years of experience stated that “having the same group was very important in teaming and was also very important in obtaining the Blue Ribbon School status.” She cited “better communications with parents” and having a smaller, intimate group ensured that “nothing fell through the cracks.”

A new teacher expressed “there is so much going on in an adolescent’s life at the middle school level.” In sharing the team’s common group and knowing the students well, “teachers recognize a child’s changes faster as discussed in the team’s meetings.” Teachers gave feedback on all students and provided the support needed. According to the staff, all students benefited from daily team planning and academic resource periods. It was especially helpful in having the same students and being able to recognize students’ needs in a timely manner.

Having the same group of students on a team provided flexibility and the scheduled daily team meeting afforded the staff “greater opportunities to discuss team needs and added to their effectiveness.” This was especially the case for 6th grade students, in their first year in the middle school, whose teachers focused on the students’ organizational skills. When compared to the students’ past elementary school setting, students came into the middle school and encountered multiple classes/subjects and other differences that were a major adjustment. Use of an academic resource period was consistently cited as key for

remediation opportunities, one-on-one, and other adaptations made to meet students' needs. The assistant principal concurred with the staff on their statements about sharing the same group of students, which helped "to meet students' needs with suggested strategies and various teaching techniques in team planning that enhanced students' motivation and helped them succeed."

Shared Planning, Teaching, and Evaluating Curriculum and Instruction.

The second component of teaming's definition dealt with the way of organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area. This was usually associated with interdisciplinary planning. "Team members took on given roles of their strengths and took turns as team leader each year," stated a language arts teacher with 22 years experience. The assistant principal felt "very comfortable with teaming's shared responsibilities" for planning, teaching and evaluating curriculum and instruction. The assistant principal noted "teaming tied things together and made it fun for the students with the interrelated activities tied to the interdisciplinary curriculum." He cited, "teaming improved planning and promoted the interdisciplinary planning and activities," and continued, "we look at things to improve as we never stay the same. We either get better or get worse."

The 6th grade team noted, "teaming reinforced key concepts that were explained in multiple subject areas in different ways, which helped students grasp the concepts and increased understanding." This was achieved through the team's interdisciplinary planning and activities, but as the focus has changed on curriculum and assessments tied to state

standards, there has been less emphasis on interdisciplinary curriculum. The 6th grade teachers have continued the interdisciplinary approach and felt it worked better prior to the changed school structure. One science teacher stated, “it is extremely important and can still be done even with the new school structure.” A math teacher cited that “everything was done as a team including fieldtrips, meetings, thematic units, reading units and more teaching across the curriculum occurred.” Some thematic units are now difficult to do as limited time has teachers focused on writing and implementing the reading and math curriculum tied to state standards/anchors and benchmarks to meet the NCLB requirements. The new PAGE One structure with its objective to close the achievement gap for all subgroups afforded more time to focus planning on the state standards/anchors, benchmarks and quarterly tests which were established to measure students’ success in the curriculum areas of math and reading. Several staff noted they liked the opportunity to plan together with the same subject teachers, but didn’t like the pressure, faster pace, and concern to achieve the benchmarks.

The 7th and 8th grade staff alluded to a difference in the large number of field trips when they were teamed and having only to coordinate for 100 students as compared to the present grade level approach that involves 200 students for any fieldtrip. A math teacher with 32 years experience revealed that the team of teachers in teaming had known what everybody was teaching across the curriculum, and now with the new structure, this awareness has become more difficult. Other 7th and 8th grade staff members concurred and mentioned this change in interdisciplinary awareness when they discussed the new school structure’s approach and its focus on student assessments. The small groups in teaming (100 students) made interdisciplinary activities such as joint service projects, fieldtrips, and other activities

manageable. One new 7th grade teacher felt the joint planning had been very beneficial in his first year.

The 6th, 7th, and 8th grade staff members felt that past teaming promoted and improved planning of interdisciplinary experiences. One reading teacher with seven years experience noted, “all staff had responsibilities on the team and participated in the team planning. This made it easier in their communication, which reinforced the interdisciplinary curriculum and its associated activities.” One math teacher, with 20 years experience, noted these interdisciplinary planned activities were very creative with the teachers on the team and were enhanced each year. One 8th grade teacher pointed out that in teaming “cross-curricular assessments” were done in their thematic work with key concepts reinforced and assessed in more than one subject. In the new structure, although grade level meetings involved a large number of teachers, they still have had a keen interest in interdisciplinary planning and attempted to do their “local stream study” that was a team generated interdisciplinary activity. Teaming’s importance in planning interdisciplinary units, fieldtrips and activities was noted across the grades. Thematic units, traditionally a part of teaming, have given way to a mandate to improve PSSA test scores.

Common Schedule and Planning Time.

The third component of teaming’s definition, “organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share the same schedule and having common team planning time,” was critical in the team process as perceived by the staff. Three 8th grade staff members having 20 or more years experience felt “having the same schedule was essential and so very important in the team concept.” According to a language arts teacher with 22 years experience, “without

common plan time, teaming would not have worked.” An 8th grade reading teacher noted, “teaming has been much more effective with the double block of common planning and individual planning time.” One 7th grade teacher with 32 years of teaching stated, “common planning time was extremely important and a wonderful experience.” She stated that her team “had the perfect team with excellent teacher leaders who knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses.” Other 7th grade staff echoed its importance in daily interdisciplinary planning, parent-teacher conferencing and other team building opportunities.

The 6th grade staff also noted that the “same schedule and common planning time was important, beneficial, and critical in teaming.” It had been essential in coordinating all the previously stated interdisciplinary and student-centered needs. It provided communication opportunities that addressed “the students’ needs, discussion on shared ideas, coordinated tests/homework, teaching strategies, parental conferences and other feedback on schedule.” The 6th grade team “enjoyed working together and felt this enhanced unity within the building.” The assistant principal summed it up: “The same schedule and common planning time has been critical in teaming. It has been a key factor in running an effective program and has been well received in the community.” The administration met with teams at least once a week. Parent and student conferences with teachers during team planning time were common and promoted positive public relations with the community and were a selling point as well for the School Board’s support.

Teams Sharing the Same Area of the Building.

Data from the case study supported the fourth component of teaming’s definition, “organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share the same area of the building.” The

assistant principal noted “it was ideal to have teams/grades in same areas of the building. Currently, this has occurred for some grade level teams.” It was noted that the middle school’s new building design allowed for grade level floors with the first floor for 6th grade, 7th grade on the second floor, and 8th grade on the top floor. One 6th grade teacher with 28 years experience felt “it has been important to be together in same area as a team. Having lockers in close proximity of the team and having older students in other parts or their own area of the building were key points.” It also helped with discipline, made passing time efficient, encouraged teachers to watch hall interactions, kept older students away from the younger group, and made it safer according to the 6th grade team. “It is really nice!” noted a 6th grade teacher.

The teachers at other grade levels concurred with the assistant principal and 6th grade staff on team’s importance of being in same area of the building. In particular, the 7th grade has currently been spread over two floors, but they will have their own floor in the new building design. Similar ideas were reinforced by the 8th grade staff’s comments: “When team’s rooms have been close together, students were efficiently in and out of the classrooms and changing of classes went swiftly.” One 8th grade teacher cited, “this reduced lost instructional time.” It had been especially important that the 8th grade rooms were located together “making it easier for interactions between the students and teachers in the 8th grade wing.”

“Teaming improves better communications between teachers” was important in all aspects of the teaming definition’s importance, even though it only ranked in the middle of the survey statements found in the quantitative data. In contrast, one teacher commented, “cooperation and communications were important factors of teaming in the school’s success

and Blue Ribbon School status.” The majority of surveyed and interviewed respondents felt strongly that adequate common teaching planning time enhanced instruction and teacher communications with students and their parents/guardians and were effectively accomplished through the team process.

The educators’ perceptions and statements supporting communications were found throughout this exemplary school with only one negative view by a special education teacher who felt isolated because she taught only the special needs students in separate reading, math, and language arts classes. The staff overwhelmingly agreed that teaming improves communications among teachers. A social studies teacher with 12 years experience noted his team “had good people with good communications skills.” A math teacher with 20 years experience stated “better communications occurred frequently with a daily team plan period and carried into the feedback on students.” A reading teacher with 26 years experience reiterated this with “the frequent team meetings and as a smaller group were able to discuss issues.” Another reading teacher with 4 years experience noted, “teaming builds comraderie among the others on the team” and led to “a more in-depth and integrated study” of their interdisciplinary units.

The 7th grade staff’s comments and similar views reinforced perceptions of the importance of teaming in establishing better communications. The blocked daily team planning time for the small group of teachers supported this. A new teacher noted, “working together in a group of five or six teachers definitely enhanced good communication, especially when compared to the 12 to 14 teachers at the current grade level meetings of this school’s new organization and schedule.” The 6th grade teachers agreed that teaming improved their communications and had a critical impact. One 6th grade science teacher

summarized that “structured team agendas outlined discussion items, improved organization and provided the avenue for better communications on helpful strategies, student needs, and homework projects.” The assistant principal summed up its importance noting, “teaming’s communication tied things together”.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study examined the perceptions of middle level teachers and principals regarding the contributions of teaming to their schools' achievement and designation as a "Blue Ribbon Program Middle School." In the extensive research and literature on teaming at the middle level, studies that have examined the impact of teaming on a school obtaining exemplary middle school status have been limited, especially those that utilize the teaming definition established by George and Alexander (1993). This mixed methods study provided key information, both quantitatively and qualitatively, about the perceived contributions of teaming and its organizational structure. The study entailed surveying Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle Schools and conducting a case study of one of these exemplary middle schools. The case study school had just changed to a PAGE One school from a traditional teaming structure. The case study's middle school retained teaming in its 6th grade level while the 7th and 8th grades switched to grade level meetings/teaming structure. The question considered in this study: does teaming structure, as described by George and Alexander, impact a middle school's attainment of Blue Ribbon School status?

Principally, this study examined the following questions: (1) How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school's and its students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School Program

criteria? The data collected from this mixed methods study of the responding Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle Schools and the interviews conducted at the case study's central Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Middle School addressed these questions. The questionnaire's return rate of the one-time mailing was 47.7% or 63 of 132 surveys, and the case study's 22 participants displayed an openness and eagerness to discuss their teaming practices and their new organizational structure changes.

Summary of Findings

There were three key findings derived from the study of the teachers' and principals' perceptions of teaming and its contributions to their exemplary middle schools. The first perception was that teaming and its structure as defined by George and Alexander (1993) were very important in promoting collaboration. The second linked teaming to the middle school philosophy, which focused on the needs of students and contributed to student achievement at the participants' exemplary schools. The middle school philosophy appeared synonymous with teaming at these studied schools. The third finding connected teaming and its structure to the shared leadership opportunities and collaborative efforts that enhanced student achievement.

The first finding tied teaming to collaboration - an important factor found at the respondents' exemplary middle schools. Collaborative opportunities included curriculum mapping, identifying and working with students who needed remediation, interdisciplinary planning, student/parent programs, and effective utilization of the common team planning time. Over ninety-eight percent of surveyed respondents (98.4%) connected collaborative efforts to student achievement at the exemplary schools. Teaming's collaboration was

encouraged by sharing the same group of students, using flexible scheduling, and exploring new and innovative methods of teaching. Cooperation and communication among administrators, teachers, students and parents on a regular basis were important in teaming's collaborative efforts. At the studied exemplary schools, it was perceived that their incredible staff and administrators' collaboration and commitment provided each child the best possible educational experience, putting the needs of students first, and encouraged strong community involvement and support. The administration encouraged collaboration at these outstanding schools as the teams functioned as cooperative groups and gave students a sense of family and connectedness as reported by 100% of the respondents. Dedicated and student-centered faculty and teamed teaching impacted team's collaboration.

The teams' collaborative efforts were perceived to have impacted and/or were enhanced by all aspects of teaming as defined by George and Alexander (1993): having the same group of teachers who share the same group of students, organizing faculty so that a group of teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area, sharing the same schedule with common planning time, and sharing the same area of the building. The import of collaborative efforts was consistently found in the studied exemplary middle schools' organized teaming. Ninety-five percent of the respondents perceived that teaming's structure, collaboration and ongoing communications affected the schools' and students' success as affirmed by the Blue Ribbon School Program's recognition.

In George and Alexander's teaming definition, the team's common schedule and common planning time encouraged collaboration and teacher efficacy and contributed to the students' achievement and school's success. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents

perceived that common planning time impacted and enhanced teachers' ability to influence student learning. This common planning time was a significant factor in promoting teaming's collaboration that supported teachers' efforts to influence student academic achievement. All survey respondents (100%) noted that when the team's rooms shared the same location within the building, it enhanced the team's effectiveness. Sharing the same group of students also provided and encouraged friendship, teamwork among staff and students, and promoted a sense of family as perceived by all the respondents.

The second finding was teaming's link to the middle school philosophy found in the studied exemplary middle schools and consistently tied to the team's common planning time. This appeared to be important in the implementation and sustainability of teaming at the studied exemplary schools. Common team planning time created by a shared schedule was essential and very important in the effectiveness of the middle school philosophy, teaming, and students' success. Common planning time enhanced instruction as reported by 98% of the respondents. It allowed teachers to work together in a collaborative manner to address the curriculum, share strategies, provide feedback, engage in formal and informal discussions, know the student needs including strengths and weaknesses, and coordinate the interdisciplinary units/activities.

Common planning time provided the opportunity for team communications and collaboration among teachers, and it was perceived to be critical in meeting the needs of the students and the students' achievement. Teaming, the middle school philosophy, and common planning time were perceived essential to create the collaborative efforts to help students achieve success. The middle school philosophy with its teaming promoted

collaboration in the planning processes and helped students achieve success in the studied exemplary middle schools.

The third finding dealt with teamed teachers' leadership that impacted the curriculum, identified student needs, encouraged remediation coordination, and allowed interdisciplinary planning. Teaming promoted shared leadership among the teachers, who utilized it in the team's flexible scheduling, communication with parents (conferences), and organization of fieldtrips and other team activities. The shared leadership promoted by teaming also enhanced collaborative opportunities, and both were perceived factors tied to the team's accomplishments and students' achievement. Teaming provided a wonderful opportunity for teachers and administrators to work together with students and their families. Team leadership and collaborative efforts provided: different viewpoints on various topics and key support for students and their needs; sharing of ideas on what works and doesn't work including effective strategies and difficulties; coordinating tests and other school issues to promote student success and achievement. The studied exemplary schools' unified desire for excellence reflected the drive, vision, and leadership of their principals and staff.

In working together, sharing leadership roles and collaborating as a team, teachers helped each other by providing support to the shared group of students. The teachers' commitment and planning time were driven by the goal to influence student academic achievement. Planning lessons, mapping curriculum and developing assessments with data analysis were shared topics of the teachers' team meetings with their shared common group of students. The focus of the team's leadership and collaborative efforts was on the transition, development, and success of each child in the middle school.

Conclusions

Several key conclusions can be drawn from this study on teaming and are discussed below. The first of these conclusions focuses on the strong connections and associations between teaming and the middle school philosophy. Second, the collaborative efforts and focused communication that characterize middle schools seem to have a vitality that continues on even when teaming was limited or eliminated. Finally, the middle school philosophy, as a viable education model, may be in jeopardy as schools abandon constructs like teaming in an attempt to address the demands of NCLB and AYP.

The first conclusion concerned the importance and centrality of teaming in implementing a middle school philosophy. Based on evidence from this study, it appears that teaming is basically inseparable from the middle school philosophy (Clark & Clark, 1997; Doda & Lounsbury, 1981; Williamson and Johnston, 1999). In other words, without teaming you do not have a middle school. You cannot have a middle school philosophy implemented without provisions for teaming (George & Alexander, 1993). Data from the educators of the exemplary Pennsylvania middle schools were consonant with the extant research literature on the centrality of teaming in the middle school philosophy (David, 1998; George & Alexander, 1993; NSDC, 1999; Swain, 1995).

In the studied exemplary schools, many different contributions were noted, but the association between teaming and the middle school philosophy was a key component that tied many of these Blue Ribbon Program schools together. Teaming and the middle school philosophy found a “connectedness” among the teachers, students, and parents as established in the research (George & Shewey, 1994). Teaming’s implementation mirrored the middle school movement and philosophy that promoted the shared vision among teachers, students

and families and a sense of community (George & Alexander, 1993; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). In the case study, teaming was found to be very important in its success and achievement of their Blue Ribbon status in 1995-96.

As the extant research also notes, teaming and the middle school philosophy appear to be synonymous and an important factor in enhancing academic achievement for all middle level students (George & Alexander, 1993; Hackmann & Valentine, 1998; Hackmann et al., 2002). The exemplary middle schools' responses and the review of the literature clearly showed the perceived connections made within teaming's interdisciplinary curriculum and activities (Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, and Meton, 1993). As established in the exemplary middle schools, teaming has impacted teachers' influence on student learning and achievement (Erb, 1997; Erb & Doda, 1989; Hackmann & Valentine, 1998).

Second, the benefits of the impact of teaming on building collaboration and communications appear to extend beyond the life-span of teaming and the middle school model. This showed up most clearly in the case study wherein teaming was limited or eliminated after a switch to the PAGE One structure. The impact of teaming on good communication and collaboration has frequently been noted in the literature (Clark & Clark, 1997, George & Alexander, 1993, Hackmann et al., 2002, Valentine et al., 1993). In the case study school, the collaborative efforts of the staff were facilitated by the common planning time found in the grade level, departmental, and intradepartmental meetings. The experienced teachers' responses, noted in this case study, emphasized their working knowledge of the prior teaming's collaborative efforts, and this carried over into their intradepartmental and grade level meetings under the school's new PAGE One structure.

The use of common planning time that centered on teaming was found consistently in this study and in the related research (George & Alexander, 1993; George and Shewey, 1994; Hackmann, et al., 2002). The common planning even in its new structure and form appeared to continue to provide opportunities for ongoing communication and collaboration among the staff.

In particular, the collaboration on curriculum, instruction and assessments was the focal point of the case study school as changed school organizational structures affected their planning practices and resulted in the changes from previously smaller groups of teamed students for 7th and 8th grades to the whole grade level groupings of students and teachers. The exception was the case study's 6th grade that for one year continued the smaller, common group of students where its teachers were familiar with the entire group of students and their needs at a more intimate level. The respondents from the case study school noted that their previous experience with teaming and the middle school model allowed them to transition more easily to the PAGE One structure with the intradepartmental meetings.

Finally, NCLB (2001) and the requirement for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) have had major implications for all grades in the middle level as evident in this study. AYP, especially, has become an important criterion in the requirements to obtain Blue Ribbon School status. Achieving the expected high performance levels is a concern, especially for the at-risk and other sub-groups of students, who have had difficulty succeeding in these assessments.

The case study school, now a PAGE One middle school, previously had a rich teaming tradition. The school's new initiatives and efforts have focused totally on its curriculum, instruction and assessments to improve students' achievement in the PSSA tests

for reading and math state assessments. Paired or small groups of same subject/grade teachers now meet, collaborate, and make decisions on how to accomplish this in intradepartmental meetings. Besides intradepartmental collaboration, departmental and grade level meetings' efforts address other programs that utilize the case study school's collaborative model including the Learning Focused Solutions, LFS (2006), which has proven to positively impact students' achievement whether using teaming or the PAGE One structure. These are some of the elements found in school turnarounds (Duke, 2006).

The 6th grade teachers of the case study's middle school maintained teaming with intradepartmental meetings on alternating days. Their concerns with the probability of losing teaming and the middle school philosophy happened in the second year of their PAGE One initiative. The 6th grade teachers, as well as the 7th and 8th grade staff, appreciated the intradepartmental or paired/small group of same subject teachers' meetings, which addressed the curriculum and instruction to meet the rigorous established math and reading assessments found in the PSSA tests.

The case study school moved from a middle school model and instituted the PAGE One structure to specifically address and close the achievement gap between subgroups. It is likely that other middle schools have followed or will follow the same path as pressures from NCLB and AYP continue to increase. Unfortunately, it appears that in a broad sense, goals are going through a transition. Previous to NCLB, schools focused on moving students forward: socially, morally, and intellectually as they matured. Teaming has been adopted in many middle level schools as a means to reach this end. However, since the passage of NCLB and its ramifications, the ends have shifted to test results, rather than the needs of the

whole child. Teaming and collaboration were a means of educating the pre-adolescent and adolescent, but now with the NCLB goals, this may be threatened.

There is a growing trend to increase math and reading time as a means of reaching AYP (Delmore, 2005; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Stevens, 2006). The case study school reduced time in the fine and practical arts in order to double math/reading time and refocused its academic resource period to be used for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). These changes were driven by the NCLB and AYP mandates and according to Cawelti (2006), it is a growing trend by schools to narrow the curriculum. The dilemma that the middle level schools are facing is choosing to remain true to the middle school philosophy and risk not meeting AYP or abandoning the middle school model to focus on AYP.

The movement away from the definition of teaming presented by George and Alexander (1993), and losing the middle school philosophy are a reality as presented in the case study's restructuring as a PAGE One school. Some urban schools have changed their middle level schools into K – 8 building structures, while some intermediate level and middle schools have done vertical teaming to address school improvement and to meet the challenges of NCLB. How schools address the NCLB and AYP can be summed up by Zavadsky (2006) who states, “Best practices cannot be identified with a single program, initiative or school leader. They are systemic, aligned, inclusive, data driven, evidence based, goal oriented and student centered” (p. 70).

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of the present study, a number of recommendations may be considered for future research.

1. A study that investigates teaming and middle school philosophy changes at middle level schools related directly to the NCLB mandates.
2. A study that investigates teamed teachers' use of common planning time and their collaborative efforts to address the NCLB Act and AYP. LFS strategies and other proven programs impact on students' achievement could be explored in future studies involving middle level teaming's collaborative efforts.
3. A study that investigates leadership roles of teamed middle school teachers and their principals to address the NCLB math and reading benchmarks/assessments. More specific information on collaborative decision-making and collaborative leadership's impact need further review with the NCLB mandate.
4. More specific studies that investigate, examine, and assess the PAGE One school structure or similar-type schools and their effectiveness in meeting each child's needs and achieving the federal AYP (yearly mandated math and reading percentages of proficiency). This could be done in a comparison study to schools with teaming to address NCLB.
5. A study that investigates and examines how teaming impacts and enhances teachers' efficacy and influence on the student learning and achievement, especially with the pressure of NCLB and AYP.
6. A study that investigates interdisciplinary curriculum and activities changes with the curricular preparation needed for the state assessments. More specifically,

examining how interdisciplinary activities are used or if decreased because of the increased demand of the math and reading curricula to address the NCLB rigors.

7. A study that investigates the impact on students' total needs when teaming and the middle school philosophy are eliminated because of changes to focus on NCLB mandates.

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Appendix "A"

Cover letter to surveyed schools

Dear Colleague:

I am a doctoral candidate at Penn State University in the Department of Educational Leadership conducting research on middle school teaming. My advisor, Dr. Nona Prestine, Professor-In-Charge of the Educational Leadership Program, is mentoring me as I complete my dissertation project entitled *Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions On the Contributions of Teaming to Their "Blue Ribbon" Middle School Status*. Today, I am seeking volunteers to participate in a research project on middle school teaming as well as the effect of teaming on Blue Ribbon school status.

Your school was chosen to be part of my study through The Blue Ribbon Middle School in Pennsylvania. I genuinely need your assistance in making my research project a success, and ask you to share your insights, ideas and comments on teaming in your middle school by completing the enclosed questionnaire. Your school's principal and three teachers will be asked to complete the enclosed questionnaire. Your responses will not only contribute to my doctoral research, but the results, I hope, will contribute broadly to educational research and practice. Participating will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this research voluntary and your responses will remain confidential. All responses will be reported in summary form, and no individual identifiers such as your name, your school name, or other personal information will be linked to individual responses. Once you have completed and returned the questionnaire, all evidence of your participation will be destroyed. The code on the envelope or questionnaire serves only to differentiate respondents from non-respondents. Only my advisor and I will have access to your responses. If you have questions, please reach me using the information shown below. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775. The Office for Research Protections may review records related to this research project.

As a fellow educator, I know how busy you are at this time. In any event, I hope that you are willing to participate in this brief survey. There will be no follow up to obtain additional responses. I would be especially appreciative if you would complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Voluntary submission of your completed questionnaire implies informed consent. I will be glad to send you a copy of the findings if you so indicate on the questionnaire.

I thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire; and please accept my sincere gratitude for your time, expertise, and commitment to middle level education. Feel free to contact me by mail, email or telephone should you have questions. I look forward to your swift response and input.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen A. Andrejack, Principal Investigator, Principal, East Pennsboro Middle School, 529 N. Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025-2199, TELEPHONE: (717) 732-0771, EMAIL: sandreja@epasd.org

Dr. Nona Prestine, Advisor, Professor-In-Charge, Educational Leadership Program; 302 G Rackley Building, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802, TELEPHONE: (814) 863-3762, EMAIL: nap11@psu.edu

Appendix "B"

Questionnaire on Middle Level Teaming's Prevalence

Instructions: Whether your school utilizes teams or not, please complete the survey as an individual or after conferring with your team. Please seal your survey responses in the enclosed preaddressed stamped envelope and return it to me. If you would like a copy of the findings, note your school's address after the principal's name.

As noted in the cover letter, your responses and your school's information will be handled in accordance with the Penn State University's policy on ethics in research and confidentiality. Thanks again for your professional input in this study.

In the event that your school does not formally operate in a teaming configuration, please complete the survey items that are relevant.

Name of School: _____

Principal's name: _____

Year of Blue Ribbon School Designation: _____

Grade Level of the respondent(s): _____

Check here if survey was completed by conferring with a team of teachers: ___

Grades in school: (circle all that are in building) - 5, 6, 7, 8, other? _____

Enrollment of total school: _____

Approximate number of students per team: _____

How many core subject teachers are on each team? _____ /Not Applicable: ___

Number of students (average) per section on the team? _____ /Not Applicable: ___

How many teams are in your school? _____ /Not Applicable: ___

In what Pennsylvania region is your school located? (use Intermediate Unit code number)

_____ Your school is considered (circle one) - Rural Urban Suburban

What percent of your students receive free/reduced lunches? _____ %

Please comment on the factors you believe have contributed to your school's success and prior designation as a Blue Ribbon School. Use back of this paper and additional paper if necessary.

Teaming Survey

Please circle the number that best describes your level of agreement with each statement. Thanks!

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Adequate common teaching planning time enhances instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Team meeting time is utilized for planning interdisciplinary curriculum activities.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Teaming does little to enhance the academic achievement of our students.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Collaboration on instructional strategies is a regular discussion item in team meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Teachers believe that they can positively affect all students' learning through the teaming process.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Negative student behaviors are seldom improved by teacher collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Student achievement is a focus of the teachers' individual and team planning.	1	2	3	4	5
9	More team planning time is needed to improve the team's effectiveness.	1	2	3	4	5
10	The increased number of building level meetings required by team planning is too demanding.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The teaming structure has had no impact on the school's ability to achieve its curricular goals.	1	2	3	4	5
12	New teachers have few opportunities to address their needs in team meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Common team planning time is not essential for middle schools.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs.	1	2	3	4	5
15	State Standards/Assessments Expectations in Math & Reading will weaken teaming utilization.	1	2	3	4	5

	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
16	A team's effectiveness is enhanced by having its teachers' classrooms located in close proximity to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
17	In teaming, teachers' goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Teacher efficacy in teaching his/her subject has been negatively impacted by the teaming structure.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Students' achievement in the core academic subjects is improved by strong departmentalization.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Collaboration has helped me become a more confident teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
21	The team's teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students' achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The team believes it can solve any team problems it encounters through its collaborative efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Serious and sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning happen primarily inside subject departments.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Our school staff and students exhibit a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Our team's teachers expect to enhance each student's social/emotional development.	1	2	3	4	5
26	In our team's organization, a sense of community is reflected by the actions of the teachers and students.	1	2	3	4	5
27	The principal's involvement in teaming is not necessary to promote an effective teaming process.	1	2	3	4	5
28	The teaming structure has played an important role in our obtaining the Blue Ribbon School Program Status.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Teaming makes no significant difference in most of our students' learning.	1	2	3	4	5
30	Our community supports this school's teaming practices.	1	2	3	4	5
31	Good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
32	Our middle school does not provide additional common team planning time for teachers' efforts to do interdisciplinary instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Teaming is costly and is expendable with achievement requirements of NCLB Act.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Teacher communications with students and their parents/guardians are effectively accomplished through the teaming process.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Our school's staff is committed to the teaming structure and process.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Teaming enhances development of a shared vision between teachers, students and families.	1	2	3	4	5
37	Teaming has pitfalls that negate its effectiveness.	1	2	3	4	5
38	Collegiality enhances teachers' instructional strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
39	The teaming structure/process has enhanced collegial relations.	1	2	3	4	5
40	Subject departments are more likely than the teaming structure to promote serious efforts to make substantive change in teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
41	While teachers are in school, they have little time for reflection, analysis, or professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
42	Teaming contributes to teachers' ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students.	1	2	3	4	5
43	Teaming has had a positive impact on team teachers' professional development and growth.	1	2	3	4	5
44	The teaming process weakens the teacher's individuality and creativity.	1	2	3	4	5
45	Our school's teaming process & structure had little impact in gaining the Blue Ribbon School designation.	1	2	3	4	5
46	Uninvolvement of team members has hindered the teaming process.	1	2	3	4	5

Please **rank** the **top five** teaming items by placing a **#1** by the **most important** down to **#5** as the **fifth most important** item listed.

- ___ Provides opportunity for teacher collaboration.
- ___ Enhances teachers' ability to influence student learning
- ___ Promotes an interdisciplinary curriculum
- ___ Influences the effectiveness of middle school philosophy
- ___ Enhances students' academic achievement
- ___ Improves planning for interdisciplinary curricular activities
- ___ Increases teacher's impact on student achievement
- ___ Improves better communications between teachers
- ___ Provides time to achieve curricular goals
- ___ Allows more teacher leadership/empowerment opportunities

Appendix “C”

Survey Final Tallies

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Adequate common teaching planning time enhances instruction.	0	1	2	8	52
2	Team meeting time is utilized for planning interdisciplinary curriculum activities.	6	1	19	21	15
3	Teaming does little to enhance the academic achievement of our students.	46	16	0	0	1
4	Student instructional needs are an important consideration in team planning.	0	1	2	23	36
5	Collaboration on instructional strategies is a regular discussion item in team meetings.	3	3	16	26	15
6	Teachers believe that they can positively affect all students’ learning through the teaming process.	0	0	11	27	25
7	Negative student behaviors are seldom improved by teacher collaboration.	41	17	2	2	1
8	Student achievement is a focus of the teachers’ individual and team planning.	0	0	5	33	25
9	More team planning time is needed to improve the team's effectiveness.	3	19	17	8	14
10	The increased number of building level meetings required by team planning is too demanding.	9	33	14	4	1
11	The teaming structure has had no impact on the school's ability to achieve its curricular goals.	33	25	3	2	0
12	New teachers have few opportunities to address their needs in team meetings.	32	24	5	1	0
13	Common team planning time is not essential for middle schools.	50	13	0	0	0
14	Sharing the same group of students facilitates teacher collaboration on student needs.	0	0	0	18	45
15	State Standards/Assessments Expectations in Math & Reading will weaken teaming utilization.	20	24	11	5	3

	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
16	A team's effectiveness is enhanced by having its teachers' classrooms located in close proximity to each other.	0	0	8	23	32
17	In teaming, teachers' goals reflect more realistic expectations of student achievement.	1	1	5	39	16
18	Teacher efficacy in teaching his/her subject has been negatively impacted by the teaming structure.	38	22	3	0	0
19	Students' achievement in the core academic subjects is improved by strong departmentalization.	2	29	13	13	5
20	Collaboration has helped me become a more confident teacher.	0	0	5	25	31
21	The team's teachers believe that their teaming structure improves the chances of students' achievement.	1	0	2	30	30
22	The team believes it can solve any team problems it encounters through its collaborative efforts.	0	2	14	34	13
23	Serious and sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning happen primarily inside subject departments.	7	39	13	4	0
24	Our school staff and students exhibit a genuine sense of caring for and mutual obligation toward each other	0	0	10	29	24
25	Our team's teachers expect to enhance each student's social/emotional development.	0	0	5	31	27
26	In our team's organization, a sense of community is reflected by the actions of the teachers and students.	0	0	7	22	34
27	The principal's involvement in teaming is not necessary to promote an effective teaming process	19	30	1	10	3
28	The teaming structure has played an important role in our obtaining the Blue Ribbon School Program Status.	2	1	10	16	32
29	Teaming makes no significant difference in most of our students' learning.	40	21	2	0	0
30	Our community supports this school's teaming practices.	0	1	2	37	23

	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
31	Good team practices are enhanced when teachers share the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction.	0	0	4	21	38
32	Our middle school does not provide additional common team planning time for teachers' efforts to do interdisciplinary instruction.	22	20	8	9	3
33	Teaming is costly and is expendable with achievement requirements of NCLB Act.	36	17	4	3	2
34	Teacher communications with students and their parents/guardians are effectively accomplished through the teaming process.	0	1	12	19	31
35	Our school's staff is committed to the teaming structure and process.	0	1	4	23	35
36	Teaming enhances development of a shared vision between teachers, students and families.	0	0	3	26	34
37	Teaming has pitfalls that negate its effectiveness.	26	28	6	1	2
38	Collegiality enhances teachers' instructional strategies.	0	0	3	31	28
39	The teaming structure/process has enhanced collegial relations.	0	2	6	22	31
40	Subject departments are more likely than the teaming structure to promote serious efforts to make substantive change in teaching and learning.	8	38	10	5	1
41	While teachers are in school, they have little time for reflection, analysis, or professional development.	2	27	17	13	4
42	Teaming contributes to teachers' ability to positively influence student learning of at-risk students.	0	1	4	29	29
43	Teaming has had a positive impact on team teachers' professional development and growth.	0	3	7	32	21
44	The teaming process weakens the teacher's individuality and creativity.	35	28	0	0	0
45	Our school's teaming process & structure had little impact in gaining the Blue Ribbon School designation.	27	26	4	2	1
46	Uninvolvement of team members has hindered the teaming process.	11	21	14	10	5

Appendix “D”

Introduction Letter for Interview

Stephen A. Andrejack
East Pennsboro Area
Middle School Principal
529 N. Enola Drive
Enola, PA 17025
January 22, 2005

October 19, 2005

Dear Colleague:

I am conducting interviews for use in my doctoral dissertation at Penn State University in the Department of Educational Leadership. The purpose of this study is to collect data on teaming in your exemplary middle school. I am working with Dr. Nona Prestine, Professor-In-Charge of the Educational Leadership Program. Your principal and superintendent have given permission for this study.

As a fellow educator, I know how busy you are, and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview on teaming. You were chosen to participate in this study because of your interests and your principal’s recommendation. I am especially grateful for your cooperation and voluntary participation. At a later point I may ask you to verify some interview items.

You must sign the Informed Consent Form, located on the reverse side of this form; a copy will be provided for your records. All data collected will be kept in a secure location and within a password protected computer file. At the conclusion of the project, all data records will be destroyed.

I have designed this interview to take about thirty minutes of your time. Your responses and those of all the staff will be treated as confidential information. Neither your names nor the name of your school will be used in reporting the data. I greatly appreciate your help in this important study and your assistance in its completion. Please accept my sincere gratitude for your time, expertise and commitment to middle level education.

Feel free to contact me by mail, email or telephone should you have questions. I thank you for meeting and your valuable input.

Sincerely yours,

Stephen A. Andrejack
sandreja@epasd.org
(717) 732-0771

Appendix "E"

**SIGNED INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**
The Pennsylvania State University

ORP USE ONLY: IRB# 20970
The Pennsylvania State University
Office for Research Protections
Approval Date: 05-13-2005 DWM
Expiration Date: 05-02-2006 DWM

Title of Project: *Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions on the Contributions of Teaming to Their Blue Ribbon" Middle School Status*

Principal Investigator: Stephen A. Andrejack, Principal
East Pennsboro Middle School
529 N. Enola Drive
Enola, PA 17025-2199
TELEPHONE: (717) 732-0771
EMAIL: sandreja@epasd.org

Advisor: Dr. Nona Prestine, Professor-In-Charge
Educational Leadership Program
302 G Rackley Bldg.
Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802
TELEPHONE: (814) 863-3762
EMAIL: nap11@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this research project is to collect data on teaming in your exemplary middle school. Also of interest to the investigators is the key information of school success in becoming a Blue Ribbon Program School.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to voluntarily respond to questions that deal with your perceptions of teaming. The investigator will use an audio recorder in the interview. Questions to be addressed include: (1) How and in what way was teaming important at this site in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status? (2) How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school? (3) In what ways have the four key components of teaming played a part in this school and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria.
3. **Discomforts and risks:** There are no risks to participating in this research beyond those experiences in every day life. Some individuals would find the beginning phases of a face-to-face interview somewhat awkward, but this feeling usually is temporary. Participation will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

(Continued - Signed Informed Consent Form)

4. **Benefits:** The benefits to you may be the opportunity to learn more about yourself and your school by sharing your professional insights as an exemplary middle-school educator. The benefits to society include an analysis of the views stated by educators, at an exemplary middle school, on their perceptions of teaming. The research will identify any contributions that teaming has played in school success.
5. **Duration/time of the procedures and study:** The interview will take place in the school at the office/classroom either of the interviewee or at another confidential setting provided at the school. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete at convenience of the interviewee.
6. **Statement of confidentiality:** Only the person in charge will know your identity. Only the investigator and his dissertation advisor will have access to your identity and to information that can be associated with your identity. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. The data will be stored and secured at my home office in a password-protected file. The Office for Research Protections may review records related to this project. All records associated with your participation in the study will be subject to the usual confidentiality standards applicable.
7. **Right to ask questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contact Stephen A. Andrejack at (717) 732-0771 with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.
8. **Voluntary participation:** Participation is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
9. **Consent for Audio-Recording:** Please identify your preference for audio-recording the interview by marking an X next to your response below:

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio-recorded during the interview

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix "F"

Interview Protocol/Schedule

Interview Protocol/Schedule: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Name of respondent: _____ Code: _____

Position & Grade: _____ / _____

Telephone Number: _____

1.0 Introduction

Hello! My name is Stephen A. Andrejack, and I thank you for this interview. My background information includes 9 years of teaching and 23 years in administration. I am currently principal at EPMS and have been working on my graduate studies at Penn State. My research will be utilizing data collected from surveys of PA Blue Ribbon Middle Schools and this interview process on my dissertation topic: *Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions On the Contributions of Teaming to Their "Blue Ribbon" Middle School Status.*

- I have included an interview letter that notes the study's authorization; provided to you, and I appreciate your willingness to participate and also, your principal's coordination of this.
- This study is approved by the ORP at PSU.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this research project is to collect data on teaming in your exemplary middle school. Also of interest to the investigators is the key information of school success in becoming a Blue Ribbon Program School.

Authorization:

Refer to and review **SIGNED INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

ORP USE ONLY: IRB# 20970 The Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections Approval Date: 05-13-2005 DWM Expiration Date: 05-02-2006 RWM

The Pennsylvania State University

Use of the information (Explain the Informed Consent)

- For what purpose will this information be used
- Use of respondent's name and quotations
- Interview is part of a larger study involving a great number of interviews
- Confidentiality (no one will be identified by name or directly associated with quotations)
- Study may employ some quotations to illustrate its observations, findings, or conclusion but names or direct association will not be utilized

(Continued - Interview Protocol/Schedule)

Ask if there are any questions on Informed Consent or others?

2.0 Biographical/Background of respondent: How many years have you been at your middle school? _____

- **Other relevant history and background of respondent** – Were you at this middle school when they achieved BRSP status and what did you know about becoming BRSP (*)?

3.0 Questions of the Study which have expanded from original list:

3.1 (*)How and in what way was teaming important at your middle school in its success and achievement of Blue Ribbon Schools Program status?

3.2 How had this school implemented teaming prior to its designation as an exemplary middle school and/or how has it changed as a PAGE ONE School?

Prior to BRSP Status:

Since becoming a PAGE ONE School:

(Continued - Interview Protocol/Schedule)

- 3.3 In what ways have the four key components of teaming as defined by George and Alexander played a part in this school and students' success that relate to the Blue Ribbon School program criteria and/or how has it changed as a PAGE ONE School:

George and Alexander state "... a way of organizing the faculty so that a group of teachers share:

- 1) same group of students;
- 2) the responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating curriculum and instruction in more than one academic area;
- 3) the same schedule; and (Common Team Planning time)
- 4) the same area of the building"

- 3.4 Are there any other areas where teaming has played a key part in the school and students' success and/or now how the PAGE One schedule is impacting this?

4.0 Additional Focused Questions:

5.0 Referrals:

6.0 Come-back or telephone contact for additional data needs or for information and clarification (This will be mentioned as possible need to do this)

7.0 "Thank you" and I will follow-up with letter of thanks.

VITA

Stephen A. Andrejack was born on January 22, 1953 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to the late Stephen A. and Ethel H. Andrejack. In 1970 he graduated from William Penn High School in Harrisburg. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Earth and Space Science and General Science in 1974 from Bloomsburg University. In 1977 he earned the Master of Education degree from Shippensburg University in Counseling (secondary), and a Master of Education degree from Shippensburg University in Educational Administration (secondary) in 1981. He completed his Letter of Eligibility in 1990 at Shippensburg University. He began his doctoral studies in educational administration at the Pennsylvania State University in 1995.

Stephen taught in the East Pennsboro Area School District in Enola, Pennsylvania for nine years following graduation from Bloomsburg University. He then moved to South Middleton School District in Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania as an assistant principal at Boiling Spring Junior/Senior High School for 4 years; he spent another 8 years there as the principal where he was instrumental in researching and developing an intensive scheduling process for grades 9 through 12. In 1995 he returned to East Pennsboro to become the principal of the East Pennsboro Middle School, a 5 – 8 grade building with approximately 900 students. Stephen is a member of PAESSP, NASSP, ASCD, PASCD, PDK and Pi Lambda Theta.

Stephen is married to Stephanie B. Andrejack and has four children – Joseph, Theresa, Nicholas and Mary Catherine.