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Elementary Teachers' Self Efficacy for Improving Student Achievement

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Walden University

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Regina Ann Epps

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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2017

Abstract

Elementary Teachers' Self Efficacy for Improving Student Achievement

by

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EdS, Valdosta State University, 2011

MSREM, Walden University, 2008

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

The local problem that prompted this study was declining student achievement scores in the 4th and 5th grades at a Title 1 elementary school in the southeastern U.S. As a result, school administrators initiated an environmental change from a self-contained classroom structure to departmentalization and team teaching for 4th and 5th grades. The purpose of the study was to investigate perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding their needs to address their own self-efficacy for improving student learning, and their perspectives of the team teaching and departmentalization processes in enhancing student achievement. The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. The research design was a qualitative case study using purposeful sampling. Interviews were conducted with 10 participants; 9 teachers who were presently teaching or had taught at the 4th and 5th grade levels for 2-20 years as well as 1 administrator. Participants' responses were coded and analyzed for emerging themes related to teachers' sense of efficacy to improve achievement, and issues with team teaching, departmentalization and student learning. The key findings include teachers' beliefs that, with support from professional development, they could help increase student achievement and then departmentalization would be more successful. A policy paper was constructed as a project to address ongoing, mandated professional development for teachers and administrators in strategies for increasing their efficacy in the use of team teaching and departmentalization structures to improve student learning. Using study findings, upper elementary school administrators and teachers may be able to make effective organizational decisions to improve self-efficacy of teachers to meet the school's increased expectations regarding student learning and achievement.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my family, most especially my children (Brendan, Madisyn, and Chase). My children have given up normal weekends (and many weeknights) activities while I have sat on the sofa, taken over the dining table, or generally ignored everything and everyone for the last 10+ year's writing paper after paper, in pursuit of both my personal and professional goals. My mother, Brenda, has stood by my side during some very trying times to get to this point, and, for that, I am eternally grateful. Collectively, they have kept me positively motivated and made sure that even when I was at my lowest they were behind me, encouraging me to stay on track, continue my journey, and not to give up on my goals.

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The guidance and support that I received from my major advisor and committee members are indeed priceless. Special thanks in particular to Drs. Morton and Whaley. I would also like to thank my colleagues both at my workplace as well as those I have conversed with over the World Wide Web. These colleagues have kept me encouraged during those too many to count times I wanted to give up or when I lamented incessantly about how I was never going to finish this study. All of these individuals played a part in helping me persevere; I know I would have given up a while ago had it not been for their support.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The local problem that prompted this study was the focus school's declining student achievement scores in fourth and fifth grades. Declining test scores have been a concern of teachers and administrators at the school and have been addressed in recent discussions. Teachers have indicated in faculty meetings that they desire more professional development and support in developing instruction to meet the needs of struggling learners. The options discussed (departmentalization and team teaching to better meet student needs) were the focus of this study.

In a departmentalized classroom, teachers concentrate their teaching in areas of specialization while students move from one classroom to another (Chan & Jarman, 2004). According to Strohl, Schmertzing, and Schmertzing (2014), teachers in a departmentalized setting become content specialists responsible for one subject at a time as student's transition from class to class. In a departmentalized class teachers can focus on the planning of one to two subject areas that allows for more time to develop lessons that are constructed to enrich a student's learning.

Team teaching is not a new concept but is based on the idea that teachers excel in several but not all the subjects that are required to best educate students as with departmentalization (Lambert, 1960). As Dee, Henkin, and Singleton (2006) noted, team teaching involves small sets of teachers who collaborate across a set of classrooms in teaching a particular group of students. They also suggest that these teams emerge from interpersonal exchanges rather than through direction from administration. One

misconception of team teaching is that it includes teachers taking turns in the teaching process (Gaytan, 2010). In fact, all team members are involved with integrating effective strategies that integrate different subject areas and teaching styles (Cara, 2012).

My goal in conducting this study was to better understand what teachers think about declining student achievement and the use of departmentalization and team teaching to address this issue and how they feel about their ability to raise achievement scores. Declining student achievement impacts a majority of schools throughout the country. The importance of raising achievement goes beyond our district and state; increasing achievement scores empowers students to compete academically on a global level. Like their peers in other U.S. states, the state of Georgia, in which the focus school is located, education officials have sought to improve student outcomes (Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2014). For instance, attention has been given to state performance standards, assessments, changes in the curriculum and instruction, and supplementary programs (GADOE, 2014). Officials have also sought support from federal programs designed to provide resources, assistance, and monitoring to help schools “ensure that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and to achieve proficiency on high academic standards” (GADOE, 2014, p. 1).

Education leaders in other states have used similar strategies for achievement (Guisbond, Neill, & Schaeffer, 2012). The authors go further to say that educational researchers in New York, Massachusetts, and Virginia conducted studies to assess the efforts being made to improve student academic improvement. The study conducted by Guisbond et al., 2012 concluded that creating a successful comprehensive achievement

model for students in the U.S., would be difficult partly due to the overwhelmingly unequal socioeconomic climate, but better methods for achievement can be achieved on a smaller scale through the use of multiple measures to student learning. Education leaders in different states focus on different methods depending on local needs. For instance, in the state of New York implemented improved methods of assessment whereas educators in Massachusetts now use a three-part assessment and evaluation program (Guisbond, et al., 2012). In contrast, Virginia principals chose to focus on teacher self-efficacy in addressing achievement issues (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2010). Further details about these studies will be reported in the “Review of Literature” subsection as they relate to the problem of low achievement at the focus school in this study. I sought to investigate the perceptions of educators about the declining achievement scores and about the use of departmentalization as an alternative teaching method to improve achievement.

Section 1 includes an overview of the problem and a review of related literature. The problem of low achievement is defined from the perspectives both of the local and the larger educational setting. Next, my rationale for studying this topic is presented, followed by definitions of specific terms used in the study. I then consider the significance of the problem. These topics are followed by the research questions, a review of the research literature, an overview of the conceptual framework, and a discussion of the implications of my research. Section 1 concludes with a summary of the information presented.

Definition of the Problem

Problem in Local Setting

In spite of the performance mandates set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which were introduced in 2013, student scores in the focus district have declined instead of increased. Due to the past enactment of NCLB, each school, district, and state in the United States has measured its achievement against Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements (Meyer, 2013). Meyer (2013) further stated that AYP was the measuring system by which schools, districts, and states were held accountable based on student performance or lack thereof. Declining scores within the last few years have been of concern to those in the district as well as in the focus school, which is located in the U.S. state of Georgia. Due to the requirements as mandated by NCLB, Georgia education officials adopted new standards because they viewed the then practiced Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) standards assessment as lacking the necessary amount of depth for students to acquire knowledge within a reasonable amount of time as outlined by NCLB (GADOE, 2010). They adopted the Georgia Performance Standards and Assessment (GPS) for 2007-2011 and CCSS for 2013-2014 (GADOE, 2010). Education officials' view of the QCCs as lacking necessary depth may have been inaccurate as AYP scores were consistently higher before the change to GPS (GADOE, 2011).

Description of Local Setting

The school that served as the setting for this study practices both departmentalization and team-teaching in upper elementary grades depending on how

many teachers are available. For example, if there are three teachers in either fourth or fifth grade, then departmentalization is the choice; however, if there are four teachers in a grade level, then the teachers are divided into two teams for team teaching. According to GADOE (2012) records, there were approximately 659 students enrolled in the school with 56% being Hispanic, 35% African-American, and the remaining 9% Caucasian, Asian, or other. Thirty-eight teachers serviced the student population: 26 taught in regular education classrooms while five were dedicated English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers who assisted the school's large Hispanic student population. Four teachers worked strictly with autistic students. Students in the Early Intervention Program (EIP) who were part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) were mainstreamed into the regular education classrooms 2 years before this study with limited push-in assistance from a special education teacher and one support teacher for three grade levels.

The community in which the focal school is located is one of the poorest in the county, which explains why 97% of the school's students were eligible for free or reduced lunches and the school qualified as a Title I school. Title 1 schools are those with a high percentage of children from families with low incomes (GADOE, 2014). A school must have at least 40% of its students from low income families enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program to be designated a Title 1 school (GADOE, 2015). At the time of the study more than 97% of the student population at the focus school was enrolled in its free and reduced lunch program. According to GADOE (2015), AYP is a measure of student achievement on a year-to-year basis. In order to make AYP, schools must show that (a) 95% of their students participated in the state wide assessment process, (b)

appropriate academic performance (proficient or above) in the subject areas of reading/English language arts, and mathematics is evidenced by individual students and groups of students, and (c) appropriate academic progress is evidenced on a second indicator selected by the school.

Tables 1 through 4 display data on the focus school's QCC scores for 2004-2006 as well as its GPS scores for 2007-2011 and CCSS scores for 2013-2014. Table 1 particularly concentrates on fourth grade overall student achievement at the focus school; as indicated in the table, in the school year 2010-2011, 86.8% of the school's fourth graders overall met achievement criteria. After the change of administration in the school year 2011-2012, there was a drop of 14.2% points in overall achievement by fourth grade students at the school; however, there was a slight jump of 1.4% points the next school year. In 2013-2014, the grade level dropped again by 3.2% for a total of 70.8% overall. Table 1, thus, illustrates that achievement scores for students in the fourth-grade level at the school changed from the 2010-2011 academic year to the 2013-2014 one when the state converted to rating the schools based on CCRPI (College and Career Readiness Performance Index). Although the scores are from different groups, in interviews I conducted with them, teachers expressed concern that their teaching methods may not be appropriate and that changes may be needed to sustain improvement in student achievement scores.

Table 1

Student Achievement Using Georgia Performance Standards in 2010-2013 and the College and Career Readiness Performance Index in 2013-2014

Academic year (achievement standard used)	Fourth grade student achievement
2010-2011 (GPS)	86.8%
2011-2012 (GPS)	72.6%
2012-2013 (GPS)	74.2%
2013-2014 (CCRPI)	70.8%

Note. Adapted from “K-12 Public School Reports Cards”, The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015.

Conversely, in Table 2, the fifth grade students experienced an overall achievement percentage of 80.8% in school year 2010-2011. This overall score was relatively close to that of fourth grade students for that year. During the 2011-2012 school year, it increased by 4.4%; however, by school year 2012-2013, it decreased by 15.2%. There was then another 7% drop in the following school year. The table shows that from the first academic year to the latest there was a 17.8% decrease in student academic achievement at the fifth-grade level, which was even lower than that of the fourth-grade students. Educators at the school were also concerned about these changes and wanted to address them.

Table 2

Student Achievement Using Georgia Performance Standards in 2010-2013 and the College and Career Readiness Performance Index in 2013-2014

Academic year (achievement standard used)	Fifth grade student achievement
2010-2011 (GPS)	80.8%
2011-2012 (GPS)	85.2%
2012-2013 (GPS)	70.2%
2013-2014 (CCRPI)	63/1%

Note. Adapted from “K-12 Public School Reports Cards”, The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2015.

Table 3 shows how the focus school fared in regards to meeting or not meeting the parameters as outlined by AYP, during the 2004-2011 school years. An *M* indicates whether the school met AYP while a *DNM* indicates that it did not meet AYP for that year. In 2004-2006, the state and county used QCC standards to teach and assess students. However, GPS became the state’s mandated standards for 2006-2011. The pivotal assessment tool used in all of these school years was the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), which consisted entirely of multiple-choice questions in all subjects.

Table 3

Adequate Yearly Progress During the 2004-2011 School Years

QCC (2004-2006) and GPS (2007-2011)	
Academic year	Meets (M)/Does not meet (DNM)
2004	M
2005	M
2006	M
2007	M
2008	M
2009	M
2010	M
2011	DNM

Note. Adapted from “CRCT Statewide Scores,” Georgia Department of Education, 2015.

Table 4 shows the AYP during academic year 2010-2011 for the entire county of the focus school. This metric was used to determine whether schools were productively educating students and making progress toward meeting academic standards (Adequate Yearly Progress, 2011). According to both state and county public records in 2011, only 34 schools in the entire focus county made AYP; 28 failed to achieve that mark. Eleven out of 38 elementary schools did not make AYP while only half of middle schools made AYP and just two of 10 high schools achieved AYP status. In contrast, in 2010, 50 schools made AYP while only 12 failed to gain that status. At the time the study was conducted, the problem of declining AYP scores persisted and had resulted in increased pressure on teachers as well as schools in the district to meet new standards.

Table 4

District Schools Making Adequate Yearly Progress in 2011

GPS and Assessments		
	Meet No.	Do not meet No.
Elementary schools	27	11
Middle schools	7	7
High schools	2	8

Note. A total of 62 county and district schools are included in the table. Adapted from 2011 AYP Charts³, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

According to Ballou (2014), the recent job discontent related to low student achievement might be attributed to teachers' feelings about the need for more support and training regarding best practices in executing CCSS, as well as negative experiences of its initial implementation. The rationale section is used to further explain the change at the state and county levels, in both standards and assessment adopted in 2012 and the decline in said years based on the new grading system as experienced by the focus school. To address low student achievement the focus school's district made some changes in school structure such as departmentalization of the upper elementary grades; it is however, ultimately an administrative decision whether to implement. In order to address declining achievement, a few of the elementary schools in the county have elected to departmentalize at the behest of staff intervention while the majority have decided to retain a traditional, self-contained, classroom setting.

Both the fourth and fifth grade teachers at the focus school at the time of the study were practicing departmentalization at their respective grade levels. The fifth grade team

included three teachers sharing five subjects. One teacher delivers lessons in mathematics while a second teacher delivers a lesson in Reading/English Language Arts, and the final teacher combines science and social studies. The fourth grade team, on the other hand, is comprised of four teachers who make up two separate teams; each team has a teacher who delivers the science and mathematics component while the partner is responsible for teaching of Reading/English Language Arts, and social studies.

Consistent with findings reported by Ballou (2014), in many grade level meetings, teachers in the school have shared their thoughts regarding the recent decline in student achievement scores and how it relates to increased expectations. Instructional effectiveness may suffer if teachers do not feel as though they have the self-efficacy to accomplish their goals in teaching (Bandura, 1997; Baron et al., 2012), in this case, improving achievement scores. The purpose of the study was to investigate teachers' perspectives of the team teaching and departmentalization processes and teachers' ideas about what they may need to help them feel capable of improving student achievement that addresses the perceived gap in practice of possible needed professional development. More information on these two topics will be discussed in the rationale section and in the section that describes the theoretical foundation for this study.

Problem in Larger Educational Setting

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2012), the state of Georgia joined nine other states in selecting the waiver from NCLB requirements. The decision allowed the state to move away from narrow parameters as outlined by NCLB, and also allowed the state to use achievement data from all fundamental subject areas as well as

graduation rate data to pinpoint schools that are a *priority* or *focus*, which will eventually supersede the current *Needs Improvement Schools* designation. As reported by Toch and Tyre (2010):

NCLB has produced meager gains in achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses student achievement in reading and mathematics every other year. Despite the intense concentration on reading and mathematics required by the NCLB Act, the gains registered on NAEP since the enactment of NCLB have been unimpressive. (p. 5)

Evidence obtained from the county in which the targeted school is located mirrors this report as NAEP scores have indicated unacceptable gains in student achievement. Schools have been mandated to seek alternatives that will increase teachers' efficacy to meet new demands and eventually lead to student achievement (GADOE, 2011). Additional information of the decline documented in a 2011 AYP report completed by the Georgia Department of Education (2011), indicated that elementary schools across the state were on a steady decline, due to the ever-changing standards as required by NCLB. The QCC scores from the 2004-2006 school years averaged 81.1%, in contrast, the GPS scores in school years 2007-2011 averaged 77.8% in Title 1 Schools and 89.64% overall. In the past 10± years (2004-2013) the state of Georgia's standards changed three times and with each change a new assessment was created to determine student and school progress (GADOE, 2014). The problems faced in the larger educational setting occurred yearly in the state's K-12 classrooms as demonstrated by the following tables.

Also, most notably the largest declines were experienced by the state's Title 1 schools which serve its most academically and socioeconomically deprived.

Tables 5 and 6 display the percentage of all Georgia schools that achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status over a seven-year period. As seen in Table 5, during the 2004- 2006 academic year, kindergarten through 12th-grade schools students scored an average of 81% when teaching via QCC standards and assessment.

Table 5

Georgia Schools Making Adequate Yearly Progress 2004-2006

QCC Standards and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage%
2004	79.4
2005	81.7
2006	79.1

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 6 indicates a drop of 1% achievement when the state changed to GPS in 2007. Scores declined close to seven points by 2011.

Table 6

Georgia Schools Making Adequate Yearly Progress 2007-2011

GPS and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage %
2007	82.0
2008	79.4
2009	84.0
2010	77.2
2011	72.7

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 7 shows AYP achievement scores of students in Title 1, K-12 schools in the state of Georgia.

Table 7

Georgia Title 1 Schools Making AYP 2004-2006 Using QCC Standards and Assessments

QCC Standards and Assessment	
Academic Year	Percentage%
2004	80.4
2005	83.8
2006	79.1

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 8 indicates the average for 2004-2006 under the QCC standards and assessment was 81%. The pattern for Title 1 schools in the state of Georgia was a 3.2% gap in student achievement scores between the years of 2007-2011 when the state used the GPS standards in Table 8.

Table 8

Georgia Title 1 Schools Making AYP 2007-20011 Using GPS and Assessments

GPS and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage %
2007	82.7
2008	78.
2009	83.1
2010	75.1
2011	69.5

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

In contrast, Georgia’s non-Title 1 schools, as shown in Table 9, averaged 78.6% during the QCC years of 2004-2006. This is a lower average than that of 81.7% during

the GPS standard and assessment years, which is an increase of 2.94% as listed on Table 10. Also, the QCC standards and assessment average for all of Georgia's elementary schools were 93.4% between the years of 2004-2006 as seen in Table 11. When teachers were required by the state to shift to GPS standards in 2007 the scores decreased by 3.96% over the next five years for an average of 89.44% as seen in Table 12.

Table 9

Georgia Non-Title I Schools Making AYP 2004-2006 Using QCC Standards and Assessments

QCC Standards and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage%
2004	78.1
2005	79.0
2006	79.2

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from "2011 AYP Charts", Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 10

Georgia Non-Title I Schools Making AYP 2007-2011 Using GPS and Assessments

GPS and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage %
2007	81.0
2008	80.7
2009	85.4
2010	81.6
2011	79.8

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from "2011 AYP Charts", Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 11

Georgia Elementary Schools Making AYP 2004-2006 Using QCC Standards and Assessments

QCC Standards and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage%
2004	94.5
2005	95.1
2006	90.6

Note. K-5 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

Table 12

Georgia Elementary Schools Making AYP 2007-2011 Using GPS and Assessments

GPS and Assessments	
Academic Year	Percentage %
2007	81.0
2008	80.7
2009	85.4
2010	81.6
2011	79.8

Note. K-5 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the state mandated a change to CCSS, which was purported to include rigor that was more demanding and challenging, when CCRPI became the new index in which to gauge a school’s progress. Even more telling was the evident decline of student achievement by minority students and those considered socioeconomically disadvantaged (GADOE, 2014).

The 2011 AYP report demonstrated that 63% of the state's schools made or met AYP, which was down from 71% from the previous year. Additionally, 17.5 % of schools in Georgia fell into the "Needs Improvement" (NI) category, while only 15.4 %

of schools were in that status in 2010 in contrast with the AYP results as mentioned. Challenges of meeting increased mandated levels of achievement demonstrate a need to study the practices of the school that is the focus of this study as they relate to teachers' perceptions of: (a) reasons for low student achievement scores, (b) the use of departmentalization and team teaching to meet student needs, and (c) teachers' perceptions of their ability for addressing increased levels of standards.

According to Smith and Szymanski (2013), NCLB required teachers to use research that was evidenced-based to direct instruction. The authors report that teachers often found themselves teaching students memorization and recall as a means to support student improvement on tests that were comprised of multiple-choice questions; the antithesis of rigorous research-based teaching. The authors also suggested that to effectively prepare students to proficiently become college and career ready, teachers have to improve higher order thinking skills rather than simply teach them how to master a standardized test.

Meyer (2013) reported that although each state was allowed to gauge its level of proficiency those levels were at its onset flawed. By flawed, Meyer explained, as one grade level was tested those students then progressed to the next grade level leaving behind proficiency levels relevant only to those advancing students. However, the proficiency levels were left behind for the next group of students to adhere to, without regard to those incoming students' learning levels and academic challenges resulting in many schools not meeting AYP. Essentially an impracticable set-up with but one outcome, under the reported proficiency levels, no school could meet AYP. Further,

Meyers suggested that the hardest hit by NCLB and its measuring tool AYP were children living in socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances and their teachers. Meyers also suggested that teachers were prevented from relying on their rich knowledge base, and were met with unrealistic demands that contributed to a political and public push towards a mistrust of teachers. He concluded that mistrust of teachers' abilities to teach led to mandates for more testing to gauge and track learning progress and suggested that these tests rarely improved instruction and only intensified the impacts of AYP. Meyers further reported that teachers are challenged to meet a new set of standards every three to four years. This issue of increase demands also impacted the school that is the focus of this study.

Rationale

In 2013, Georgia joined 42 other states in the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) designed to ensure that students who graduate from high school are equipped to enter either the workforce or attend a collegiate program (GADOE, 2010). At the same time, the expectation is that students would leave the classroom with the ability to compete with peers both here in the US as well as around the world. This transition has, however, not been a successful one and the focus school is challenged with addressing declining student achievement, for example, test scores.

The focus school had an AYP ranking of 28 among the 35 elementary schools in the district according to the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE, 2013). Results showed that this school achieved AYP eight years in a row with teaching standards from the QCC's the first few years and then the GPS, prior to an administration change in

2010. Previous scores demonstrate that the teachers at the focus school are capable of accomplishing the goals as outlined by CCSS and improving the schools' College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores as presented in Table 1 (GADOE, 2014). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2014), the CCRPI is a school improvement plan that stresses accountability and communication aimed at educational stakeholders to foster college and career readiness for students in the Georgia public school system. The Index as a replacement for AYP makes both the public and parents aware of how schools are performing and differs from the pass or fail system previously used by the guidelines of AYP. Each school receives a grade out of 100 points, similar to what students receive on their report cards. Our gap in practice is possibly restructuring the school environment to focus on teachers' expertise in various subject matter areas that might enhance student learning in those areas.

In the focus school, many collaborative meetings and discussions addressed the need to improve student achievement, based on data that directly outline standards in which students have deficiencies. During the 2011 to 2014 school years at several of the many grade level meetings, teachers discussed the possibility of collaborating teaching strengths to combat the decline in student scores. Some of the suggestions to improving student achievement as well as teacher morale were co-teaching, team teaching, and departmentalization. One teacher stated that "...if I only had one or two subjects in which to concentrate I can enhance the lesson, make it more rigorous and alleviate some of the stress that comes from trying to keep up with the ever-changing standards" (Fourth Grade Teacher, personal communication, May 2011). This statement aligns with Liu and

Ramsey's (2008) reported high levels of stress resulting from insufficient time for planning and preparation along with increased workloads. This study is designed to determine teachers' perceptions about declining student achievement scores, restructuring the school environment to focus on teachers' expertise in various subject matter areas through team teaching or departmentalization, and teachers' sense of self-efficacy for addressing the concerns that might enhance student learning.

Additionally, further evidence to explain the rationale for this study was provided during various grade level and faculty meetings where teachers at the focus school expressed frustration due to the lack of student achievement and continual changes in standards for which they feel unprepared. For example, one teacher stated, "If we could just stick to one set of standards for a consistent number of years we might be able to measure better student achievement (1st Grade Teacher, personal communication, August, 2013). Stress may have long-lasting repercussions on not only a teacher's well-being but could eventually reflect negatively on their job performance (Liu & Ramsey, 2008) via lower self-efficacy and inadequate student growth. Among those attending the various meetings, discussions or both, it was decided to take the suggestions to administration along with an action plan that would address student achievement and use departmentalization or team-teaching as forms of shared teaching as a possible solution to declining levels of student achievement. The conclusion was that something needed to be done.

Throughout the state of Georgia, the percentage of schools that have met AYP has not been consistent nor what educators desire to see (GADOE, 2011). As explained by

the Georgia Department of Education (2011), there were some years when, based on the performance of all of Georgia schools, the state did not make AYP. As shown in Table 11, AYP among the schools fluctuated between the academic years 2006-2011. The lowest percentage of public schools in Georgia that did not meet AYP occurred in the academic year of 2008-2009 (14%). However, since that school term the number of schools in the state of Georgia that did not meet AYP has continued to increase. As a result, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (2010) stated that these types of findings raise questions about the effectiveness of local, state, and federal reform efforts, as well as the direction that the schools appear to be heading (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2010).

Table 13

Adequate Yearly Progress in the State of Georgia

Academic Years 2006-2011		
Year	Meets	Does <u>Not</u> Meet
2005-2006	79.3%	20.7%
2006-2007	82.2%	17.8%
2007-2008	79.9%	20.1%
2008-2009	86.0%	14.0%
2009-2010	77.4%	22.6%
2010-2011	72.7%	27.3%

Note. K-12 schools are included in the overall count. Adapted from “2011 AYP Charts”, Georgia Department of Education, November 2, 2011.

As of 2012, the state of Georgia started the assessment of student achievement through the use of the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). These recently employed changes in reporting the findings of student achievement per county, per school, are expected to serve as indicators of student achievement that replaces AYP

(GADOE, 2012). Based on the CCRPI, each school in Georgia can receive a score out of a maximum of 100 points, just as students can obtain in their classes. The focus school plan was that the school would serve as the setting for investigating a possible solution to the decline in student achievement. Data obtained from the CCRPI are presented in Appendices D, E, and F (i.e., academic years 2012-2014). The trend shows that there continues to be a decline in student achievement in the school that is being proposed for the setting of this study.

Appendix D shows that during the 2013-2014 the focus school's lowest achievement score was revealed in the preceding four years. The school's overall CCRPI score was 52.7% out of 100, which indicates that the school was not meeting the requirements of CCSS. Also indicated within Appendix D is a breakdown of how the students performed in each of five subjects, with social studies at 83% of students passing while the other four subjects have scores below the 70th percentile. While 2014's CCRPI is 52.7% 2013's was 60.1% (see Appendix E). Appendix E shows an decrease of 7.4% of the CCRPI score from the following year shown in Appendix D, which would signify that the focus school's scores are continuing to decrease yearly. Of the five subjects tested, students marginally met proficiency in reading, mathematics and science while they did not meet proficiency in ELA (English Language Arts) and Social Studies.

Appendix F shows the findings on student achievement in the focus school for the school year 2011-2012 that begins the CCRPI process taking over the previous AYP report. The CCRPI score for the year was 66.8%, which was the highest for the three years since the inception of the use of the CCRPI 2011-2014. To meet the state's

standards, schools' CCRPI must meet or exceed 70% (GADOE, 2014). There was no breakdown of student proficiency per subject for this table as it was information received from an AYP report. Using the previous achievement gauge, AYP, and based on the information listed on the Georgia Department of Education's 2010 AYP report, the focus school met the attendance and academic progress requirements for the last time in 2010. For instance, in 2011 an AYP report shows that the focus school did not meet the required percentile for attendance and academic performance, which places them on the list of schools that need improvement. If a school is placed on the needs improvement list they will receive escalating penalties such as required assistance for the students, support for the students to transfer to other schools, or even closure of the school if no improvement is evidenced (GADOE, 2011).

In order to address declining student achievement, a threefold plan was developed which included professional development in those subject areas in which each teacher would concentrate. It was the contention of the developers of the plan to evaluate for implementation upon consideration and discussions with administration. The plan included an intensive study of the in-school data focusing on standards in which students demonstrated the largest ongoing deficiencies. With that information, teachers could plan to differentiate teaching for all learning levels as well as establish in class or after school remediation or both, to address specific content areas for the struggling student. The focus school's CCRPI score for 2012 was 66.8% and even lower for the end of the school year in 2013 at 60.1%. This means that these results are far behind their peers in other elementary schools in the state of Georgia. Georgia's elementary school CCRPI was

83.4%. The school that is the setting for this study as well as the local county, which scored 70.2 overall, falls well below the state index and is progressively worse when the scores of minority and disadvantaged students are considered (GADOE, 2014). School concerns over the declining achievement scores have led to this study of teachers' perceptions of low student achievement, through departmentalization as an alternative teaching method to try to improve teaching, and teachers' ideas about their self-efficacy for teaching.

The teachers need a variety of skills and strategies based in knowledge about learning to find the best way to help students learn as well as how to transform content knowledge into practices and procedures that are pedagogically potent and adaptive to an ever-changing student population (In Time, 2001). Colleagues expressed frustration over the new requirements due to the lack of resources and training needed to develop students that are college and career ready as CCSS mandates (Fourth Grade Teachers' Collaborative Meeting, personal communication, September, 2014). The teachers agreed that any good plan takes time to implement, however as one colleague stated..." the work needed to make CCSS successful is taxing and time consuming; many days I feel as if I am swimming upstream" (Fifth Grade Teacher, personal communication, August 2013). Statements such as these demonstrate the need to implement alternative solutions in addressing teacher concerns for student achievement.

One main data source from which information was obtained is the county's access to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (2013). This source enabled me to gain information regarding student achievement over a two-year period. The Statewide

Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) provides teachers, schools and their districts with access to historical data, which in this case includes assessments, attendance, and teachers. The information acquired from the SLDS demonstrated the disparity in student achievement from year to year, starting with the scores as acquired during the last few years of NCLB onto the advent of Common Core. The school as well as the county has experienced declining test scores must pursue alternatives. The low-test scores as obtained from SLDS and CCRPI may indicate teachers are unprepared to teach students under the demands of CCSS and lack ability to meet increased demands to improve student achievement.

The CCSS is designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are equipped to enter either the workforce or attend a collegiate program. The Common Core State Standards are based on a comparison of expectations from high-performing countries around the world (GADOE, 2012). Accordingly, CCSS does not dictate how a teacher should teach which leaves the bulk of the planning and preparation of lessons to the teachers. At the same time, the expectation is that students would leave the classroom with the ability to compete and collaborate with peers here in the United States as well as around the world. With the increased expectations of CCSS, the need to address the decrease in student achievement is more prevalent than ever. A noted deficiency has been identified as the need for some form of teaching alternatives and strategies that could be used to specifically address declining achievement scores. The intent of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of low student achievement scores, the use of departmentalization and team teaching, and suggestions they have for helping raise their

sense of self-efficacy or feelings of their ability for meeting increased standards of student achievement. Information about teachers' perceptions shed light on possible solutions to increasing academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

Specific concepts that were used in the context of my investigation are defined and explained in the list which follows.

Co-teaching: Those instances whereas two teachers co-plan and co-instruct a varied group of students with a range of learning levels allowing both teachers to provide fundamental instruction during the daily lesson (Murawski, 2008). In some cases, these terms are used in conjunction with team-teaching.

Departmentalization: An instructional paradigm in which young students change classrooms to meet with a teacher who is considered to be the best or the specialist in a particular subject area (Andrews, 2006). Departmentalization is sometimes referred to as platooning (Hood, 2010). More U.S. elementary schools are supporting the use of departmentalization (Hood, 2010).

Self-contained/traditional: Classrooms that include several students under the guidance of one teacher addressing all of their curricular needs (Strohl, Schmertzing, and Schmertzing, 2014). The teacher in a self-contained classroom is a generalist who has the responsibility of providing the curriculum to one group of students for the entire day (McGrath & Rust, 2002).

Self-efficacy: A person's belief that she or he can achieve his or her goals (Bandura, 1997; Baron & Branscombe, 2012). Self-efficacy is also evident when

individuals commit to a set of explicit goals, as perceived through negative incongruities between what they do and what they seek to achieve within themselves that serve as motivation to enhance their efforts toward self-satisfaction (Bandura & Cervone, 1983).

Team-teaching: Those instances when two or more teachers providing instruction to one specific group of students (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Teachers from different disciplines partner or collaborate in their areas of proficiency to develop cohesive lessons (Loeser, 2008).

Significance of the Study

It is important to be able to address low achievement scores as indicators of learning achievement, as low achievement is a significant problem to not only the students and teachers but also the stakeholders throughout the county. Teachers, parents, administrators and the community are affected when children do not perform well in school; thus teachers are looking for a solution. The governor of Georgia recently proposed that all schools that do not show improvement on their yearly CCRPI can be taken over by the state and eventually be forced to adopt a charter system; this news heightens concerns of teachers at the school. The focus school would be directly affected by this change and faces a serious challenge when looking for solutions as to how to improve student achievement, since it is one of the schools that has not shown marked improvement in recent years.

Research Questions

The problem that this study was designed to address was declining student achievement scores in the upper elementary grades of the focal school. Changes have

occurred in the school because of the transition from NCLB to CCSS assessment standards, which demand that teachers help students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers who will be ready to compete with their peers around the world for employment or admissions into college (GADOE, 2010). The CCSS do not dictate how a teacher should teach, which means that most of the responsibility for planning and preparation of lessons lies with the teachers (GADOE, 2012). The intent of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of low student achievement scores and the use of departmentalization and team teaching and solicit their suggestions for raising their sense of self-efficacy for meeting increased standards of student achievement.

All stakeholders such as teachers, parents, administrators, and the community are affected when children do not perform well in school (Crum, Sherman, Whitney, & Myran, 2010). More demands are being placed on teachers at local, state, and national levels. Schools in Georgia are facing escalating penalties if they do not show improvement on their yearly CCRPI (e.g., remediation, support given to their students to attend other schools, or being taken over by the state and eventually forced to adopt a charter system; (GADOE, 2015). The concept of self-efficacy was helpful in better understanding teachers' thoughts on how they could improve student achievement and whether team teaching or departmentalization might help in this regard. The research questions for this study were the following:

RQ1. What are the teachers' and the principals' perspectives of reasons for declining student achievement scores?

RQ2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of team teaching to improve student achievement?

RQ3. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement?

RQ4. What are teacher's perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching or ability to help students meet increased standards?

Review of Literature

Various databases were searched for related research to investigate teachers' perceptions of low student achievement and possible methods to address the problem. The following search terms were among those used as keywords: *Common Core State Standards, collaboration, content specialist, co-teaching, declining student achievement, departmentalization, effective instructional models, improving elementary student achievement, self-contained, teacher self-efficacy, and team teaching*. Some of the literature located was dated well before the five-year window required by Walden when the only keyword was departmentalization, yet the works contained valid and rich information that proved valuable to the research. It was determined that classic investigations germane to the study could be discussed in the literature review. There have been very few studies done more recently using departmentalization as an indicator for research and include as many reliable resources as possible the choice was made to include those dated when the topic was most prevalent. The study includes perspectives on how alternative form(s) of teaching could influence student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was self-efficacy theory. The more positive teachers are about their ability to teach a subject, the higher their goals and the firmer their commitment to improving student achievement (Bandura's, 1997). Bandura and Cervone (1983) stated that the more developed one's self-efficacy, the greater the effort to realize one's goals. In the case of the focus school, positive self-efficacy would enable the teachers to increase efforts to improve student achievement. Teachers reported their beliefs of their areas of strong efficacy and their belief in their ability to help students reach higher levels of achievement for teaching along with areas in which they feel less secure. They were asked to discuss if they think departmentalization or team teaching would improve their feelings of ability to better prepare students to achieve higher standards.

Bandura (1997) is a proponent of the belief that those who have a low sense of self-efficacy may be simply disheartened by failure. Conversely, those confident of their capabilities due to higher self-efficacy set goals in which they work determinedly to succeed. That is, a person high in self-efficacy is expected to engage in the activity, persist longer and is motivated to achieve. Bandura et al. (1996) stated that efficacy represents an undifferentiated disposition and subjects that are dissatisfied with their own performances but have a high efficacy develop efforts made to master challenges rather than allow themselves to become mired in feelings of depression or futility. In a 1983 study, Bandura concluded that belief in one's ability to exercise autonomy over events that directly affect one's life is a shielding element against feelings of ineffectuality and

despondency. In the same study, Bandura stated that a high level of self-efficacy would strengthen one's level of stimulus and diligence in the face of complications and constant setbacks. Due to high demands for continual change in the focus school, this framework offered insight into the teachers' apprehensions over meeting the demands of CCSS while continually experiencing low student achievement.

Researchers have pointed out the need to consider teacher self-efficacy in affecting one's objectives and commitment to goals, level of motivation, and quality of critical thinking as it affects one's belief in one's capacity to affect change. Collie, Shapka and Perry (2012) stressed that schools can build a teacher's confidence and efficacy with the appropriate, sustained professional development that engage both the teacher and the classroom aids. It is no surprise that teachers are interested in identifying effective instructional models that are more likely to help their students succeed. Self-efficacy could be cultivated through a departmentalized system as teachers become more adept in their content comprehension through concentrated professional development as described by Bailey (2010) and Strohl, Schmertzling, and Schmertzling (2014). Teachers in the school that served as the setting for the study discussed possible ways to address declining levels of student achievement; considering ways to improve the teachers' sense of self-efficacy for addressing student learning needs contributed to a solution. Bandura (1997) said that self-efficacy affects motivation to teach as well as learn and influences one's level of determination and tenacity. He goes further to state that when one has a high sense of self-efficacy for achieving an educational task an individual will work harder, participate more willingly and endure longer when confronting difficulties than

someone who doubts their capabilities. Effectively addressing the research questions, data collection and analysis hinge upon those individuals who have a developed sense of self-efficacy for teaching, or are on the path to improve their teaching strategies and methods that directly affect self-efficacy and its impact on improved student achievement (Bandura, 1997).

Instructional Models

The instructional models addressed in the study were some of the most prominent discussed among the study participants when deciding and disseminating what would prove to be the most appropriate practices and strategies for student achievement.

Collaboration. A process whereas teachers can converge to jointly plan toward a common goal by making decisions and solving problems regarding the direction in which to steer curriculum (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Collaborating to improve and prepare a more demanding curriculum bridges the gap between outwardly unrelated subjects, or rather cross-curricular incorporation (Cara, 2012). In multidisciplinary teams, understanding between the disciplines is encouraged and permits teachers the opportunity to comprehend core principles and theories of contributing disciplines while sharing a fundamental mindset (Cara, 2012). Collaboration plays a large part in both departmentalization and team-teaching. In both models, collaboration is required (Cara, 2012). Teachers must work together in teaching subjects in a cross-curricular fashion.

Many subjects can benefit from cross-curricular collaboration and if set up properly can work toward improving student achievement (Cara, 2012; Dugan &

Letterman, 2008). Social studies while predominately inundated with informational text can use the same said text to develop various skills and strategies in reading standards. This method of collaboration could afford teachers the prospect of working with their colleagues, so that they can share and interchange ideas and results in the classroom and deliver much needed support while tackling the growing concern over declining test scores (Cara, 2012; Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007).

Cara (2012) explained that with multidisciplinary teams, understanding among the disciplines is encouraged. In this manner, teachers are afforded the opportunity to comprehend core principles and theories from contributing disciplines while sharing a fundamental mindset. Cara (2012) conducted a practice-based study that examined ways in which to improve teaching and learning and widen teacher perspectives through shared teaching. The study was conducted in real classrooms in collaborative settings over a three-year period. It included 30 educators along with 900 students, in regions of Melbourne, Australia encompassed by low socioeconomic families with a large and diverse ethnic and language background. Many of the students were considered “at risk” and came from the lowest percentage of residents who completed secondary school within the region. The teachers worked in teams relying on those areas of expertise of each teacher to provide the most motivating learning units. The teachers adopted a premise from an African proverb that exemplifies “It takes a village to raise a child”, by developing an atmosphere of collaborative and inclusive shared teacher and student learning.

The focus of Cara's (2012) study was learner-centered while using scaffolding to develop the learner's skills. In essence, Cara suggested, a student-centered practice that makes the students responsible for their own learning, and promotes the concept that students develop ownership of their own learning. While time management was considered a major limitation of the study, the teachers involved agreed that shared teaching decreased their workload while allowing for better preparation. Cara (2012) concluded that shared teaching promoted inclusive practice because it supported and recognized a diversity of opinions, and thoughts and actions were to be valued in developing the independent and autonomous learner.

Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2007) corroborated Cara's study stating they believed when teaching is collaborative and reflective the student's performance is markedly improved. They continued this line of reasoning in their study by stating that students who experienced a collaborative cross-disciplinary instruction felt better prepared for courses in their chosen fields and experienced a higher sense of achievement over the traditional courses. The author's summate that to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness, collaboration is needed that could provide teachers with a framework in which to transform schools into a more cohesive learning environment.

Team teaching. Team-teaching resembles departmentalization in that teachers can break from the isolation of the traditional classroom while allowing teachers from different disciplines to partner in the development of meaningful curriculum, real world projects and better assess student learning (Loeser, 2008). Team-teaching can be either a tag team or side-by-side approach (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Each teacher handles a

portion of the instruction that s/he can best handle using his or her teaching style. In the Dugan & Letterman (2008) quantitative study, the authors analyzed and compared student assessments of team teaching against the normal classroom. Team teaching in the case of this study consisted of various models including three or more teachers (panel), simultaneously two-person teaching (coteaching) and alternating two-person teaching (alternate). The study derived its data from a survey of the students and faculty in team-taught classes at three New England universities and in eleven different team-taught classes. Dugan & Letterman used the Individual Development of Educational Assessment Center (IDEA) as its survey instrument. The survey measured student-learning results from classes taught by one instructor as well as the three varieties of team-taught classes. The survey consisted of forty-three questions that rated progress concerning objectives, styles and methods, along with self and class characteristics.

Out of the eleven different classrooms that contained two hundred and eleven students comparing team teaching classes and classes taught by one instructor, Dugan & Letterman (2008) found no differences among students' ratings when comparing team teaching classes against classes with one instructor. However, when comparing the three styles of team teaching, panel (three or more teachers), coteaching (two teachers teaching together) and alternate (alternating two-person teaching) the authors found that a lack of communication between teachers was the main obstacle to good grades according to a majority of the students surveyed. Students in the survey indicated that their preferred method of team teaching involved two instructors in the classroom at all times to address

the student concerns regarding communication. Alternate teaching was a close second while the panel was the least desired teaching method among the students.

Another version of team teaching may involve a divided class and each teacher instructs one group of students in particular subjects while the other instructor provides a lesson to the other group in an opposing subject (Crum, Sherman, Whitney, & Myran, 2010). As early as 1960, there was concern about team teaching even though at the time it was an instructional model that was creating excitement and interest among the teachers (Lambert, 1960). . Furthermore, Lambert (1960) explained that team teaching in the classroom “is based upon the idea that every teacher excels in some, but not all, of the abilities and techniques that are necessary for the education of a single child” (p. 85). Likewise, Loeser (2008), stated that team teaching refers to interdisciplinary teams involving two teachers who display strengths in particular subjects and collaborate to develop a rigorous curriculum that bridges the gap between seemingly disparate subjects, or rather cross-curricular incorporation. Loeser (2008) reviewed studies that included special education and regular classrooms, middle school teams, and high school interdisciplinary teams. The author (2008) reported that interdisciplinary team teaching ensued mostly at the high school level, while 80% of middle schools in the United States used team teaching, coteaching was seen primarily at the elementary level, but all are considered a form of team teaching.

Loeser (2008) explored the benefits of numerous team teaching models on teaching and learning along with conditions essential for successful teaching partnerships. Successful teaching partnerships, according to Loeser, must include a)

common planning time, b) teacher willingness, and most essentially c) communication. The author stated that mutual planning time is the number one defining factor to a successful teaching partnership, where teachers can discuss and plan curriculum, revisit objectives and confront student concerns. Teachers must be willing to invest the time necessary for a successful teaching partnership, Loeser stressed, and that teachers should not be pushed into a team teaching situation, but rather encouraged to embrace the concept in order to improve instructional practice and student achievement. Loeser also proposed that communication is extremely important to developing successful teaching partnerships, and teachers need to converse honestly in everything ranging from, but not limited to, methodologies associated with assessment, teaching philosophies, and classroom policies. The author indicated that in a worst-case scenario teachers paired arbitrarily without consideration to willingness and communication could negatively affect a teaching partnership, and, according to various teachers from the study, administrators occasionally fail to recognize these factors when developing teaching teams overlooking the impact on student achievement. In cross-curricular or multidisciplinary teams, understanding among the disciplines is promoted and enables teachers the opportunity to understand core principles and theories of contributing disciplines while sharing an essential mindset (Cara, 2012; Loeser, 2008). Cara (2012) further implied that, in today's constantly changing classroom, it is imperative that teachers cultivate flexible thinkers who are better prepared for the future, which reflect the basic tenets of CCSS. Cara and Loeser's (2008) ideas may be informative for the problem being addressed.

Departmentalization. Departmentalization is a way of structuring classes wherein teachers teach mainly one main subject to all students instead of many subjects to a few students. Williams (2009) proposed departmentalism is an attempt to augment teachers' expertise that promises better success, or rather an improvement in student achievement. The author goes further to say that one benefit of these forms of teaching is that teachers would be required to focus on limited subjects that could allow for more in-depth teaching.

The conventional elementary classroom has one teacher and a unit of students that s/he handles teaching all core subject areas (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2010). However, "is it possible for an elementary school teacher to be so adequately trained and knowledgeable in a multitude of subject areas that he can teach them all?" (Dean, 1960, p. 406). Presently in the county in which the focus school is located, there is a consistent decline in test scores in particular subjects such as science and social studies, which may be due to a lack of time or motivation or both, to teach in light of the standardized testing requirements of reading/language arts, and mathematics as described by Ballou, (2014) and Chan et al. (2009). Dean (1960) asked if school curriculums are becoming too overwhelming for one educator stating, "Is it possible for an elementary school teachers to be so adequately trained and knowledgeable in a multitude of subject areas that can teach them all?" (p. 406). Dean raised a variety of questions about the use of departmentalization: (a) how can a teacher be expected to meet the special needs of all children when teachers have the responsibility of reaching a common level? (b) Does our present method of training teacher's produce many insufficiently qualified for this newer

responsibility? Strohl, et al. (2014) agreed with the reflections of Dean when they stated that among the 12 participants the overall agreement was that the workload of teachers in a traditional classroom sometimes seemed insurmountable. They also stated that the participants found their planning time was more productive when they were allowed to plan for only half of what is expected in the traditional classroom. Overall, these researchers suggested that departmentalization could be helpful to allow teachers to better concentrate on one or two subjects.

Additionally, departmentalization enables teachers to use their strengths (Andrews, 2006; Williams, 2009). Andrews (2006) conducted action research in her school with the fifth-grade classrooms. The purpose of her study was to evaluate the benefits from departmentalization and a modified block schedule. Andrews explained that the blocks were composed of two subject areas and as such, each teacher taught two specific subject areas, such as writing and science, mathematics, and social studies, or reading and health. Three 90-minute blocks were used for each of the paired subject areas. Attention was also given to the diverse students population, for instance, Andrews explained that they developed six schedules that rotated so that they could accommodate students with different needs such as special education and English Language Learners. Results from Andrews (2006) were informative. She conducted a qualitative study and interviewed teachers and the students. Qualitative analyses were conducted, and Andrews identified themes that illustrated personal and professional benefits from departmentalization as reported by the participants. Teachers reported that, as a result of departmentalization, when they would teach two courses rather than five or more, they

had more time to: (a) plan lessons, (b) assess the work of their students, (c) improve the quality of the lessons planned, and (d) gain a sense of wellbeing which made them feel better generally. For example, teachers expressed appreciation for being able to spend more time on subject areas in which they had an expertise, they reported better relationships with their students and felt that they became much better teachers.

Responses from the students in the Andrews (2006) study indicated that they had positive feelings about changing classes in the fifth grade and being taught by the experts in the subject areas. It was interesting to find that the students also said that changing classes in the fifth grade set them apart from the other students, which made them feel good, and it helped them prepare for the transition to middle school. Finally, data as related to the students' tests scores were inconclusive. The researcher was only able to assess the students' mathematics scores and results showed that the students "composite score for total math and math subtests were maintained. While there was a modest improvement in the percentiles, the stanines remained the same," (Andrews, 2006, p. 16). The researcher concluded that there was room for improvement with the practice; for instance, the principal believed that the success of departmentalization would depend on the individual teacher because some were more suited for the practice than others. She also stated that more research was needed.

Since the early 60s, teachers and students experienced some aspects of departmentalization (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Findley, 1967; Strohl et al., 2014). Often in a departmentalized school, upper elementary students are assigned to homerooms where administrative tasks are performed, for example, attendance, distribution of information

(Strohl et al., 2014). Students rotate from one classroom to the next during the day and receive instruction in specific subject areas. There are variations of the departmentalization model as some schools at the elementary level have adopted a semi or partial departmentalized program where one teacher instructs multiple classes in more than one correlated subject, such as reading and social studies, and others team-teach with two or more teachers instructing a large selection of students, usually at the same grade level (Andrews, 2006).

In departmentalized classrooms, students are taught core curriculum subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, writing and reading by different teachers as opposed to a self-contained or conventional classroom with one teacher (Strohl, et al., 2014). As noted by Andrews (2006), one advantage of departmentalization is that it allows students the opportunity to move around without being confined or limited to one room with one teacher all day. Andrews, in agreement with Andrews, Hood (2010) ascertained that... “Departmentalization breaks the monotony: it provides students the opportunity to be challenged by different teachers and different classroom environments, and as students go from class to class, it gives them a chance to move around without getting into trouble” (p. 15). Further, Hood (2010) weighed the pros and cons of elementary departmentalization in her reporting of “Platooning” Instruction a term coined by the Denver Public Schools for departmentalizing. The study looked at the possible downturn in student performance specifically in the area of algebraic concepts, due to the newly expected state achievement test, TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program). Hood (2010) also reported that the advent of the state’s new assessment

prompted the superintendent of Memphis City Schools to look into an alternative form of teaching such as departmentalization in order to address the expected low student math scores on the state's high stakes assessment.

Hood (2010) concluded that the effectiveness of departmentalization was not clear, however, departmentalizing appeared to be a cost effective way of upgrading instruction through professional development that focuses on fewer teachers and maximizes resources, and through professional development teachers can make the necessary improvements with a focus on only one to two subjects, with the aim of becoming content specialists. Only a few schools in the district have adopted departmentalization (Hood, 2010) but there is concern that with increased standards in other subject areas that have been put on the back burner something must be done to aid the teachers in preparing to more effectively teach their students such as specializing content instruction. Students with diverse needs such as special education students, students with behavioral or emotional problems specifically benefit from this pause in the monotonous structure of the traditional classroom setting (Andrews, 2006; Delciscio & Muffs, 2007; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989). Departmentalization is a teaching alternative for students in the upper elementary grades to address the low academic achievement as well as provides diversity during the learning process (McGrath & Rust, 2002).

An often-reported benefit from the use of departmentalization is that it provides time for teachers to deliberate on the best preparation of a smaller number of exemplary lessons (Andrews, 2006). Andrews explained that there is a decrease in the need for

preparations of many subject areas, and the teacher can concentrate on one or two subject areas in depth. This means that the teacher no longer has to focus on multiple lessons that may only cover the content areas (Andrews, 2006; Strohl et al., 2014). The departmentalization instructional model enables the educator to build on his/her strengths, rather than teaching five subjects where a deficiency may exist, a deficiency, which may contribute to low student achievement. Strohl, et al. (2006), Andrews (2006) and Strohl et al., (2014) suggested that students would profit from intensive lessons and could surpass in areas not previously possible in the conventional classroom setting.

Strohl et al. (2014) also concluded that departmentalization was an attempt to augment teacher's expertise that may promise better success, and improve student achievement based on his case study to assess elementary school teachers' perceptions and experiences with departmentalization for one year. Data collection techniques included a questionnaire, interviews with the researchers face-to-face and in focus groups, and journals written by the teachers. The participants included 12 teachers who were selected by administrators to assess the implementation of departmentalization at the school.

Strohl et al. (2014) reported that all of the first, second, and third grade teachers agreed to participate in three focus group sessions and a one-hour interview. The age range of the teachers was reported as between 28 and 50 years. Other demographic data from the school showed that teachers' years of experience and credentials varied, the school was classified as a Title 1 school, and 815 students were enrolled during the year of the study. Results showed that five overarching themes emerged from the teachers'

responses across the different data collection techniques. In no particular order from Strohl's et al. (2014) study these themes were: (1) workload, (2) teaching methods and instructional time, (3) lesson planning, (4) interactions with students, and (5) interactions with parents. These findings can be described as follows:

1. The workload with the departmentalized instructional model was significantly less than that used in the traditional elementary school classroom. Teachers indicated that they were more productive and were able to better use their time to identify enrichment activities and plan for hands-on exercises such as with science experiments.
2. As a result of being able to better plan for their classes, teachers stated that they were able to add more activities in the lessons to supplement the lessons or differentiate them to fit the needs of the students. Teachers stated they could provide more in-depth lessons and in their opinion, improving their effectiveness.
3. Lesson planning was described as more effective, less stressful and gave the teachers more control over their personal and work schedule.
4. Interactions with the students improved as a result of departmentalization. Teachers reported that they knew and understood their students better, could remember their names, and were better able to connect with their students. One teacher stated, "If I see one of my afternoon students misbehaving in the hallway during the morning, I can call that students by name and correct the situation quickly" p. 11).

5. Teachers also described how the interactions with the parents of the students improved as a result of the use of departmentalization. Participants in this study admitted that they were sometime intimidated and apprehensive about communicating with parents when they used the self-contained instructional model. However, when they were using departmentalization, they stated that they encouraged parents to come to conferences more often. The teachers said that they also noticed that there were fewer instances when students left school early, so they did not miss as much instructional time (Strohl et al., 2014).

In conclusion, Strohl et al. (2014) stated that the participants in the study said that they preferred departmentalized instruction over the self-contained model because of a “lighter workload, more focused and higher quality instruction and increased self-efficacy” (p.17). These ideas can help inform the study.

It is the opinion of several educators and researchers that departmentalization could benefit educators by providing the best opportunity to address the CCSS by planning and preparing commendable lessons (Aud et al., 2011; Ballou, 2014; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Toch & Tyre, 2010). Teachers can use their time more effectively when they only have to concentrate on one or two subjects with departmentalized instruction and increased teaching efficacy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Strohl et al., 2014). Perrachione, Rosser and Peterson (2008) also reported that the departmentalized teacher plans fewer subjects than their self-contained counterparts thus reducing the amount of time expended developing and implementing other non-teaching

responsibilities. This decrease in workload ultimately leads to a decrease in stress (Caprara et al., 2006; Perrachione et al., 2008; Strohl et al., 2014). In essence, in a departmentalized classroom, teachers experience only a portion of each day with a group of students, causing less stress triggered by any challenging students (Buyse, Vershueren, Verachter, & Van Damme, 2009). Buyse et al., stated that classroom climates that are healthy are essential for effective teaching and learning, which creates an atmosphere that promotes less stress.

There are apparent advantages for teaching when teachers feel as though they are capable of performing their jobs effectively. When teachers can reduce the scope of instruction, as they can with the alternative forms of instruction such as possibly coteaching, departmentalization or team teaching, their levels of self-efficacy are expected to increase. Researchers have reported that teachers' attitudes toward the teaching of specified subject areas improved, as well as their self-efficacy for teaching the subject, and quality of instructional methods improved (Brown, 2012; Fantuzzo, Perlman, Sproul, Minney, Perri, & Li, 2012; Schwartz & Gess-Newsome, 2008).

Opposition to Departmentalization

Despite the positive recommendations for departmentalization there are still some educators who would argue that the self-contained classroom is the most nurturing environment for students in this age group and offers stability that departmentalization do not (Crum et al., 2010). Crum et al., found that principals in Virginia schools experienced increased student achievement when they empowered their teams, developed a strong positive rapport with their staff using efficient communication strategies and facilitated

the change process in their schools. These researchers contend that a successful school promotes teacher efficacy, motivation, and staunch support for professional development that creates and sustains an engaging educational environment. The next section of this review is used to specifically discuss research, which suggests that there are limitations with the use of departmentalization or that it should not be used.

Some precautions in the use of departmentalization have also been discussed in the research literature (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chan, Terry, & Bessette, 2009; 2004; Strohl et al., 2014). For instance Strohl et al. (2014) discussed the departmentalization instructional model as one of change and believe that change should be systematically introduced to the teachers and students. As such they, along with other researchers, recommended that schools conduct pilot studies before implementing the change in the instructional model to the whole school (Chan & Jarman, 2004). Procedural concerns could be identified and addressed as well such as transition to different classrooms built on the results acquired from the pilot study that could serve to enhance the effectiveness of the model when it is introduced to the whole school (Chan et al., 2009; Strohl et al., 2014). Additionally, Strohl et al. recommended that education leaders in the school need to consider the personalities of the teachers who are selected to use the departmentalization, model. As previously discussed, the conclusion has been that some teachers were a better fit with the model than others (Chan et al., 2009). The notions of attitude toward departmentalization and change will be important to address in this study.

Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) designed a study to assess the effect of departmentalization on students in elementary school. The focus of Chang et al. was on

connectedness because they argued that student connectedness is related to student outcomes. The students' connection to the learning environment was said to start with the teacher. Chang et al. theorized that departmentalization could hinder the school's ability to establish a supportive and caring environment because different teachers would teach the students. Hence, Chang et al. stated that they wanted to determine if the grade level and the content areas that were departmentalized had an effect on the students' connectedness. According to Chang et al., the eight schools in this study were using departmentalization to improve the school environment and integrate academics with social and ethical development. Third, fourth and fifth grade departmentalized students were matched with non-departmentalized students in a causal-comparative research design to determine if the departmentalized students varied from their non-departmentalized counterparts in feelings toward school.

The Chang et al. (2008) study took place in Louisville, Kentucky. Schools had to meet certain criteria, such as: (a) have a substantial achievement gap between minority students and non-minority students, (b) not be currently involved in any other comprehensive school reform activities, and (c) at a minimum, 80% of the teachers and staff had to agree to partake in the selected school reform model. These criteria led to the identification of eight schools out of 87 elementary schools in a public school district served as the setting for the study. A total of 1802 students completed a questionnaire, which asked about their perspectives of the school, classroom, and social and moral orientations. The five scales of connectivity were:

- Student autonomy and influence in the classroom,

- Supportiveness in the classroom,
- Liking the school,
- Respect and trust for teachers, and
- Have concern for others (Chang et al., 2008, p. 5).

Departmentalization data showed that 39% of the students ($n = 702$) were departmentalized, and 61% ($n = 1,100$) were not departmentalized. In terms of the number of teachers students interacted with, 63% ($n = 441$) of students who were taught with the departmentalization instructional model had three or more teachers, and 37% ($n = 261$) had two or more teachers. The only difference noted on the demographics of the students was age, that is, students who were in the departmentalized classrooms were more likely to be older than were their non-departmentalized counterparts. No gender differences were revealed.

To establish if there were distinctions between the departmentalized students and the non-departmentalized students as measured by connectedness to the school, the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was performed. The covariate that was controlled for was the initial differences in the schools. Significant differences were revealed on the two groups of students' ratings of connectedness for: (a) classroom supportiveness, $M = 3.00$ for the self-contained and $M = 2.46$ for the departmentalized students [$F(1, 1799) = 7.13, p < .01$] and (b) trust/respect for the teachers $M = 3.51$ for the self-contained students, and $M = 3.30$ for the departmentalized students [$F(1, 1799) = 12.44, p < .01$]. There were no substantial differences between the students in the departmentalized classrooms and the self-contained classrooms on the three other

measures of connectedness. Results showed that departmentalized students had a .02 difference ($\underline{M} = 2.46$, standard deviation .84) from the self-contained students ($\underline{M} = 2.44$, standard deviation .75) on the student autonomy and influence in the classroom measure; as indicated, this difference was not significant. Findings for the liking of school did not reveal any significant difference, that is, $\underline{M} = 3.01$ (standard deviation 1.13) for the self-contained students and $\underline{M} = 2.94$ (standard deviation 1.13) for the departmentalized students. Finally, concern for others showed that the departmentalized students had a slightly higher score ($M = 2.90$, standard deviation -.04) than did their self-contained counterparts ($M = 2.86$, standard deviation .83), however, this difference was not significant.

When the MANCOVA was performed for the degree of departmentalization and the connectedness to the school by the students in the Chang et al. (2008) study, results showed that the actual difference on the supportiveness and trust and respect domains of connectedness was between the students in the three teacher departmentalization classrooms and both the students in the self-contained and those in the two-teacher departmentalization classrooms. In each instance students in the three-teacher departmentalization classroom rated the two domains lower than did the self-contained and two-teacher departmentalization classrooms. There were no substantial variances between the self-contained classrooms and the two-teacher departmentalization classrooms on the student surveys. Also, results showed that there was a substantial difference between age and connectedness as measured by classroom supportiveness and respect and confidence in teachers. Data indicated that the younger age students, eight

and nine years old, were more likely to report lower ratings on both domains than were the older children, 10 and 11 years old. Chang et al. (2008) concluded that departmentalizing may not be the preeminent way in which to improve school connectedness, but rather develops a sense of detachment among students. However, the authors recommended that, in light of high stakes testing, alternative teaching solutions need to be scrutinized in the context of student achievement and the development of lifelong learners.

The explanation of these findings by Chang et al. (2008) was that departmentalization had a negative impact on the ratings of students of connectedness as measured by classroom support and trusts and respect for their teachers. The degree of departmentalization and age of the students also had an effect on the students' ratings. Students who had three or more teachers in the departmentalization classrooms, as well as the younger students, tended to report lower ratings of connectedness as measured by classroom support and respect for their teachers. The conclusions made by Chang et al. were that schools needed to cautiously consider the age of the students if they choose departmentalization. There is not a lot of research on departmentalization in the elementary schools, so more research is needed according to Chang et al. Furthermore, they recommended that if an elementary school elected to use departmentalization they should begin with the two-teacher model and start with the older students such as those in the upper elementary grades.

Job Stress

In a departmentalized structure, a group of students interacts with a teacher for only a portion of the day, receiving lessons in one or two subjects; they then rotate to another classroom where a different teacher is conducting a lesson. Similar to the findings from Strohl et al. (2014), Klassen (2010) concluded that since departmentalized teachers in an elementary classroom do not stay with the same group of students as in the conventional self-contained classroom, they get the opportunity to start anew with a different group throughout the school day. These type experiences help decrease stress and increase productivity. Klassen believed that teachers' collective efficacy (TCE) would mediate the effect of job stress (p.343).

To study the teachers' job stress and efficacy, Klassen (2010) recruited 951 teachers who were employed in elementary and secondary schools located in Canada. Three measures were used to collect information about the variables of interest. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (as cited in Klassen, 2010) measured teachers' collective efficacy through the use of the Collective Teacher Efficacy Belief Scale (CTEBS). Job stress was measured by the Teacher Stress Inventory created by Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni (as cited in Klassen, 2010). Klassen measured job stress with a "one factor, three-item, 9-point Likert-type scale" that had acceptable levels of reliability and validity.

Klaussen (2010) used a 2 (school level) x 2 (Gender) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to analyzed results. Results were no significant effects for school level, but significant effects were revealed for gender. Patterns from those data showed that females rated the stress variables such as workload and stress from the student behavior higher than the males. TCE refers to the teacher's perceptions about the school's

collective ability to effect positive change on student outcomes and is believed to be centered on the teacher's evaluation of the teacher's capabilities to teach all of the students effectively. The analysis disclosed that Teachers' Collective Efficacy for student discipline facilitated the impact of job stress from the misbehavior of the students. This relationship was consistent across groups. In other words, as explained by Klassen (2010), "Teachers' collective efficacy may lower teachers' stress attributed to student behavior," (p. 350). Class management can play a role in lowering a teacher's stress when addressing student behavior as well as building a collective confidence based on improved student discipline, since teachers workload is more challenging to influence than stress from student behavior.

Improving Student Achievement

Studies reviewed for this literature review consistently discussed the importance of teachers feeling as though they can successfully achieve their goals, that is have high levels of self-efficacy, in order to improve student achievement (Bandura, 1997; Baron & Branscombe, 2012; Brown, 2012; Caprara et al., 2006; Cara et al., 2012; Klassen, 2010; Strohl et al., 2014). An example explained below is the educational status in Finland (Antikainen & Luukkainen, 2012; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2014) and how the country addresses student achievement. The educational system in Finland is one where students are required to attend school all the way through secondary schools. At the age of 16 students have to choose between a vocational track or an academic track. This school system also has no tuition and fees, free meals are supplied for full-time students, and schools are strategically located near students (Antikainen & Luukkainen,

2012). Data obtained between 2006 and 2012 showed that Finland has consistently ranked among the highest in the world in terms of educational success. According to the Finnish Ministry of Education, Finland attributes its success to “the education system (uniform basic education for the whole age group), highly competent teachers, and the autonomy given to the schools” (Antikainen & Luukkainen, 2012, p. 8). Based on this type of information, it is speculated here that Bandura (1997) would predict that teachers in Finland have a high level of self-efficacy, and it is possible that Chang et al., (2008) would predict that students have a high level of connectedness to the school.

Furthermore, schools in Finland practice policies diametrically opposed to NCLB by first eliminating a ranking of its schools based primarily on student test scores (Guisbond, Neill & Schaeffer, 2012). Guisbond et al., further explained that in Finland the focus is on: (a) assuring equitable resources unilaterally, while providing additional resources to those schools that serve students with greater needs, (b) heavily investing in professional development ensuring that teachers are amply prepared, and (c) providing autonomy to demonstrate faith in the teacher’s abilities. When a comparison of standards of different schools was made, the results showed that the expectations of high-performing countries do not dictate how a teacher should teach, which means that most of the planning is left up to the teachers (Guisbond, Neill & Schaeffer, 2012).

Other states that have adopted CCSS are addressing the problem of low student achievement through a variety of strategies. New York implements an improved method of assessment, Massachusetts uses a three-part assessment and evaluation program, and Virginia chose to empower teacher self-efficacy which supports the belief that efficacy

promotes motivation and a commitment to the field while serving as a predictor of teachers' effectiveness.

In conclusion, many of the studies included in this research have cited findings from authors in favor of departmentalization as a possible alternative to addressing low student achievement at the upper elementary level as well as supporters of the self-contained classroom. In summation authors such as Hood (2010), Cara (2012), Strohl et al. (2014), Ballou (2014) and Crum et al. (2010) agree that a consideration in improving student achievement may lie in teaching methods such as departmentalization. From questioning over 351 fifth grade teachers in Memphis City Schools Hood (2010) found that maximizing teacher's resources while concentrating on only one or two subjects certified teacher effectiveness. "Self-efficacy was found to be a positive effect of departmentalizing...as teachers reported feeling more confident and prepared in their teaching than when... they taught self-contained classes" (Strohl et al., 2014, p. 12). In Cara's (2012) practice based paper she was able to ascertain that teaching using methods such as team teaching or departmentalization allowed students to become moored in structures and domains of knowledge that created and developed lifelong learners, indicating that the traditional classroom may not be appropriate in preparing students for either academic achievement or social interactions. On the other hand, Chang et al. (2008) argued that research shows that positive relationships are developed in self-contained classrooms between teachers and students, especially those students that are socioeconomically disadvantaged and their main source of adult interaction comes from teachers and for these reasons departmentalization may unsettle the formation of that

integral teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, McGrath & Rust (2002) stated in their paper that the self-contained classroom allows for the opportunity of the teacher and student to become well acquainted, and a teacher develops a strong sense of their students' personalities, weaknesses and strengths and understands best how to accommodate for a students' individual learning style. The study will look to gain perspectives from teacher's regarding the local problem of declining student achievement in the upper elementary grades through alternative teaching solutions as mentioned.

Implications

Change of some sort at the focus school is a foregone conclusion as it pertains to the need to improve student achievement. Teachers' ideas about team teaching and departmentalization inform this change and called for professional development to improve departmentalization practices. Also, to assist teachers in feeling more efficacious in developing and improving lessons for the more rigorous standards in the CCSS, effective professional development was needed. The participants also offer other alternative ideas to improve achievement that lead to professional development and recommended policy change. It was determined at the conclusion of this study what teachers think should be done to improve student test scores. Based on the information obtained from the comprehensive literature review, professional development throughout the school year was needed to help teachers increase effective instruction to meet their students' needs. The final project was developed with my committee based on responses of the participants.

Summary

The specific problem that prompted this study is declining student achievement scores in the upper elementary fourth and fifth grades. In 2013 Georgia, along with 42 other states decided to implement the Common Core Standards (CCSS) to ensure that students who manage to graduate from high school are equipped to enter either the workforce or attend college or vocational school. The expectation is that Georgia's students would be able to compete with students nationally and internationally. However, the transition to the CCSS has not been successful, and the focus school has to address declining test scores (GADOE, 2013).

Section 1 includes student scores from GADOE (2014) for the years 2004 up until 2012 that demonstrate not only declining scores from the focus school but also the district in which the focus school is located as well as the state of Georgia in grades K-12. Section 1 includes information about the problem of low-test scores, teacher's concerns about addressing new requirements of CCSS, related literature, and suggested choice of professional development for the study. In Section 2, I present the qualitative methodology, the research design, how participants were selected and received correspondence regarding protection of their participation and the focus of the study. Steps taken to establish a relationship with said participants, address ethical concerns, along with the process of the collection of data and analyses of the findings, and the limitations expected of the study are also discussed.

Section 2: Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. As individual perceptions were sought from each participant, a case study was in order, which includes extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). A case study characteristically centers on small groups or individuals; the researcher documents the experience of that group or individuals in a definite setting (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). According to Merriam (2009), a key point about a case study is to make sure to keep in mind that they offer rich description that affords the reader a mediated experience of being there. The case study worked best for this study because the plan was to provide a detailed examination from one setting that is relatable to similar settings as was the circumstances for this study it also described the activities of a group that were culturally shared and gathered through observations (Creswell, 2012).

This case study was specific to the school that served as the setting for this study. I investigated a modern phenomenon in a real life context (i.e., teachers' perceptions of low student achievement), and I limited the participants to a manageable number for a qualitative study. In this study, I sought to better understand teachers' ideas of why student achievement is low, their perspectives of the value of departmentalization, and their perceived sense of self-efficacy for meeting increased standards. Grounded theory involves constructing of a theory through the analysis of data already gathered and usually begins with a question (Merriam, 2009). The author goes further to explain that in grounded theory the data or questions leads the study and rich descriptors that come from

participants is rarely involved. The goal was not to develop a theory, thus, grounded theory would not have been a good match, but to find emerging ideas that teachers can contribute to solving the problem of low achievement. These are characteristics of the study that identified it as a case study.

The collection and analysis of statistics required for quantitative research (Creswell, 2012) would not have been the most appropriate approach for understanding individual teachers' beliefs, meanings, and lived experiences. Quantitative researchers are known to use numeric data for statistical analyses, in some cases are inflexible using observable phenomena oftentimes using math or computations to report their data, discounting the value of a rich "professional" descriptive summary as seen in a qualitative case study (Lodico et al., 2010). In conclusion, in this study, I sought to investigate teachers' ideas about how to address and increase low student achievement possibly through departmentalization and development of self-efficacy for teaching.

Participants

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 educators within the district at the focus school. Participants included nine teachers and one administrator. At the time of the study, the teachers taught or had taught at either the fourth or fifth grade level, in a traditional (self-contained) or a departmentalized setting. Ten participants ensured that the fewer participants involved could allow for a deeper inquiry per individual (Merriam, 2009). I used purposeful sampling for the study because there was a need to interview participants who had knowledge and involvement in teaching in the fourth and fifth-grade levels and who were experienced in teaching many subjects and, thus, could be deemed

information rich. Certain teachers were chosen so that they could provide the most in-depth information about student achievement in fourth and fifth grades, since they were the most experienced at those grade levels. Thorough descriptions of the focus school are provided so that readers may be able to transfer findings to similar settings.

Gaining Access to Participants

Once the study was approved by my dissertation committee and by Walden University, I secured consent from the administration of the school district and the school site. Upon receiving authorization to conduct research needed for this study from the school district, I met with the school's administrator to discuss the research study and the sampling procedures. I then obtained teachers' e-mail addresses from the school administrator. Teachers were then contacted via e-mail with an explanation about the study and how it may benefit their school; I also included information about protecting participants' confidentiality. I waited 10 business days for the electronically signed and e-mailed consent form from the participants before seeing them in person for the purposes of establishing rapport and maintaining accuracy in records, as well.

After the participants returned the consent forms as instructed, I made contact with them via emails and telephone calls to schedule a time to meet for the purpose of a one-on-one interview at their convenience. Interviews were scheduled so that there was no interference with instructional time. Participants received e-mails to remind them about the scheduled interview. For instance, teachers received an alert several days before the interview to check for possible changes in the schedule; another alert was sent 1 day before and 1 hour before the scheduled interview to avoid any last minute alterations and

to offer participants the opportunity to reschedule if necessary. As noted, no contact was made with the teachers until after permission was obtained from the education leader of the school.

Establishing Researcher/Participant Working Relationship

The relationship between the researcher and the participants can range from detached and impersonal to collaborative and friendly (Lodico et al., 2010). I have worked with a majority of the participants for approximately 6 years without any problems or negative interactions. As such, I expected that my relationship with the participants would continue to be collaborative and friendly. During the interviews, I engaged the participants in discussions of concerns over declining test scores and expressed the need to find alternative methods to improve scores.

While encouraging interviewees to identify alternative solutions to the school's low student achievement, I remained neutral to avoid making interviewees uncomfortable. It was also important that I remained receptive to their ideas and alert to the fact that the relationship between a researcher and participants may either positively or negatively evolve over the course of a research project (McGinn, 2008). I followed McGinn's (2008) advice that, as a researcher, I adhere to the needs of the participants with respect to their comfort and availability. I endeavored to remain true to the participant's own words in the interviews; I respected their experiences and perspectives in the hopes of demonstrating a deferential and engaging relationship laboring not to bias opinions. Important ethical considerations can surface from the nature and quality of researcher/participant relationships, which were addressed by lack of a supervisory

position on the researcher's part and the participant's ability to discontinue their participation at any given time. The participants were also allowed to review their transcribed interviews and discuss points in which they either disagreed or added further discussion because I do not presently hold, nor have ever held supervisory positions over any of the participants, the expectation was to receive candid and realistic perceptions that address student achievement concerns as needed by the study.

Ethical Concerns

Several steps were taken to address ethical concerns. First, I gained permission from the superintendent of the school district to conduct the study. After approval from the Walden IRB Office (see Appendix C) and the district, personal contact was made with the administrators of the focus school to verify permission. The consent form was initially sent via email so that participants could become aware of the parameters of the study, and have enough time to consider whether or not they wanted to participate in the study. Each participant was asked to email a copy of the consent form to me with an electronic signature within 10 business days to avoid the perception of coercion.

Participants in the study received an email as well that included a/n:

1. Informed consent to participate,
2. Outline of the parameters of the study,
3. Assurance of honoring confidentiality concerns, and
4. Promise of disclosure of the findings with participants and stakeholders upon completion and final approval of the study by the Dissertation Committee.

Participants were told that participation was on going and voluntary, and that they could withdraw at whatever time without experiencing any penalties. I assured them that I would protect them from harm by not holding any discussions about individual comments with anyone, and that their comments would not be discernible in the final report. Participant confidentiality was honored through the use of codes for participants and aggregation of data. Individual statements remain on an external hard drive under lock and key as well as computer accessible by only me. Both the external hard drive and the computer are stored at my home in order to avoid any inadvertent workplace tampering.

Data Collection

The main source of data was obtained from interviews of 10 teachers and one administrator. One interview was done with each of the 10 participants who were specific to one school and about their perceptions of a particular phenomenon. Upon approval, interviews took place during shared planning periods or at the suitability of the participants. The interviews were conducted, individually, in the focus school's conference room at the time that worked best for the participants. They were free from distractions due to students' attendance in other scheduled activities. If it became necessary, plans were made to arrange the interviews at another time and location that was comfortable for the participants. Relationships established among participants began with the sharing of a common experience such as concerns about changes in student achievement.

Table 14 presents the interview schedule for six out of 10 participants from a selection of fourth and fifth grade teachers in the focus school, as well as a four other teachers who had previously taught at those grade levels. The schedule was based on each of the teacher's 2014-2015 specials schedule, as obtained from the administration. Specials schedule refers to the time allotted to teachers to update, meet, and collaborate for the day's lessons while students are interacting with an art, music or physical education teacher. If the teacher would prefer, the schedule would accommodate the participants by meeting at a time of their choice that would not interrupt instructional time. The administrative interview occurred at the education leader's discretion which was held after school so that there was no interference with any planned in-school activities.

Table 14

Interview Schedule

Teacher Number	1 st Interview Time Month 1 Week 1	2 nd Interview Time	Alternative Time
Teacher # 1	Monday 11:20-12:05	Teacher has the option of any date that coincides with planning time (11:20-12:05, 8:00-8:45, 1:15-2:00, or 9:40-10:25)	Each teacher has the option of alternative times, after school between 2:30-4:00. Schedules will be coordinated at the convenience of the teacher.
Teacher # 2	Tuesday 11:20-12:05	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 3	Wednesday 11:20-12:05	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 4	Thursday 8:00-8:45	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 5	Friday 8:00-8:45	See Above	See Above
	Month 1 Week 2		
Teacher # 6	Monday 8:00-8:45	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 7	Tuesday 1:15-2:00	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 8	Wednesday 1:15-2:00	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 9	Thursday 1:15-2:00	See Above	See Above
Teacher # 10	Friday 9:40-10:25	See Above	See Above

By seeking perceptions from educators, the intent was to gain insight and an in-depth comprehension from the group and situation as explained by Merriam (2009). In this qualitative case study, the goal was to investigate the perceptions of teachers' ideas about low student performance and alternative teaching methods in which to address, such as departmentalization of upper elementary teachers. The interview questions were developed by me to provide awareness into the problem of low achievement and generate ideas to improve achievement (See Appendix H). I audiotaped and transcribed all

interviews. Please see Table 15 for Research Questions as related to the Interview Questions.

Table 15

Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. What are teachers' and principals' perspectives of reasons for declining student achievement scores?	1
2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of team teaching improve student achievement?	3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11
3. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement?	2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
4. What are teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching or ability to help students meet increased standards?	12, 13, 14

Document Review

Archival data from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) provided student criterion test scores and were collected to gather additional information that would contribute to the validity of the study. The archival data was retrieved from a statewide site available to all teachers in the district. The site allows teachers to view the school's records and is separated in a variety of categories, identified by student, standards, grades, subjects and scores over the previous two years. The data was made available before the interviews for the participants to peruse and discuss during the interviews, allowing time for personal interpretation. The site also included limited

resources for teachers to use that directly address CCSS that could: (a) assist in remediation for student deficiencies with the standards, (b) aid in discussions on solutions for the problem of declining achievement in fourth and fifth grades, and (c) help generate possible ideas to improve test scores. As Lodico et al. (2010) pointed out, in case studies, more than one qualitative method may be used. In fact, “multiple techniques including interviews, observations, and...documents and artifacts are at times employed” (p. 269). Data collected from recorded interviews, along with printed SLDS reports specifically assimilated to the focus school per grade level, provided information that was used to help determine how best to tackle low achievement. The archival data was reviewed to: (a) gain a clearer picture of the context for evaluation as it regards student progress over a period of years (i.e., longitudinal data), (b) identify/address student needs for growth/achievement and (c) determine a baseline from which to measure my results. A standard/comparison from which to assess student achievement, such as the focus school in comparison to the county/state, was also reviewed.

Interviews

At the beginning of each interview, the topic was re/introduced along with the contents of the informed consent document. The interview data included demographic information regarding the participants’ such as years of teaching experience and teaching grade and the time of the study. Interview data collected from participants also included one interview per participant, scheduled for 45-60 minutes each to deduce phenomena in terms of the implications people bring to them (Griggs et al., 2011). The one-on-one interviews were conducted to determine a participant’s perceptions of the problem of low

student achievement and proposed alternative solutions. Each participant was interviewed once, however, the possibility for a second interview was discussed.

The second interview was mentioned in the event that: (a) there were any unclear responses from the participants, and (b) time was needed for the researcher to further engage the participant if opportunities were presented in the interview that enabled the participant to describe relevant candid moments that steered away from the original probes. As explained by Merriam (2009), this strategy would demonstrate respect for the views of the participants. In this way, if further explanation or probes on any answers were not clearly addressed in the initial interview, then the researcher would remain cognizant of on the job time constraints by being able to schedule a second interview. If clarity were achieved in the first interview and the participant felt as though they had time to express their concerns and ideas, then a second interview would not be necessary. According to Merriam (2009) qualitative research is designed to meet rigor and trustworthiness that contains rich data, and several interviews can ensure that the participants are the proprietors of the knowledge and experience as it regards the topic at hand. Interviews work best in determining a participant's perceptions or response to an event (Lodico et al., 2010). Participants were asked for their permission to audio record the interviews for later transcription. Interviews enabled me to better understand the teachers' perceptions of declining test scores and the structure of departmentalization as a teaching format.

Data analysis involved triangulation of interviews and data from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). Triangulating sources of information provide a more

precise picture as evidenced in a multitude of ways (Griggs et al., 2011). Data triangulation in this study included the ongoing collection of data from among 10 teachers and one administrator, at different intervals while keeping track of emerging understandings through a reflective journal as well as the archival data collected over a set number of years for the fourth and fifth grade classrooms. These data were separated into subjects, categorized by a student's performance index of exceeds, meets or does not meet standards, as well as the schools CCRPI index for the same years.

Role of the Researcher

I have more than 12 years of experience at the focus school in various leadership roles as well as that of a teacher of the upper elementary grade levels. In those years I have held the role of grade level chair for at least eight years as well as social studies and science chair, technology co-chair, principal's advisory team, social studies liaison, curriculum author, and occasional professional development instructor. At the time of this study I accepted the responsibility to lead the STEM initiative for the focus school for the upper grade levels and technology liaison for Google Drive. I have also worked with a majority of the teachers in said grade levels for most of my tenure at the school.

I have never held any supervisory position that required evaluations among the colleagues that participated in the study. In addition, the participants were eager to solve the problem. To ensure that no biases occurred, I also monitored the reflective journal to identify any subjective assessments. Additionally, a peer debriefer was selected who did not hold a supervisory position at the focus school, had more than 15 years of teaching experience (several at the upper grade level), and experience with departmentalization.

She also signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure confidentiality for herself as well as the participants of the study.

Data Analysis

After the last interview, I began the transcription of the audio recordings and proceeded with data analysis. At least one hour was planned to transcribe each 15 minutes of the interview. In the weeks following the interviews I transcribed each interview and arranged participants' comments to survey for emerging themes for coding by identifying certain words, ways of thinking, phrases, and topics (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Based on the emerging descriptive themes, I then organized the coded themes into meaningful interpretive categories. When analyzing the interviews, I recorded notes in the reflective journal of my observations and queries that I found interesting and informative to the focus of the study thus beginning the coding process and the building of categories. I read the information at least three separate times, marked emerging themes with code words throughout the transcribed text, listed the emerging themes related to the problem and conceptual framework, and grouped those that shared similarities. Findings were presented in narrative form with emerging themes organized into main categories and, as described by Creswell (2012), I used the language of the participants (i.e., *in vivo*) to support identified themes.

A rich descriptive summary was composed to identify commonalities to ascertain the role a teacher's self-efficacy plays in student achievement despite or due to perceptions as they relate to collaborative forms of teaching. The components of self-efficacy that guided the coding involved synthesizing and summarizing information as

related to the framework that occurred in the interviews. I developed a storyline that integrated those themes that centered on self-efficacy, perceptions of competence to teach in different structural situations, motivation to help students learn, and persistence in spite of repeated failure (Bandura, 1997). In developing the storyline I allowed the data to guide me in the best way to organize and code, and steer the basic structure of the coding system. I established a list of pre-set codes that were derived from the conceptual framework and research questions and allowed my prior knowledge to aid in creating the pre-set codes. I also allowed the coding to organize my data while refining my codes through coding notes that suggested new interpretations of the data and remained cognizant of what may grow from the data that pointed toward issues that may have required further perusal.

Microsoft excel was used to create a chart for categories appropriate for a visual representation which would serve to narrow the data. Each interview was reviewed for both accuracy and coding. The codes were placed with its own heading and the information gathered was entered into appropriate rows associated with the most accurate category as described by the participants. It was expected that as the data developed so would the coincidental ideas and the shaping of a more precise and reflective demonstration of the data collected from the individual interviews.

Evidence of Credibility and Trustworthiness

Merriam (2009) stressed that member checks were invaluable to a study and can also aid in identifying any biases by soliciting feedback from the participants based on emerging patterns and accuracy of the interviews. In this manner, misinterpretations and

misunderstandings could be avoided. Member checking is also necessary to identify inconsistencies, concerns and allows for accurateness through checking with participants and should occur within 14 days from completion (Merriam, 2009). The draft findings from interviews were emailed to each person and she/he was asked to give input about points in which they may disagree or may have forgotten to share. The findings of the study were emailed to the participants for the purposes of accuracy, realism and fairness to avoid any misinterpretations.

Another recommendation to control subjective perspectives and biases was to continually record reflective field notes along with a journal of thoughts (Lodico et al., 2010). I kept an ongoing research journal of my thoughts about the study to aid in formulating meaningful ideas. Once the interview notes were transcribed, I re-evaluated and re-read to identify data that were potentially relevant for further coding purposes. In order to ensure internal validity I implemented member checking of the draft findings, along with a schedule in which participants could meet with me to address any possible discrepancies or concerns. Additionally they were asked to check for the accuracy of their own data included in the findings within a 14 day window and return the information to me upon completion (Merriam, 2009). Sample transcriptions of interviews and coding are included in Appendix H to support credibility and trustworthiness.

Management of Discrepant Cases

As is the case with qualitative research, if participants provide a response it is considered a part of the results. The number of participants who voiced an opinion does not have as much weight as the quality or depth of the information provided in qualitative

data analysis (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). In this case, there was one instance in which the response from one participant was discrepant from those of her peers. When participants were asked how they felt about their ability to teach and meet the increased goals of the GPSS, all of the participants reported that they felt comfortable and confident with their abilities except one. Participant Number 2 indicated that she was scared. As explained by Participant 2, the previous standards in mathematics were more simplistic than the current standards. These differences and interpretation of the findings are discussed further in the results section.

Limitations

The limitations have been identified at this time. First, as this study took place within one semester of a school year, time can be considered to be a limitation. Also, the participants of the interview process were limited to fourth through fifth grade teachers from one school within one district. This means that the results/outcome may not be generalizable for other schools or any other grade levels. Transferability was addressed by describing the context. Another limitation could have been the reluctance of the teachers to totally share their ideas.

Data Analysis Results

Thematic analysis was used to successfully analyze the data. The following procedures were used as described by Creswell (2009). According to Creswell to successfully analyze qualitative data means that the researcher is “preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the

data” (Creswell, p. 190). I used the following procedures to address each of the four qualitative research questions:

1. I recorded a description of the participants based on the information revealed in the interview.
2. I prepared and organized data for analyses by transcribing the participants’ responses that were recorded on the audiotape during each one-on-one interview with me. This involved typing the notes in a word processing program on my own computer. These data were then arranged by the specific research question being addressed.
3. I read through all of the responses to the particular interview questions to develop a general sense about the type of information provided by the participants. I reflected on the responses noting the tone, information, impressions, and possible meanings as described by the participants, as well as the depth of the knowledge shared; my reflections were kept in a separate research journal on my computer. Responses to questions were kept on both my personal computer hard drive and a USB drive; hard copies were printed for further analysis.
4. I read, reread and placed information into manageable sections to identify and gain an overall sense for the substance of the information. This is from the reflective notes kept within the margins of the transcribed interviews.

5. Coded and categorized responses in the actual language used by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Responses were analyzed by codes into emerging ideas and to inform the study.
6. I developed themes and categories emerging ideas into related categories as provided by the teachers. This information was then made available as the major findings from the study and presented as related to the specific research question.

Findings were presented in narrative form. The essence of the participants' responses was organized in accordance to the research question. Information provided by the participants, which reflected their interpretations, meaning, or understanding of the discussion questions was summarized using their own words as they informed my conclusions.

Member checking was used to assess the accuracy of the information collected. Member checking is the process used by the researcher to review the information provided by the participant to ensure that accurate data were recorded. Discrepant responses discussed in analysis, participants in the case of this study were not needed for additional discussions related to discrepant data. Depending on the research question, there were never fewer than three codes and sometimes as many as five. These coded responses were then organized into meaningful units as themes.

The findings are organized as follows. I first present information about the sample. Then, the findings from the study are presented based on the specific research questions that guided the development of this study as they relate to the local problem of

declining student achievement scores in fourth and fifth grades. The research questions developed to address perspectives of the problem were, 1) What are teachers' and principals' perspectives of reasons for declining student achievement scores? 2) How do teachers' perceive the effectiveness of team teaching to improve student achievement? 3) How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement? 4) What are teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching or ability to help students meet increased standards?

Analysis of Interviews

Participants. I chose purposeful sampling for the study since there was a need to obtain information from participants who had knowledge about and were involved or had been involved in teaching fourth and fifth grade students in different subject areas (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). At the time of the study there were nine teachers who fit the criteria for selection. One teacher had transitioned into a position as a Resource Teacher for the Early Intervention Program (EIP). However, she had more than three years of experience with departmentalization and self-contained classrooms with fourth and fifth graders and agreed to participate in the study. Overall, nine teachers and one administrator agreed to participate in the study. Thus a total of 10 participants were interviewed. The experiences of the teachers in the teaching profession ranged from two years through 20 years; the average number of years in the teaching profession was 9.8 years. All of the participants ($n = 10$ or 100%) reported that they had taught in self-contained classrooms and departmentalization classrooms. The sample can also be

described as mostly females (90% or $n = 9$) with one male (10% or $n = 1$), and African American (90% or $n = 9$) with one Caucasian American (10% or $n = 1$).

Findings from Analysis of Interviews

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perspectives of the team teaching and departmentalization processes and teachers' ideas about what they may need to help them feel capable of improving student achievement that will address the perceived gap in practice of possible needed professional development. Specifically, 14 questions were posed to each participant. Table 15 shows the number of the specific questions used in the interviews to respond to each of the research questions (see Appendix H Interview Questions and Protocol).

Table 15

Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. What are teachers' and principals' perspectives of reasons for declining student achievement scores?	1
2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of team teaching improve student achievement?	3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11
3. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement?	2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
4. What are teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching or ability to help students meet increased standards?	12, 13, 14

In addition, archival data was retrieved from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The SLDS provides student criterion test scores. These data are available to all teachers in the district. This information was made available to the participants before the interview so that they would have time to consider and reflect on the information. Furthermore, the archival data was also used to gain a clearer picture about student progress over a period of years. The performance of the school in comparison to the county or state as applicable was also ascertained.

Evidence of Quality

Triangulation of data involved interviews, data from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), and keeping track of emerging understandings through a reflective journal. Sample transcripts from the reflective journal are presented in Appendix H (Transcript from Reflective Journal and Additional Questions). Findings as related to each research question are subsequently presented after member checking, whereas participants were emailed a brief conclusion of the findings along with the opportunity to respond in order to avoid misinterpretation or bias (Merriam, 2009).

Summary of Outcomes

The findings of the study are included in a presentation of a white paper to district stakeholders such as the teachers, and administrators of the focus school as these are the individuals who will be actively involved in the documentation of the professional development activities used in the classroom. Their support and active involvement is needed for approval of the policy recommendations and ultimately the success of the

project. Along with the district stakeholders, the school board will be important in their support for policy recommendations.

Research Question 1: What are the Teachers’ and the Principal’s Perspectives of Reasons for Declining Student Achievement Scores?

To obtain information that could be used to respond to this research questions, during the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked directly, “What is your perspective of the reasons for declining student achievement in the past few years? Three themes emerged from the participants’ responses. First, it was apparent that the participants’ responses reflected the belief that educators, parents and the students themselves shared in the responsibility for student achievement. For instance, the educators attributed the students’ decline in student achievement to: (a) changing standards with increased rigor, (b) teachers not being able to respond to the needs of the students, and (c) parents unable to help at home (see Table 16).

Table 16

Reasons for Declining Student Achievement from the Perspective of the Participants

Themes	
Primary:	Changing standards with increased rigor
Secondary:	Teachers not being able to respond to the needs of their students
Tertiary:	Parents cannot or do not help at home

Data that led to the identification of each theme are subsequently presented along with the statements from the participants that support these findings. It was also observed that each teacher gave several reasons for the decline in student achievement.

Primary theme: Changing standards with increased rigor. The primary theme that emerged from the responses of the educators who all had experience teaching fourth and fifth grades was that, in recent years, standards have changed consistently and each new change required increased rigor. For example, Participant Number 7 reported the following information,

Well I think the CRCT and the Georgia Milestone are two separate entities when it comes to testing. I don't think that teachers nor students were prepared for the level of rigor in which students would have to test in, and I don't think that the strategies and the teaching styles were incorporated in time for students to get acclimated into that type of learning. So I think that that's probably a lot of the reason for the decline, and I think if we continue it would probably get better, this was just within the last few years.

The participant clarified her response further when I probed by asking, "So you think a lot of it has to do with the fact that the students are still getting used to learning at critical thinking levels and problem solving levels?" Participant Number 7 said,

Well, not only that, we were teaching to test, kids were not having to explain their writing verbatim as to step by step kind of, that kind of thinking was not required of them. So it's going to take more than a couple of years for students to actually gain that kind of concept. It's not going to happen overnight. So if they were starting this as children that

were [in] kindergarten and they had been doing it up until they hit third grades, those kids would do much better.

In summary, this participant is referring to the fact that in previous years when students were using the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), much of the curriculum was based on teaching students how to take that test, but with the advent of Common Core mandates teachers are charged with building our students' problem solving and critical thinking skills that prepares them for the next grade level as well as the Georgia Milestone Assessment System (GMAS) and if taught per the standards then students are prepared for the GMAS when they start in third grade. However, their responses also showed that the participants believed that the changing standards and increased rigor had a negative impact on academic achievement directly and indirectly. For instance, as reported by Participant Number 6, "More recently in the last couple of years, since changing towards more rigorous standards, I have noticed that parents are saying that they weren't taught the same way that students are being taught today." Participant Number 5 provided her perspective in the following manner,

I would say the main reason would be the way in which we are asking them to think is different. It's not as straight forward (answers) any more, and this generation is looking for that. They are looking for questions that have answers right there in their face because they don't seem to like to have to analyze too much. The powers that be keep changing the standards. We are now using Common Core and two years before that it was a different set of standards and as I understand, it was just three years

before when they were completely different. There is no consistency in these students' lives.

Participant Number 4 explained an impact on the testing situation that occurred as a result of the change in standards,

I think the kids have gotten where they have been tested so much that they don't care how they score anymore, especially the last two years with the GMAS (Georgia Milestones Assessment System), which were thrown out anyway, so they don't count for anything. They are just not taking it seriously. The children are able to do better they just don't care.

Similarly, Participant Number 1 stated that "I believe it's a lack of motivation is one of the reasons, and also that the student isn't just as focused on education. Education is not a priority to them in my opinion."

Participant Number 10 presented information that added to and supported the statements made by the participants in response to the first discussion question they heard in the one-on-one interview. According to Participant Number 10,

I think a couple of reasons. One of the reasons I think is the change over from Georgia standards into common core standards. I remember when we came out with common core standards our district wide training or series of trainings about common core but we really did not get into the standards of the common core. So, what I've found is for a lot of teachers, and administrators, there was an adjustment in how we actually taught students based on what the common core was actually asking us to do or

asking students to be able to do by the end of their grade level. With that being said, that is one of the reasons why we spend so much time with unpacking the standards because what we also did was, often times it could leave different interpretation[s] for what the standards are actually asking the students to be able to do. So in one grade level, although there are some recursive standards that scaffold to each other, one perspective in second grade might be different than the teachers in third grade so the teacher in third grade has expectations in terms of what students should come with and the second grade left them with a different perspective because of their interpretation of the standards.

That was a lack of collaboration, and so I think we're getting smarter now with collaborating and making sure we all have the same understanding of what the standards are asking us to be able to do. So that when we're teaching, you know, we're intentional with that.

Furthermore, Participant Number 10 elaborated about the complex situation that educators and the students find themselves. Participant Number 10 explained,

The other thing is the changes in the assessment system; we went from CRCT to the Georgia Milestone. The CRCT, for all intents and purposes, we were told was a less rigorous assessment for the students. In order for them to exceed if you will, they did not have to answer as many questions, it didn't require students to go as in depth. We didn't have to write as much because the writing assessment was separate. Now it's included or a

part of the reading and math, and students are expected to be able to write critically and write about what they understand. So it meant that we had to change the way we thought in our teaching practices and so our preparations for the assessments had to look a little different.

Participant 10 also expressed perceptions on how preparation of assessment were to be achieved by adding,

Even something as simple as making sure our students utilize the computer a lot more because now our students are assessing on the computer and the goal is for all students to assess on the computer. Well that's a totally different set of skills that some teachers find difficult along with all the other demands they have for teaching the content area itself while not always having that support to do that. So the change in assessments, the change in the standards, and then, definitely not the decline in or lack of resources. We have plenty of resources and some people would probably say we have too many resources because there's so many to choose from and it can become overwhelming. I mean what we're finding though is that, less is more, if you will. That's kind of my, one of my, or some of my reasons why I think the decline in student achievement scores.

While participant 10 had a number of reasons for declining student scores they were able to break down some of their perceptions that possibly contributed,

Schools just have to think about so much more, you know. When we had the old accountability system it was reading and math was the focus. So schools really focused on just reading and math, with new accountability, CCRPI, everything counts, access, attendance, reading levels, all content areas, and growth in each. There's a lot to think about when one day you're addressing student needs, behavior, guidance counseling. So there are different things and climate is a part of it so there are a lot of different things that teachers have to think about in schools when they're approaching student achievement. So it's not just about content area.

Responses from the teachers indicated that they were aware that the standards had changed, and that the new standards required increased rigor. For instance, the participants discussed the change of the testing methods that also had implications for the type of skill sets needed to do well on the different instruments used (e.g., from the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) to the Georgia Milestone Assessment System (GMAS). Teachers also reported that neither they nor the students were prepared for the increased rigor. Finally, they also indicated that there was initial confusion about what the new standard was asking the students to be able to do.

Secondary theme: Teachers not being able to respond to the needs of their students. The secondary theme revolved around the responsibilities of the teachers or school (i.e., education leaders in the school, district, state and federal government) not being able to respond to the needs of their students. Educators felt that for various reasons, student needs were not being met. There were many reasons given that identifies

this theme. For example, respondents indicated that there were not enough educators to help the students. They also reported that the achievement level of the students made it necessary for teachers to know how to differentiate but that some teachers were not able to do so. Another reason teachers stated that they were not able to respond to their students' needs was because they were not given enough time to effectively teach a standard before it is time to move to the next standard. Support for these findings is subsequently presented. Participant Number 2 stated:

There are not enough educators in the classroom to teach the students in smaller group settings and the demographic that we serve would truly benefit from smaller group settings and more support teachers in my case where previously I received no EIP services. So all of my students that are eligible were not served, which is a disservice to the students. Why didn't I see growth among my students? It's just too many bodies suffering with only one person to address their needs. It's out of balance.

Participant Number 3 said,

I think the scores are declining [because] a lot of teachers do not know how to differentiate and we need to figure out what methods work for the students to make sure that they're reaching their goals and being able to understand concepts so they can go on to the next grade.

Participant Number 6 explained her response to this question as follows:

I feel that there are several reasons for the declining student achievement scores. The first that comes to mind is, students seem to be far below their

current grade level in reading and math. [This] tends to show me or tell me that they're not getting a good foundation, those foundational skills are missing.

According to Participant Number 8 the decline can be explained in the following manner:

I think as a district there have been a great number of transient students; a lot of students that are coming into the county are well below our county, or performing well below our county. We do see a difference and we can actually identify which students weren't in our system just by their knowledge of the content areas. I also think teachers are not given enough time, depending on their building, whether they're able to hone in on a certain content area.

As explained by Participant Number 9,

I feel that scores have declined in the past few years due to the way the curriculum is paced. Teachers are not given enough time to effectively teach a standard before it is time to move on to another one. I have worked with fourth and fifth grade for over 10 years and many of them don't even know their multiplication facts due to us not teaching the process. They are learning strategies, but they are not learning the rote process as we did when we were in school. When students have to complete other concepts aligned with multiplication, but they are unable to understand the new concept because they have not mastered multiplication.

The participant goes further to explain how one subject affects another and contributes to the declining scores,

Everything is connected to math but if they don't understand the basics, they definitely won't grasp the complex, which is cause for grades to decline more and more. When it comes to reading, students are just not reading, as they should. They are not reading for fluency or comprehension. They are reading to get done. I am also starting to wonder if teachers know how to teach reading effectively.

Tertiary theme: Parents cannot or do not help at home. Participants also identified the lack of support some students seem to receive from their parents to help them succeed in school. Participant Number 3 stated,

Also I think that kids are not getting the help that they may need at home and that might [be] because parents are working and also some of the subjects, especially math, are completely taught different than the way they were taught. So they're trying to help but may be messing their children up because they're teaching their kids the old methods instead of the new methods.

Similarly, Participant Number 5 indicated that the lack of support from parents had a negative effect on student outcomes. As stated by Participant Number 5,

I also feel like scores have gone down because for areas like this (poverty level/Title I), people expect these students to fail so sometimes they are not being pushed enough, especially at home. They don't have anyone

helping them out, they don't have anyone to check their work, and if their parents do check their work they don't really understand what is going on (with our large Latino population a majority of the parents barely speak English), or they may have struggled in school themselves (for the parents of our non-Latino students). I think those are just some of the factors that are attributed to declining student achievement scores.

Responses from Participant Number 6 showed similar concern about the lack of parental involvement and student academic achievement. As stated by Participant Number 6,

I also think that there has been a great decline in parental involvement, which we all know that that's what bridges the gap from in class learning to at home learning. They [parents] can't help the kids as much as they would like to.

This theme was also evidenced by Participant Number 8. When they stated,

Also lack of parent involvement, that's one of the strongest reasons and not to fault the parent. However, some of our parents aren't coming with the knowledge base of what the curriculum is demanding of students at this juncture so they really don't have that support at home.

As can be seen, the third theme identified focused on the role parents have in the education of their children. Participants reported that there were instances when the parents wanted to help but could not. Two illustrations of these statements were shown from the participants' comments that indicated teachers believed when parents were

working they could not always be home to help the children, and that sometimes parents do not have the knowledge base of what the curriculum demanded from the children.

Summary. The 10 educators thought that teachers, education leaders, parents, and students have an important role in the attainment of positive student outcomes. Data analysis for RQ 1 resulted in three themes emerging from the interviews. According to the educators who agreed to participate in this study their students' decline in academic achievement could be explained by: (a) changing standards with increased rigor, (b) teachers not being able to respond to the needs of their students, and (c) parents cannot or do not help at home. Information from the interviews, as explained by the participants, was presented which support the findings of the identified themes. Furthermore, it was also noted that the participants consistently reported more than one reason for the decline in student achievement.

Research Question 2: How do Teachers Perceive the Effectiveness of Team Teaching to Improve Student Achievement?

Information obtained from the participants related to team teaching from interview questions number 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11 were reviewed and analyzed to develop a response to this research question. To ensure that all of the participants had knowledge and experience with the pedagogy that is the focus of this study, participants were asked to define both departmentalization (i.e., interview question number four) and team teaching (i.e., interview question number three), and they were asked if departmentalization or team-teaching was applied on their grade level currently (i.e., interview question number five). Since the focus here is with team teaching, the results

from the questions related to team teaching are presented here and the information related to departmentalization are presented with the findings for the third research question.

The primary theme identified in the teachers' responses to interview question number three was that teachers who attempted to define team teaching agreed team teaching referred to being in the classroom with more than one teacher. For example, according to Participant Number 1 "Team teaching is when you have more than one teacher in the classroom and are bouncing teaching styles and/or strategies off of each other. Helping each other in regards to the subject matter, we're looking at the same subject at one time." When asked to define team teaching Participant Number 6 responded, "Team teaching is usually more than one teacher in the classroom where those teachers are responsible for sharing the responsibility of teaching in that content area." Similarly, Participant Number 3 described it in the following manner,

Team teaching actually works in a similar way [as departmentalization], for example when we're discussing math, social studies, and reading we tried to cross curricular the subjects. Like when we taught Paul Revere we're teaching across the board and team teaching we're adding parts of every subject, combining different parts of the curriculum together, so we have more across the curriculum teaching. Team teaching is different because we have fewer students and the students have two teachers to adjust to.

Participant Number 7 stated, "Team teaching is when two collaborated teammates take on content together and they team teach within their grade level. So two people, or

one person would teach math and science and the other one would teach social studies and reading.” Participant Number 8 informed that departmentalization and team teaching were not the same and she was able to make the distinction. She said,

Because as I understand it they are not the same thing. In my opinion, or rather based on my professional knowledge I feel as though team teaching and departmentalization are different. Team teaching will be when two teachers will come together to teach a specific content area so it’s more like a collaborative effort.

When I provided this participant with a description of a, respectively, departmentalization, and team-teaching paradigm, she responded correctly. The interaction between this participant and me in this regard is described subsequently.

Alright, so I’m [the researcher] going to give you a scenario and you tell me if its departmentalization or team teaching. Last year on my team there were three teachers for all of the students at that grade level, each teaching different subjects; departmentalization or team teaching? [Participant Number 8 said,] Departmentalization. Okay, this year, two separate teams (four teachers two of which teach ELA/SS on different teams and two that teach Math and Science as partners for the other two teachers); departmentalization or team teaching? Team teaching [as stated by Participant Number 8].

Consistent with this theme was Participant Number 9’s response, which also explained “Team teaching is two teachers in the same classroom teaching a subject

together whole group. Teachers can also break off the students into smaller groups, but they will still be working on the same subject.” Finally, Participant Number 10 explained,

When I think of team teaching I think of an environmental situation where there are two teachers in a classroom co-teaching the same content areas facilitating learning at the same time. For example, a general education teacher and an ESOL teacher, a general education teacher and a special education teacher, a general education teacher and a gifted teacher, or even perhaps maybe just two teachers. That’s what I see team teaching as or I define team teaching as co-teaching.

In contrast, Participant Number 4 indicated that both departmentalization and team teaching belonged in the same category. When I asked the participant if she felt that there were any differences, she replied that,

The concept was the same, the only difference [is] that it could be either two teachers on a team or three, but in each case the teacher only has to teach either one or two subjects and they can specialize in those subjects.

There were two participants who stated that they could not define team teaching because of a lack of information about it. For instance, Participant 2 indicated that she did not fully understand team teaching,

...but if I am understanding correctly it’s when another teacher comes into the classroom...I can’t answer that question fairly because I never have worked with just one other teacher as a team, sharing subjects. When

working with other teachers in a similar situation it has always been departmentalization for me.

Participant Number 5 explained that she had only recently started team teaching. She said “I am not comfortable trying to define team teaching with it so fresh a concept.”

During the interview, participants were also asked: Is departmentalization or team teaching applied on your grade level now? If so, how? Patterns from the teachers’ responses showed that half of the teachers indicated departmentalization was applied on their grade level (see Table 16). Also shown in Table 16, three of the teachers reported that neither one of the paradigms was used on their grade level. It should also be noted that only one teacher was engaged in team teaching.

Table 17

Is Departmentalization or Team Teaching Applied on Your Grade Level?

Response	Departmentalization	Team Teaching	Neither
Yes	P1, P3, P5, P6, P10*	P2	
No	P8		
Neither			P4, P7, P9

*P = Participant Number

Participants were asked directly about the effectiveness of the instructional strategy they used on their grade level (i.e., interview question six). Overall, patterns from the participants’ responses showed that teachers whose grade levels applied departmentalization believed that it was effective; and the teacher who reported the use of team teaching reported that it was effective. Participant Number 8 indicated that either

approach would be effective if used correctly. Participant Number 10 stated that the effectiveness of the approach used depended on the effectiveness of the teacher. As will be seen, some of the other participants' responses were consistent with this belief.

Participants who discussed team teaching indicated that its effectiveness basically depended on the effectiveness of the teachers. For instance, participants described challenges with team teaching. The themes that emerged from these responses were: (a) having a good team, (b) experience of the teachers, and (c) grouping. Participant Numbers 3, 6, and 7 provided information, which resulted in the identification of these themes. When participants were asked to describe the effectiveness of team teaching, Participant Number 3 reported the following,

Even though I have only taught one grade level, one-year team teaching and one-year departmentalization, each year was different because of the people that I worked with. My first year was not good. I prefer not to elaborate on that since I am still trying to establish relationships despite my rocky start. [I then followed up with a question by asking, "So it wasn't so much a preference for either departmentalization or team teaching, it was the team itself?"] [Participant Number 3 replied] Yes, definitely. If it wasn't for the makeup of my team last year I am not sure it would have worked as well. There were five of us, three departmentalized (my team) and the other two were self-contained and I received more help with this grouping than I did my first year when I only had one partner (team teaching) to collaborate with.

Participant Number 3 then elaborated further by explaining some of the problems with the use of team teaching. She said,

I felt like I had more time with the students in a departmentalized class than when I was team teaching. I got more done. I think this happened because it was both the awesome team I worked with and the fact that it was my second year, so I knew what to expect, whereas my first year I was sort of thrown in and I didn't know what to do, and if it wasn't for a member of the other teaching team I would have been completely lost. In my second year I walked in with more confidence and knew the expectations. I knew more about time management.

Participant Number 7 stated,

Well I just think if you have a weak link on your team the kids struggle and they you're making up what they're not. At the end of the day your group of students are still your students so if they go to a weak link and they're not getting reading, and that's a subject in which they have to pass, then that becomes a problem for the whole grade level not for just one teacher. So it's more than one person being affected, it's the whole grade level being affected.

Participant Number 7 wanted to convey the importance of a strong team, and that despite how well their view on the concept of becoming a specialist in one or two particular subjects if there is even one teacher on a team that does not have the experience and self-efficacy to aid in student achievement then the whole grade level is negatively

affected. It was interview question number 10 that asked participants directly: “What is your perception of the use of departmentalization or team teaching as a method of improving students’ achievement scores?” Given that the focus of this section has been on team teaching, participants’ responses as related to this paradigm will be presented here and information related to departmentalization will be presented in the results described for Research Question 3 where the focus is on departmentalization. When participants were asked this question, the theme that emerged from the participants’ responses was that effective teachers enabled team teaching to help improve students’ achievement scores. Participant Number 7 indicated that her perception was that team teaching would be the method to improve students’ achievement scores while emphasizing the importance of effective teachers. As explained by Participant Number 7,

I think it [team teaching] does [improve student scores], again, it goes back to if I had a strong team and that was what we taught and that was our thing there’s going to be more rigor in the classroom, you’re going to push your kids further, you’re going to have higher expectations of your kids. You know you play to your strengths, that doesn’t mean that along the way you don’t gain more strengths, that doesn’t mean that along the way they don’t gain a strength that they didn’t have further along the way, but when you’re playing to everybody’s strength then the kids benefit. And you have a happier environment within the collaborative team. Not just the student’s benefit.

Participant Number 6 believed that either instructional strategy would be effective in helping students improve student achievement. She stated,

Departmentalization or team teaching can be used to improve student achievement scores. I think this is true because the teacher has to do planning for one or two subject areas, provided she or he is either departmentalized or on a team teaching mode. Therefore they can focus more on that one or two content areas as opposed to having to plan all five content areas. Which can be very time consuming and stressful. And what I've actually seen a year where the student achievement scored did increase. We've seen it work in the past and that was the year that we were given autonomy to structure the class [es] the way we needed to structure them.

Similarly, Participant Number 10 indicated that either method (i.e., team teaching or departmentalization) would help improve students' achievement scores because both would improve teachers' effectiveness. As explained by Participant Number 10, whether or not a school supported departmentalization or team teaching depended on the effectiveness of the teachers.

As mentioned previously, participants reported that they perceived: (a) team teaching as the method that had a positive impact on students' achievement scores, or (b) both methods had a positive impact on students' achievement scores. However, Participant Number 2 indicated that even though team teaching was used in the school, she believed departmentalization was better than team teaching for the improvement of student achievement scores. Her perceptions about departmentalization will be discussed further with the findings for Research Question 3.

The last interview question that provided information that could be used to develop a response to Research Question 2 was interview question number 11. This question asked participants “What are your perceptions of student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings?” Patterns from the participants’ responses showed that there were essentially two themes that emerged where participants’ responses indicated that they perceived: (a) departmentalization as the paradigm that had a positive impact on student achievement, and (b) both as paradigms that would have a positive impact on student achievement depending on the circumstances. Information pertaining to departmentalization will be presented in the next section that describes data analysis conducted for research question three. One participant reported that she could not choose one over the other because of lack of experience in the traditional setting. Specifically, according to Participant Number 5,

I have never had to teach in a traditional setting. I am not really sure because even when I was student teaching the classes switched at least once per day, like I do in team-teaching. I have had some experiences with a traditional classroom, but the number of students was really small.

Less than 20, so I can’t really answer from experience.

The second theme that emerged from the participants’ responses to the interview questions about the effectiveness of team teaching or departmentalization was that both of the settings could be beneficial for the students’ achievement, but it depends on other factors. Participant 2 explained it in the following way,

I see student growth in both settings. However in the departmentalization setting you are focused on just one or two subject matters, the kids know that you truly understand the subject in which you are teaching. I have seen success in both so this is actually a difficult question for me. At this point it just might be selfish reasons as to why I prefer departmentalization to the traditional classroom because there is less stress. Although departmentalization has its share of battles, in the traditional setting you know everything about your students...so say you have a student that has deficiencies in reading but is a superstar in math, but I don't have to worry about 65 students, only the 25 or so in my classroom. I'm in a tug of war on this question because I have seen success in both settings. At the end of the day I prefer departmentalization as a teacher.

When asked about her perceptions of student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings, Participant 7 said,

I think you need to know the climate and the school community in which you're in, and that might sound wrong for me to say, but I think that economically and the community in which you're in... where you have parent support, that all comes into play. So when you are in an environment where you have parents that are pushing their kids to learn and are participating you have a better environment of kids being able to be successful. So I think that all of those things come into play... I think that third, fourth, and fifth grade levels can handle departmentalization,

but it is based on the community in which they are in. So if you're in a community where you have a lot of parent support and those kids are pushed to learn and to be in that type of environment. I think you can do it in third but I just don't think that all schools should say that third through fifth should be departmentalized. I think that is should be up to the administrators to know their community and their school. If you have people who don't want to do it on your team, they're not going to want to give their best.

When Participant 9 was asked about her perceptions of student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings, her response also indicated that other factors must be considered when discussing the merits of either strategy. She stated,

This is truly a catch 22 situation. The reason I say this is because it comes back to what I stated earlier in number 9 [Have there been some challenges to executing departmentalization or team teaching within your grade level? Please explain.]. Student achievement may be the same or totally off concerning these two scenarios. Once again, you have a teacher that goes into a traditional classroom setting and only has expertise in math and science, but no expertise in reading and social studies. What is going to happen to those students? They may excel in those two subjects whereas they might not do as well in the other two subjects because the teacher does not know enough to effectively teach it (you will have some students that are going to excel whether they are being taught effectively

or not). I feel the same way toward departmentalization. It does not change. One teacher is teaching one or two subjects whereas the other teacher is teaching 5. The bottom line is that the teacher has to know the information they are teaching (pedagogy). There has to be some enjoyment and a lot of effort on the teacher's part to make sure their students are grasping all the information and retaining it. [Without being prompted the participant addresses self-efficacy, as in the framework for this research.]

Summary. It was important to be sure that the participants understood the concepts team teaching and departmentalization. Data analyses showed that when participants were asked to define team teaching, the participants' responses could be placed in three categories, namely, participants: (1) could define team teaching (i.e., responses from Participant Numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10), (2) placed team-teaching and departmentalization in the same category, meaning that s/he believed the paradigms were the same (i.e., Participant Number 4), and (3) admitted that they could not define team teaching (i.e., Participant Numbers 2 and 5). Results revealed that there was only one primary theme identified among the participants' responses. Participants believed that team teaching involved two teachers in the classroom and both were focusing on teaching one subject at a time. It could also involve a teacher with a specialization, for example, a gifted or special education teacher or a general education teacher and another content area specialist, or two general education teachers teaching the same subject matter.

Participants' perceptions about the effectiveness of departmentalization or team teaching were central to the information needed to address Research Question 2. Results revealed that teachers whose grade levels applied departmentalization believed that it was effective; and the teacher who reported the use of team teaching reported that it was effective. There were also teachers who indicated that: (a) either setting would be effective if used correctly, and (b) the effectiveness of the approach used depended on the effectiveness of the teacher. As noted by the teachers each paradigm has both strengths and weaknesses. For instance, three themes emerged from the responses discussed by the participants. Participants indicated that the challenges were related to: (a) having a good team, (b) the experience of the teachers, and (c) grouping. Overall, the participants believed that team teaching could be an effective method to improve students' achievement scores. In terms of the impact of the settings on student achievement, no simple response can be made. For instance, team teaching can be effective in helping students improve their academic achievement levels, under some conditions (i.e., effectiveness of the teacher, environmental support, students' characteristics, and parental involvement).

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement?

Just as information was needed about participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of team-teaching, similar information was also needed about departmentalization. Information from Interview Questions 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 were

used to develop a response to Research Question 3 (see Appendix H). In order to respond to the Research Question 3, results from the data analyses are outlined subsequently.

Interview Question 2. When participants were asked if they currently implemented departmentalization or team teaching in their grade, five participants said yes to departmentalization; Participants 1, 3, 5, 6, and 10 (see Table 16). Information from those participants who were in departmentalized classrooms is presented first. The data revealed one theme among the participants. All of the educators focused on the expertise of the teachers in one or more subjects, most often teaching the same group of students. Therefore, it was determined that participants could define it, had experience with this paradigm, and their input would be valued. When Participant 1 was asked to define departmentalization, she said,

Departmentalization I would define as when the teacher is an expert in one subject for example, like math, the teacher could become or does become an expert in math. For example I teach third grade math, and I'd like to think I know quite a bit about third grade math. I mean I do research on just third grade math in order to provide the best for my students.

Participant 3's definition for departmentalization was consistent with Participant 1's definition. Participant 3 said, "I think departmentalization is when certain teachers teach some subjects and others teach different subjects. For example, I taught social studies and science this past year and someone else taught reading and yet another taught math." Similarly Participant 5 said that "I would define departmentalization [as] a set of teachers working together but their focus is on each of their individual subject areas, but

they're still working together or rather with the same group of students." The remaining two definitions from those participants who were currently teaching in departmentalized classrooms are subsequently presented.

- Departmentalization is a team or group of teachers, usually on the same grade level, where each one is assigned a specific content area. And each of those teachers teach that content area to that grade level student, and so at that time students are on a rotation type of schedule where they receive the same number of minutes in each teacher's classroom to receive their lessons in all the areas. (Participant 6)
- I would define departmentalization as a grade level that has teacher experts that teach one or two at the most content areas. Where students receive instruction for a particular content area by one teacher.
Departmentalization, where you have teacher experts on a particular grade level. So for example, on a fourth grade level, or let's say use the fifth grade team for example, you have one math teacher, you have one science teacher and social studies teachers, and you have one ELA teacher.
(Participant 10)

It does seem clear that the common theme among the participants' definition of departmentalization involves expertise in one or two subject areas and collaboration involved among the teachers on the same grade level.

Interview Question 4. This item asked participants: "If you could be involved in departmentalization or team teaching how do you think it would be helpful for teaching

and students' learning? What may be the disadvantages?" The primary theme that emerged from the participants' responses was the inherent nature of departmentalization itself in the words of the participants, that is, the opportunity for the teacher to focus on one or two subjects and effective collaborations among colleagues. As explained by

Participant 1:

I prefer departmentalization, departmentalization was helpful for me the entire year I focused on one subject, and I also believe that my students benefited from me being able to concentrate on one subject matter.

Therefore I was a better resource to them in that subject. I have always liked departmentalization so I don't see a disadvantage to departmentalization. I believe in a classroom with departmentalization the kids can focus on one thing because everything in the classroom such as anchor charts and vocabulary is immersed with all of those things for that subject. So for that class period that's what the student observe.

The participant goes further to explain how having one or two subjects taught by one teacher is beneficial to the student,

They see math subject, they see anchor charts focusing on one subject instead of this corner social studies that corner reading. I think for some kids that might be too much going on in the classroom. I think team teaching would work if you have the person that you [are] working with matches or compliments your teaching style and you work with similar goals in mind. The disadvantage might be where there were two wildly

different teaching styles. That might be a little confusing to the students. I guess that would be a disadvantage with team teaching.

Participant 3 also perceived departmentalization as helpful for teaching and learning. She explained it in the following way:

I think it [departmentalization] is extremely helpful because then the teachers are able to concentrate on different areas and spend more time on that certain area so the students are in the class for a longer time, which allows for more in-depth labs as well as develop the resources for social studies. I think a disadvantage of departmentalization is that now when you move back to a more traditional classroom you are unprepared to go back to teaching five subjects. Now you're unsure of how to revisit the teaching of math, or reading and that's my problem for this school year. Although I have taught reading before I have however never taught math so I had to get back with my team and formulate a plan for the best way in which to teach math. I already know that I am going to have to really spend some quality time with my team member that taught math last year. I know I can do it, but all of those labs and resources I cultivated that realized student achievement could no longer fit into my schedule.

Participant 5 indicated that her involvement with departmentalization led her to believe that departmentalization was helpful for both teachers and students learning. She said,

Well, fortunately I have been involved in departmentalization so I can say that it was helpful for me as a first year teacher, only having to plan for reading and ELA. I feel like if I had to plan for five subjects then I would not have adjusted as well. Disadvantages would be the lack of knowledge of student performance in other subjects, only having the data for one or two subjects, but even that we can collaborate with our team to discuss data. It would be a disadvantage if you had an awful team to work with, luckily that wasn't my experience but I think that would be a huge disadvantage.

Even though Participant 6 was teaching in a departmentalized classroom, she informed the researcher that she would rather be involved with team teaching because she thought it would be more helpful. Her reason for that choice was that “you’re not rotating as many times, therefore you get more time with that group of students or each group of students.” Just like other participants, Participant 6 shared some of the disadvantages she saw with departmentalization.

The disadvantage for departmentalization...when [the students] are departmentalized at my school...they’re grouped based on their ability level and the disadvantage then becomes that each group or class of students may be at different levels of different pacing in that content area. And when that becomes the case it’s almost like you have to create three lesson plans or two lesson plans more than once per week.

In terms of the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement, Participant 10 presented a different view point than from most of the other participants. The information is relevant to the discussion however because it provides confirmation of the themes shared by the teachers as well as describes the process and the importance of effective leadership in order for schools to attain positive student outcomes. In response to interview question four, Participant 10 shared the following information,

I have thought about second through fifth grade maybe not necessarily the students moving but the teachers moving because I have been in schools where the teachers move. I do think there is something to say about a teacher who is very strong in math who can impact math with all students and if I'm really strong in math, especially if I don't believe I'm strong in math, why would I want that teacher to teach a child in math, you know. So for me, from a professional development perspective, I can focus my professional development on the subject in which I need to concentrate for that year, in order to become an expert in the building.

While the participant shared some views on the advantages of departmentalization they were objective enough to also see the disadvantages,

But the other side of that, the disadvantage is that if you don't have strong teachers in those departmentalized areas they impact a lot of students and so that's a disadvantage. If you don't have a strong teacher then that can be very detrimental to your student achievement in that particular area do

that's a disadvantage. And, of course, logistics wise you have to consider ESOL and EIP and having to place students in certain places in order to provide services to those students and so they aren't missing other areas. So I don't think departmentalization is the problem. I think how we structure our intervention time, as a county, is a problem so that can be a disadvantage if you don't have control over that.

Responses to interview question four from participants who were not currently teaching in a departmentalized setting were also analyzed. Patterns from these participants' responses revealed that only one of them selected team teaching as the setting they would chose to be involved, and the remaining participants' responses indicated that they would prefer departmentalization for the classroom setting. The reasons they expressed for their choice were consistent with the patterns from the participants who were currently teaching in a departmentalization classroom. That is, these participants also reported advantages that focused on the inherent nature of departmentalization, and the opportunity to work with other colleagues to help improve student achievement.

Themes revealed when these participants were asked about the disadvantages with departmentalization varied, for instance, one participants reported that she did not see a disadvantage with departmentalization. The themes surrounding the disadvantages were related to the work of the teachers and student learning. For example, as explained by Participant Number 1,

When you are departmentalized...I had three different classes and those different classes could have an additional set of three different levels or within each class you could have even more different levels in each class. So I think that would be the only challenge per se, differentiation for so many groups within each class. For example, in my homeroom I may have 3-5 different groups of students based on their learning levels, but with two additional classes you now have 9-15 groups that require differentiation.

Participant Number 1 explained that within a departmentalized setting a teacher may find him/herself on either a three person team that requires a rotation of at least three separate groups of students or a two man team which rotates two groups of students. Each of those groups will need differentiation based on the needs of the students, which could require sub groups within each set of students, and even though a teacher may only need to specialize in one or two subjects there is still quite a bit of work needed to offer students the proper lessons for their learning level. One participant explained that if there were a need to return to the traditional classroom (i.e., teach five subject areas) after being in a departmentalization classroom, the teacher would be unsure about how to revisit other subject areas. For example, as mentioned previously, Participant Number 3 said, "I think a disadvantage of departmentalization is that now when you move back to a more traditional classroom you are unprepared to go back to teaching five subjects. Now you're unsure of how to revisit the teaching of math, or reading and that's my problem for this school year." Two other disadvantages described by Participant Number 3 were a

lack of adequate information about students' performance in other subjects, and the need for additional lesson plans to meet the needs of all students (i.e., high and low achievers).

Interview Question 6. Participants were also asked about the effectiveness of departmentalization or team teaching on their grade level (i.e., interview question six). As mentioned previously (see Research Question 2), teachers who were teaching in departmentalized classrooms reported that they perceived it as an effective paradigm. In addition, the teacher who stated that she was in the team teaching setting reported that that paradigm was effective. Other themes revealed from the participants included: (a) either approach would be effective if used correctly, and (b) the effectiveness of the teacher would have an impact on the effectiveness of either approach used.

To collect other information that could be used to respond to Research Question 3 about the effectiveness of departmentalization to improve student achievement, participants were also asked if they had any involvement with the choice of departmentalization on their grade level (i.e., Interview Question 7). The primary response from the sample was no, they did not have any input about the classroom setting that would be used in the school. Participants indicated that the county school system made the decision for the schools. However in some instances administrators could make a decision about the use of departmentalization if student achievement increased.

Teachers were also asked if they had any input about the selection of the instructional paradigm used by the school. Most of the participants indicated that they did not have input about the selection of the classroom setting they expressed concern because they did not. For instance, participants did express the need to involve educators

in decisions about teaching and learning in their school. As stated by Participant 8, “No [we did not have any choice]. At the time it was mandated by the school administration so I had no voice, or involvement. Another participant explained that the school was already departmentalized when she accepted the job, “but that’s what I was looking for when I accepted the job,” (Participant 5). Participant 6 emphasized the importance of seeking input from the teachers,

I think it’s best to have teacher input when it comes time to your choice or decision to departmentalize at any grade level. This is because you as the teacher know your strengths and weaknesses and you also know the students’ capabilities, especially once you’ve been teaching for a while or you become a seasoned teacher. I can recall the one year where we were allowed to have input, it seemed to have brought some of the highest standardized test scores and I think that’s because we were given the ability or autonomy to decide amongst ourselves what we would teach and how the students needed to be grouped.

The one participant who indicated that they did have a choice at her school explained that,

Well we do have [a] choice. It would be a matter of our team, you know, asking for it. The county is allowing each school to be able to choose whether they want to be departmentalized but it can only be third, fourth, and fifth [grades]. (Participant 7)

Information received for Interview Question 9 was presented in detail in the results reported for Research Question 2 as this item asked about both departmentalization and team teaching. The primary theme that emerged from the participants' responses about challenges with departmentalization was grouping or differentiation. The secondary theme reported by the participants' responses were the attitudes of the teachers. The challenges discussed with grouping when the departmentalization approach was used included: (a) the need to differentiate among the skill levels of the students, (b) negative effects when grouping was not done appropriately for example Participant 5 mentioned the challenge they experienced when all of their high performing students were placed in one homeroom and all low performing students were placed in another homeroom. Two other themes that were identified were: (a) getting to know the students so that the teachers could respond to their diverse needs was another theme that emerged, as well as, (b) teachers' attitudes were also discussed as challenges in departmentalization classrooms.

Interview Question 10 concerned participants' perceptions about the use of departmentalization or team teaching as methods of improving student achievement. As mentioned previously, the themes that emerged from the participants' responses were that they perceived: (a) team teaching as the method that had a positive impact on students' achievement scores, (b) both methods had a positive impact on students' achievement scores, or (c) departmentalization had a positive impact on students' achievement scores. Participant 2 indicated that even though team teaching was used in the school, she

believed departmentalization was better than team teaching for the improvement of student achievement scores.

Finally, information obtained from data provided for interview question 11 (i.e., participants' perceptions about student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional setting) was also used to develop a response to Research Question 3 as related to departmentalization. Patterns from the participants' responses showed that two themes emerged when participants' responses indicated that they perceived: (a) departmentalization as the paradigm that had a positive impact on student achievement, and (b) both as paradigms that would have a positive impact on student achievement depending on the circumstances. Only one participant reported that she could not choose one over the other because of lack of experience in the traditional setting. Data that supported these findings were presented in the Research Question 2 section.

Summary. It does seem clear that the common theme among the participants' definitions of departmentalization involves expertise in one or two subject areas and its collaborative nature in terms of working with the other teachers on the same grade level. The advantages had been described by the inherent nature of departmentalization (e.g., teacher's focus on one or two subjects) and as a better opportunity for students to attain positive student outcomes (e.g., more time to provide in-depth information and practical experiences for the students). Themes that were revealed from the information participants shared about the challenges with departmentalization were related to students and teachers. For instance, grouping was the primary theme. Teachers expressed the need to differentiate among the skill levels of the students. The secondary theme was related to

the negative effects when grouping was not done appropriately (e.g., all high performing students placed in one homeroom and all low performing students placed in another homeroom). Two other themes that emerged from the participants' responses were challenges from the need to know the students so that the teachers could respond to their diverse needs, and finally, teachers' attitudes were also discussed as challenges in departmentalization classrooms.

Research Question 4: What are Teacher's perceptions of Their Self-Efficacy for Teaching or Ability to Help Students Meet Increased Standards?

Four of the questions used in the interview obtained information to respond to this research question. The questions that were used in the interviews to obtain information to respond to research question four were Interview Questions 8, 12, 13, and 14. These questions asked the teachers about their perceptions of their self-efficacy for teaching as well as their ability to help their students meet the increased standards introduced as a result of changes in the testing system in the state of Georgia.

Interview Question 8. This question asked the participants: How would you define your level of ease with the use of departmentalization or team teaching? The focus here is on whether or not the teachers felt comfortable with the practice of the instructional strategy they used for their grade level as related to teaching and their ability to help students meet the increased standards. According to Bandura (1992), a person with high levels of self-efficacy would feel comfortable engaging in and performing the desired goal. When participants were asked to define their level of ease with either of the paradigms, most indicated that they felt at ease with departmentalization and one

participant reported team teaching. The primary theme that emerged from the participants' responses was *very comfortable*. Some of the descriptions of their comfort with departmentalization were: very comfortable, easy, easier, confident, comfortable, and no problem. A secondary theme emerged as the participants described the advantages such as more time for planning and preparation, such as collecting resources for the class or challenges of time management in the departmentalized setting. Participants also explained why they felt confident with departmentalization and as indicated one teacher focused on team-teaching. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the teachers reported high levels of self-efficacy with the use of departmentalization as related to teaching and their ability to help students meet the increased standards. For instance, according to Participant 2,

I feel/felt confident in my ability to serve students in a departmentalized classroom because I have been teaching this way since I arrived at this school. The hardest part is to know what you are teaching or rather what you need to teach. It's not a struggle with the transitions or the students' behaviors. Once they arrived in the classroom students understood that it was about the business of teaching and learning.

Similarly, Participant 3 indicated that departmentalization was all that she knew. When the question was posed to her, she said,

I found it easy because it was all I knew. I worked as a paraprofessional for a very long time and I had seen what classrooms were like without departmentalization and time was a real issue, and I am finding this year

that time management is a big issue for me. I did not have to worry about that last year or the previous year because my day was dedicated to only teaching two subjects either twice a day or three times a day. It was very easy for me to slide into departmentalization. Last year it was really easy because of the people I worked with. I worked with a team that was extremely supportive and shared similar teaching styles and values. My team was awesome. Not so much my first year (team teaching) because my team was not as cooperative.

Participant 5 also indicated that departmentalization was easier than team teaching.

I think it was easier for me because of who I had the opportunity to work with, honestly I think a lot of the stuff that I had to go through or rather how I was able to get through was because of who I worked with.

I was never stressed with departmentalization itself.

Participant 6 reported that she was comfortable with both departmentalization and team teaching.

Yes I'm comfortable with departmentalization and team teaching because I've done it in the past. I do recall the first year where I did the team teaching model. I was a bit reluctant and that was really because that fourth class got opened up late in the school year and then for a long time there was a substitute teacher in there.

Participant 1 explained in the following manner,

I took to departmentalization very easily, because it allows me to focus on one subject. I found myself comfortable with departmentalization.

[Reflecting on the traditional setting...] If I look at it by subject matter, math, science, social studies and reading I would guess that the grammar, the ELA part, I struggle. With that level I struggle, and when I say struggle I mean like it's very, very hard, but you know what you wanted to say, you know what to do, it's just figuring out how to convey those ideas, those concepts to the students once you've been in departmentalization and have not covered those subject areas for some time. This is a grade level that I haven't taught all subjects. I've only taught math, third grade math. But say for instance if I were to teach say second grade or kindergarten and I had to all subjects I'm good. I'm familiar with all the subjects because I taught them at those grade levels. I think it would be easier for me to go back into teaching all subjects if it was second grade or kindergarten rather than third. By teaching math I find I have more time to find resources and become an expert in one or two subjects. I looked up different resources online and those resources that I looked up I tried them out and I feel that when you're teaching all subjects you wouldn't necessarily look for those resources but when you're departmentalized you have a little more time that you can use to become a better content specialist.

Participant 7 explained their perceptions of the feasibility of team teaching if certain parameters were met by sharing,

I would have no problem being departmentalized. I think my only issue with team teaching is that there has to be a good foundation and relationship with the person you're going to be team teaching with. You have to be able to have a strong collaboration and work ethic with each other to be able to get the job done. You can't do it with somebody that's not working with you. So I think that would be the only disadvantage I would say about team teaching. As long as I was working with someone that had the same or similar teaching styles in that we agreed on what our goal, what our end goal was.

Participant 8 expressed confidence with departmentalization because of her training. She explained,

I have a Masters in reading so I feel as though I am very comfortable with it because I get to focus on my specific content area. I can support my students with various resources and technology and I'm able to use book studies with a differentiated text...For a long time I've had these groups where the fluctuation is so large. This year however, has been my most challenging year because they're so low, both groups. It was easy because once I acclimated to the students I was able to tailor the teaching to meet their needs.

Finally, Participant 10 described how she felt about departmentalization and team teaching. According to Participant 10,

I'm very comfortable with it [departmentalization] and like I said even with the team teaching aspect. There has to be a relationship for it to be effective in the classroom. You still have some teachers that are very protective of their students and don't want to let go and so when others come in the room, it's like, "But I got to touch them all, I have to touch them all." Instead of really building that capacity and utilizing that extra person because those are certified teachers, you know, they are certified teachers. And using them in a capacity to really impact other students that are in your classroom, that's why I always say for example, with Department of Exceptional Services (DES), students there are DES teachers but you have students with similar issues or needs and a DES teacher can provide some of those strategies to those students that a general education teacher may not have in their toolbox.

Again, yes, I'm very comfortable with the departmentalization or team teaching if I am allowed some voice over who does the team teaching and who does the departmentalization.

As indicated from the pattern of the responses provided by the majority of the teachers, they felt more confident, had higher levels of self-efficacy that they could achieve their goals with departmentalization than with team teaching. The interest here

was on whether or not they believed they could teach and respond to the needs of their students with the instructional paradigm that they used.

Interview question 12. The second question that was intended to provide information to help develop the response to Research Question 4 is Interview question 12. This question asked the teachers' to discuss their feelings about their ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS (i.e., self-efficacy or possibly teacher efficacy). Two themes were revealed from the participants' responses. The primary theme was in the affirmative, that is, the participants did say yes they felt that they had the ability to teach and meet the increased goals of Georgia Performance State Standards (GPSS). For instance, Participant Number 1 stated

I believe that I can reach those goals of the change in the rigor levels.

I also believe that we also need to leave students where they are, for those below level students, those students one to two grade levels below I still have to teach them their grade level standard, but I also have to meet their learning needs and help them with that foundation that they're missing. I have the ability to meet the increased rigor of the GPSS but my opinion is that I also need to meet my students in order for them to show growth.

Participant Number 5 stated that

I feel like with each day of experience that I get, my ability/skills level increases. The standards are pretty much the same as those I used when

I was student teaching, so I feel pretty comfortable with them. I don't think I will have a problem meeting the increased goals of the GPSS, it's just a matter of me taking the time to learn the material and studying what is needed before I introduce the students. I believe in educating myself of the content, so that the students see a confident teacher.

Participant 5 expressed agreement when the researcher followed up with the question: Do you think PD's could possibly help with learning more about the content? Participant 5 responded with, "Yes, I do. I also believe that if I can't get what I need from the county I still have to work toward making sure I am fully knowledgeable of what I am teaching before I introduce the lessons to the students."

It was also noted that some of the participants tempered their responses with acknowledgement of the challenges or conditions that needed to be met in order for students and teachers to attain success. In addition, there was a secondary theme among the participants, which the participant stated that she was scared, hence, not comfortable with her ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS. Participant 2 indicated that she felt scared about her ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS. Her explanation was,

The newer math standards make no sense to me. There are so many extra words just to teach the students one concept. It's just too wordy, for example during March madness I was astounded by how many steps have been added to the lessons, because it's been years since I have taught math and I really didn't even look at the math lessons since I had such a good

math teacher on my team. The math teacher had to break down the lesson for me almost step by step like I was one of her students because of all of the jargon associated with the teaching of just one standard. The previous standards were more simplistic. I could read them, I could break them down, and I could pick it up and run with it, effectively teaching to my students. However, the math we use in this county is frightening and I am scared as to how I am going to approach it with my students.

The participant explained how while they were not comfortable in one particular subject there were other subjects in which they could share their mastery,

I'm comfortable with social studies, reading, no problem, but those standards are also convoluted (too wordy) and some of its just too complicated. As a teacher I feel I shouldn't be in a situation where I have to ask other teachers how to teach certain subjects because our county decided that we now have to again be proficient in all subjects. This is where PD comes in and preparing your teachers to become the best they can be for their students.

With the exception of the above participant, overall, the participants reported that they felt as though they had the ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS. In their words, they described themselves as comfortable with feelings about their ability, no problem, yes they could handle it, and confident that they could teach and meet the standards of GPSS. It was also noted that some of the participants explained what it would take in order for the teachers and students to achieve their goals, as well as some

of the challenges they faced even though they did feel confident about their ability. For instance,

Participant 3 explained that she felt could do what was expected of her,

I came to teaching using Common Core, I really don't know much about the other standards. I feel like I have been given an outline and it gives me the freedom of how I will teach, but it just gives me what I need to make sure they are taught, what the students need to learn specifically and what they need in order to go on to the next grade level, and to prepare for the next level because you build on top of the previous grades' standards. I like that the standards gives us this outline, a building block.

Another participant who felt comfortable with being able to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS was Participant 4. She said,

I feel real comfortable teaching GPSS. I think they're laid out better than the old standards. I think they looked at them and they worked on a better way to build on each other, better than the old standards did. They have moved some things around where the kids aren't experiencing some of the more difficult concepts such as math, until high school where they belong. I feel confident in teaching the GPSS; I don't have a problem with it at all.

It was interesting to note that while Participant 6 indicated that she did not think it was a problem for her to teach to meet the increased goals of GPSS, she did feel as though some parts of the goals of GPSS made her job a lot tougher. As explained by Participant 6,

The new standards that were rolled out a few years ago, initially, I felt like the one thing that changed was the rigor. Some of those standards that we were taught at grade six were slated to be taught at grade four and five.

The problem with that is while I may be able to change my style of teaching, who's to say that the students are ready for their increased rigor? I find that these new standards are actually more specific, they're actually telling you exactly how multiplication is to be taught for instance.

What strategy to use and I can really only speak for math because that's been my subject. The one downside to the new standards is now the students are expected to write or defend or have an argument or have an opinion about a certain topic. The students have low reading capability so of course their writing is not up to par. Now that part of it has made my job a lot tougher.

According to Participant 7, she felt the increased rigor was great. In her own words,

You know, I think that it's [teaching to new standards] great because I think that Georgia is behind as far as education goes throughout the country. Other states have been doing this for a really long time I think we're behind the eight ball when it comes to this type of teaching so I think that we're only benefitting them. I just think that it takes time. I think it takes a teacher to open to the changes that are coming and that you have to be willing to meet them. I think that it is very possible to reach the

goals that are required of us as long as you have the resources to be able to do the things that you need to do. If you are in a school where you don't have the resources or technology then I think that these are unrealistic goals and we have a lot of schools in Georgia right now that have these expectations and do not have the resources necessary to them to be able to do it.

The participant goes on to explain how they believe a lack of resources can hinder a teacher's ability to address the increased rigor,

I went from a classroom where I had absolutely no technology, matter of fact they still had chalkboards. I didn't even have a white board, yet I was told to teach my students not only the CRCT but then the very next year I had to teach the Georgia Milestone. And so, you know, the expectation of what was required of me and the tools and the resources in which I had, they didn't match to what your abilities were in these types of classrooms.

Participants 8, 9 and 10, respectively indicated that they believed they themselves had the ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS. However, each one of these participants qualified their responses with such statements the work: (a) could become overwhelming (Participant 8), (b) was challenging, and (c) would only work under certain conditions (Participant 10). The participants' responses are subsequently presented.

Participant 8 said that,

I feel that [the performance standards] are above the students' capability and I feel as though, based on the data from the district, that's for everyone, it's a small portion of students across the districts that are able to meet these goals. Feel as though I can teach it, the standards, but it takes a lot to try and get them to master it. They are very broad and then you have to hone in and do this portion today and then the next portion. It's so much within one standard sometimes and you just have to, you know, really break it down, and I don't know, it gets very overwhelming though.

Participant 9's response and explanation was as follows,

I truly feel that this is no difference between the GPSS and QCC's.

The only thing is that the GPSS has more in-depth wordage and requires our students to think more critically. I felt I could teach toward the goals of the QCC's, and I feel I can teach and meet the increased goals of the GPSS. Although I am out of the classroom, I still know that I play an important part in making sure that my students understand the standards and are able to break them down.

The participant in this case makes a point in explaining how the state has dramatically changed in rigor, yet the students are not given the time to acclimate and how such a change affects both teaching and learning,

The concern however, is that many of these students were used to taking test that were strictly multiple choice and now we are asking them to

rewrite their thinking to express themselves critically and do that in written form, whereas many of our student population have major difficulty in both areas (thinking critically and explain that thinking in writing). I do not doubt my ability to teach it, but it is a challenge based on what our students have been asked to do in the past. It's an uphill battle in which we our students are not given the time to acclimate before they are considered failures. One to two years is not enough time to determine if GPSS is working.

Finally, Participant 10 was asked to discuss her feelings about the teachers' abilities to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS. Points made by Participant 10 were:

I have to say I think we are on the right track of getting where we need to go, we had great growth this year, and I think what we have to do us give ourselves permission. Well one we have to all be committed that's number one we all have to be committed to the same goal that we want students to achieve; which means if you are committed to that then you are going to do everything in your own power, you're going to be a self-learner, like what we want students to be, and you're going to perfect your own craft, that's what a professional does.

As professionals teachers should stay abreast of changes that occur in education by making sure they continue to learn themselves, thusly building their own self-efficacy,

Participant 10 also summates that there are other factors that are just as important that can aid in student achievement as well,

You have to have self-efficacy and I believe that you are able to do it and the other piece is that we have to collaborate. Like I think we are getting better with that because I think people use to be afraid to say they didn't know. The best teachers don't know it's what you do with what you don't know. I don't know everything either that's why there are experts that's why we...talk and we really look at our teaching and we look at our student learning when we shift from teaching to learning and looking at how students are learning and if they are learning. So I think when we start being more in tune to the students learning we'll get there.

Participant 10 acknowledges that the teacher's dedication to their students at the focus school was instrumental in increasing student achievement scores,

But like I said, we had great growth this year, we got a call from the superintendent yesterday because they're looking at all these schools that went backwards and we went forward and we exceeded our goal, which was 3% but we ended up doing 4%. And some people may say...that's only four points from 60.9 to 64.1. That's pretty huge because what got us there was the student growth. And that's commitment is like. I think we can meet the goals, I think that if everybody, you know, has that commitment, and self-efficacy.

In the next section I will present the findings from interview question number 13.

Interview question 13. This item was used in an attempt to get specific information about the needs of the teachers from their perspective that would help them improve their ability for meeting the needs of their students. Specifically the question asked: What specific subject areas do you consider to be the main challenge to meet the increased goals of GPSS. What would you suggest could help improve your ability for meeting student needs in that area? Data analysis revealed that the primary theme among the responses from the teachers about what subject areas that were challenging for them to meet the goals of GPSS, was Reading/ELA/Writing/Literacy. A secondary theme was mathematics, followed by social studies then science was also mentioned. Suggestions varied among the teachers (see Table 18). Table 18 also outlines the specific suggestions teachers said would help them improve their ability for meeting student needs in these areas.

Table 18

Challenges for Teachers and Solutions Suggested

Challenging Subject Areas		Solutions
RP1	Reading, ELA	Modeling; model a lesson for me to
RP2	Math	New language and standards involved
RP3	Math, Reading, Writing	Work with experienced math teachers; technology; have fun while learning
RP4	Reading with Special Education	Corrective reading; direct instruction, and Students depends on grade level; goes back to basics of reading; instructed to use another program
RP5	Social Studies, Science	Strategies to capture the students attention; researching different methods, different activities; research online; information from experienced teachers
RP6	Social Studies, ELA	Autonomy to pull from whatever resources I can find; an interactive notebook
RP7	ELA	Need the resources; flexing among grade levels—those above grade level go to the class above them,
RP8	Math	Understand, grasping the standard; and would be able to better drive my instruction in order to assess students with the concepts
RP9	Reading, Math	More writing activities; focus more on Comprehension/reading strategies, activities; with math be able to work on a concept for more than a week or two to learn

Continued on next page

Challenges for Teachers and Solutions Suggested

Challenging Subject Areas	Solutions
RP10 Literacy, Reading, Writing	Have to support the whole child; teach self-efficacy; teach empathy, how to socialize, how to care about something outside of themselves; make some decisions about things you don't control, decide as a school what's important; more intentional planning; look at data; prescribe what is needed for the students

Interview question 14. The last item that participants were asked to respond during the interview was: What specific areas of professional development do you think may help you meet the demands of the increased standards and possibly aid you in increasing student achievement? As shown in Table 19, teachers' responses, as well as the educational administrator shared one common theme, namely, professional development activities that would help them meet the needs of their students to help improve student achievement. As can be seen, teachers admitted they would need professional development activities that would help their students throughout the school as well as inside of the classroom. The conclusion made in this instance was that teachers believed if they could improve their effectiveness (i.e., time management, content areas, planning, etc.), then the students would have the opportunity to increase their levels of academic achievement.

Table 19

Professional Development Areas Suggested by Educators

Participant	Professional Development Areas
RP1	Lesson planning; locating a mentor for modeling for guidance that has shown consistent growth
RP2	Professional development with Professional Learning Center; collaborate with a teacher that is an expert
RP3	Differentiation and technology; professional development In Special Education
RP4	Differentiated instruction; time management (e.g., how to transition from one subject to another in the time allotted)
RP5	Planning or differentiation; any reading professional development that helps is direct our teaching towards the requirements of GMAS; how to plan for students not performing on grade level and how to challenge those above grade level
RP6	Lesson planning on new standards; how to prepare students for a computerized test when they have not been exposed to the fundamentals of computers and typing; how to teach a whole class and below level learner; spiral review of the standards throughout the entire school year; the pull out method—is it effective; collaborating with someone who does well; grade level professional development
RP7	Effective practices for ELA; scheduling (e.g., where are we supposed to work and for how many minutes; getting administration to trust us more
RP8	Math (i.e., breaking, deconstructing the standard, rewriting it in my own words so I can understand what it is and what's required of the students
RP9	Pacing workshop to show me how to get everything taught that needs to get taught
RP10	Collaboration; Professional Learning Communities; content area

Summary. There were four interview questions that provided information for RQ 4. First, when participants were asked to discuss their levels of self-efficacy as related to being able to accomplish their goals, the participants reported that they were very

comfortable and the other feeling reported was scared. The secondary theme was identified when the participants described the advantages such as more time for planning, preparation, and to get resources for the class or challenges of time management in the departmentalization setting. Participants also explained why they felt confident with departmentalization and as indicated one teacher focused on team-teaching.

Two themes were revealed from the participants' responses. The primary theme was in the affirmative, that is, the participants did say yes they felt that they had the ability to teach and meet the increased goals of (GPSS). Participants also mentioned some of the challenges they faced along with some conditions that needed to be met in order for students and teachers to attain success. In addition, participants reported they felt as though they had the ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS.

Furthermore, data analysis revealed that the primary theme among the responses from the teachers about what subject areas that were challenging for them to meet the goals of GPSS, was Reading/ELA/Writing/Literacy. Participants' responses also indicated that there were specific professional development activities that they would like to engage. Teachers admitted that they believed if they could improve their effectiveness with better time management, concentration on content areas, and with planning, then the students would have the opportunity to increase their levels of academic achievement. The response to Research Question 4 is that, while most of the teachers felt as though they have the ability to teach and help their students meet increased standards, there were still challenges and circumstances that needed to be overcome in order for them to accomplish these goals (see Tables 18 and 19).

Discussion and Interpretation

When I began the research for this particular topic I was under the impression that most if not all of the participants would feel strongly in favor of departmentalization and while the majority did, there were also honest feedback among the teachers about what they needed to maintain effectiveness in the classroom so that students could learn. While many of the participants did in fact agree that departmentalization had a positive impact on student achievement it was debatable as to how this was to be implemented.

Participants were able to articulate the advantages and disadvantages with departmentalization as an instructional strategy. Participants provided in-depth information about what could work and when they needed to be successful, for instance, the cohesiveness of the affected teams. How well a team collaborates and how well the varying personalities work together or complimented each other's teaching style was reported as factors that determined the success of any instructional strategy used in the classroom. Not only did effective teaching behaviors lead to increased academic achievement (Mastropieri et al., 2005), they also led to a greater degree of effective collaboration between the two team teachers. Tilleczek & Ferguson (2007) found that vertical team teaching or rather the sharing of resources and information on multiple grade levels and collaborative analysis benefits students academically, an effective vertical collaborative team can ease the transition for students from grade level to grade level. Compatibility of perceptions on effective teaching was similarly a noteworthy component of effective team teaching relationships. Collaboration has been associated with changes in literacy instructional practices and improvements in teacher's self-

efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). This information would be important when education leaders and the teachers are making decisions about what is best for student learning.

Participants also shared that within the focus school the students are grouped based on ability levels and this creates a distinct disadvantage because students within each separate group are at such drastically different levels and different pacing that two to three plans would be needed per week to address such divergent needs. In the upper grades participants also emphasized that children should start the writing process in kindergarten in order to address the increased rigor and demands of the GPSS so that when they reach the third grade they could perform much better. According to the participants students seem to be far below their current grade level in reading and math, this may mean that they are not getting a good foundation, those foundational skills are missing. Another angle up for discussion according to one of the participants was that many of the students are able to reach the expected levels of achievement but they simply do not care.

According to Chalmers and Keown (2006), professional development involves teachers assessing and applying the knowledge they obtain to serve as an effective purpose for their students, and administrators need to allow for change to evolve and take and they need to invite input from teachers to allow for collaboration. Teachers believe that with support for professional development activities they could help increase student achievement, that if the voices of the teachers were heard along with receiving the type of support they perceive is needed, then the probability of departmentalization being successful increases. Ongoing and meaningful professional development to staff in order

to address specific achievement needs of students, work with diverse student populations, foster a culture of high expectations and collaboration, among other job requirements on what seems to be a nearly infinite list of roles and responsibilities (Chalmers & Keown, 2006).

While we are all professionals within the workplace common goals and similar teaching styles play a significant role in how well a team helps students attain academic success. I also discovered that a teacher's point of view regarding departmentalization is drastically different from that of administrators and there are some very telling points between the two, and participants firmly believe that input from teachers is needed more right now than any other time. According to theories in social psychology, people tend to become more engaged and feel more confident about their ability to succeed when they feel as though they have some control over their lives, and that their freedom has not been threatened (e.g., self-efficacy, psychological reactance; Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Sommers, 2016). This could possibly be accomplished when teachers are allowed to have a voice in how and with whom their departmentalized teams are formed.

While teachers emphasize the importance of becoming experts in one or two subjects, administration believes it is not as cut and dry as just becoming an expert in a subject, however, every one of the participants agree that self-efficacy is an essential factor in delivering the best lessons possible for student achievement whether you are in a traditional classroom or a departmentalized setting and that they, as a whole, felt confident that they had the ability to teach and meet the increased rigor as outlined by GPSS. Bandura (1997), says that the higher a teachers efficacy the greater effort to obtain

their goals. He went on to say that a high efficacy affects the level of one's goals, the strength of the commitment to a goal as well as their intellectual performance.

Project Description

Based upon the discussion and correspondence with my committee considering the various themes arising from the transcribed interviews it was agreed upon that the project genre that would best suit the findings from my research would be a policy paper from which the information gathered would be presented to the stakeholders within my district, my administration and fellow colleagues who could benefit from the information. The position paper will offer a policy recommendation for mandated professional development for teachers considered for or presently teaching in a departmentalized setting. The data demonstrates that teachers perceive that professional development would aid them in improving their teacher efficacy when they are charged with mastering one to two subjects along with improving student achievement. Bandura (1996) explains that a teacher's sense of efficacy relatively determines the level of children's scholastic activities, and that a high sense of efficacy for both learning and academic mastery in children fosters achievement and academic aspirations.

In order to increase teacher efficacy in a departmentalized setting, the data indicated that mandated professional development focus on the one or two subjects teachers are expected to master for the assigned school year lent itself to a policy recommendation as such for the district. I will present the district with a position paper that outlines an alternative teaching solution for student achievement in the upper grades and mandates professional development for teachers in classrooms who are teaching only

one or two subjects so that they might become more efficient in those subjects. Crum et al. (2010) stated that professional development affords teachers the opportunity to learn more about developing the skills to meet the needs of the students. The authors go further to say that an educator's attitudes and viewpoints about professional development is an integral component related to the types of opportunities offered to teachers. Furthermore, professional development should be conducted over a period of time rather than in one day workshops. In order for professional development to be effective, the teachers that attend and participate must be wholly invested.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate teachers' perspectives of the team teaching and departmentalization processes and teachers' ideas about what they may need to help them feel capable of improving student achievement that address the perceived gap in practice of possible needed professional development. The local problem that prompted this study was the focus school's declining student achievement scores in fourth and fifth grades. By conducting interviews from 10 colleagues, teachers and administrators along with archival data I was able to develop a qualitative case study about a possible solution to the problem faced by both the focus school as well as the district in which the school is located.

The findings revealed that teachers advocate departmentalization in the upper grades but with the de facto that certain parameters would need to be taken into account in order to see student achievement. The primary requirement of professional development within those subjects is that, since teachers are charged with teaching their

group of student's year to year, participation in professional development has to be ongoing and not one time shots and there has to be unification of the goals and practices among the teachers that service the same group of students.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

After analyses of the data from participants in this study, I concluded that a white paper and policy recommendation (see Appendix A) was the best way to address the study problem. Professional development to enhance teacher efficacy can aid in delivering content to meet new standards and increased requirements for the students, as described in Section 1. According to Protheroe (2008), teacher efficacy refers to the confidence teachers hold about their ability to have a positive impact on student learning. Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) defined teacher efficacy in a similar manner, namely, as the confidence level of teachers about their ability to teach their students.

Protheroe (2008) explained that teacher-efficacy levels are influenced by teachers' past experiences as well as by the school culture. Based on information obtained from the teachers in this study, I believe it is possible that teacher efficacy could be improved by mandated professional development within subject areas that teachers encounter in a departmentalized setting. The researcher's expectations from the study were that required professional development that could increase teacher efficacy to facilitate learning in the subject of focus and that increased efficacy would have a positive influence on student outcomes.

Rationale

Four genres for the project were reviewed and considered, these were (a) evaluation report (for an evaluation study), (b) curriculum plan, (c) professional development/training curriculum and materials, and (d) policy recommendation with a

detailed position paper. Neither the curriculum plan nor the professional development/training curriculum and materials were appropriate given the goals and objectives for the current project. In the remaining portions of this section, I will provide evidence to support those statements.

The study is a policy recommendation incorporated in a position paper (see Appendix A). A policy recommendation meets the parameters outlined in my program's study checklist in that the paper is an analysis that includes background of the prevailing problem within the focus school and its district, along with a summary of the study's findings. Evidence is provided from both the research conducted as well as literature, and an outline is given of the recommendation connected to this evidence as it relates to the target audience. According to Scotten (2011), a policy paper is a research paper that focuses on a particular policy that provides recommendations to stakeholders.

Scotten (2011) goes on further to state that it is the job of the researcher to bring attention to the current problem, offer possible solutions, and explain how the recommendation impacts the school/district. Teachers in the focus school indicated that they can help their students improve their academic achievement levels if they (both students and teachers) received appropriate support physically, financially, socially, and emotionally. Furthermore, the teachers and students need to know that the efforts they expend are not in vain. The determination was that one way to ensure the success of their plans was to have education leaders in the school and district publicly commit to acceptance of the study by word and deed. The genre presented and discussed was a policy recommendation with detail in a position paper.

I reviewed the results from the original study to ascertain ideas for the study. After discussions with my major advisor and input from committee members, I decided that my focus would be on the concerns of the faculty. I concluded that the educators wanted to succeed and were willing to do what they could to help improve their effectiveness in the classroom and student outcomes. The central problem experienced in the school that served as the setting for the study was that the students' overall achievement level was not consistent. For example, overall achievement decreased 14.2% in the Academic Year (AY) 2011-2012, slightly increased by 1.4% in AY 2012-2013, and in AY 2013-2014, achievement scores dropped by 3.2% (GADOE, 2016). Teachers reported they were concerned that their pedagogy was not meeting the needs of their students and that specific changes were critical to help the students attain positive academic outcomes. The district policy concurs with that of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (July, 2017). Which states that teaching certificates are renewable as Standards Professional Certification if or when the educator earns up to 2 Proficient or Exemplary Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) ratings within 5 years, and has 1 or less unremediated unsatisfactory or ineffective performance rating. Furthermore, the teacher must also satisfy the professional learning requirements of the district in which they are employed. The county in which the focus school is located requires that its teachers attend professional learning trainings during pre/post planning and on days assigned as professional learning (currently two for the school year). These courses are largely developed around reading with the occasional math course added, based on achievement scores.

While the district offers a variety of professional learning courses, science and social studies, which are testing subjects in the upper elementary grades, are only mandated when standards have changed or when a textbook is being adopted. The focus school has experienced a yearly turnaround of new teachers in both the fourth and fifth grade classrooms. Although the teachers charged with improving science and social studies grades have been encouraged to seek courses to aid in their teaching process, such courses are not mandated. Six of the nine participants of the study said they have not taken advantage of the courses due to a lack of time, since such courses are offered after hours or on weekends. These same participants, while concerned with improving student reading levels, expressed concern that the majority of allotted professional learning time is centered on reading which does not consistently support the other pivotal testing subjects. They are also concerned about the lack of opportunities for efficacy training that are either student- assisted or teacher based.

Discussions about the performance of the students and effectiveness of the faculty occurred among the teachers and among the education leaders in the school. These stakeholders were very concerned well before the advent of the study about the education of the students and the future of the school. At the core of the discussions were speculations about the cause of the poor student outcomes that educators in the school witnessed. At the same time they noted, between the years of 2004 and 2013, the GADOE had changed its standards three times, and, each time the standards changed, new assessments were introduced.

The previous exam Georgia's K-12 students were required to take and meet the standards for their grade level in specific content areas was the CRCT, which is a multiple choice exam (GADOE, 2016). Currently, students in the state of Georgia must take exams and meet the standards for their grade level on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS), which requires students to use critical thinking skills, unlike the CRCT (GADOE, 2010). The goal of my study was to examine teachers' perceptions about possible reasons students have low achievement scores in the district, departmentalization and team teaching were suggested, as well as cultivating their self-efficacy for meeting and improving student achievement to meet the demands of the increased rigor set by continually changing standards (see Appendix H).

Schools in Georgia have had to respond to policy changes as federal and state mandates have transitioned from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 to the new CCSS (GADOE, 2017a). The CCSS demands that teachers help students become critical thinkers and problem solvers who are prepared to compete with their peers around the world for employment or admissions into college (GADOE, 2017b). The CCSS does not suggest how a teacher should teach, which means that most of the responsibility for planning and preparation of lessons lies with the teachers (GADOE, 2012).

All stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents, administrators, immediate community, and society) are affected when children do not perform well in school. A case in point was the statement made 1 year before the study by Georgia's governor that if schools do not show improvement on their yearly College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), then they could be taken over by the state and eventually be forced to adopt a

charter system (GADOE, 2017b). It is believed that teacher efficacy for meeting these challenges plays a part in helping to better understand how teachers think they can improve student achievement and if team teaching or departmentalization may help. As described in the section on data analyses and results, the participants' responses provided information that critical to the success of the teachers' effectiveness and student learning. In order for teachers to effect positive change in the schools, a policy that recognizes the expertise of the teachers and the need to support continuous improvements in teaching and learning will need to be adopted.

Review of the Literature

The problem being addressed in the study was that, in spite of efforts put forth by educators in the school, district, and state levels, as well as educational policy makers, students in the setting where the original study was conducted continue to perform below grade level (GADOE, 2016; GADOE, 2017a). A decision was made by the education leaders in the school that they would change their instructional strategy to departmentalization for fifth graders and team teaching for fourth graders. While this strategy received the attention of the education leaders in the school, essentially, the participants in this study indicated that it was not enough. The patterns from their discussions in the one-on-one interviews with the researcher indicated that they wanted and needed continuous professional development on both subject area and the instructional strategy being used.

Departmentalization, according to this sample, adds responsibilities that must be addressed if the students will succeed (e.g., differentiation skills, sensitivity training as

related to teacher expectations, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, growth versus fixed mind set, etc.). Findings such as these have also been reported in the literature (Gewertz, 2014; Hood, 2015; Watson, 2012). It is possible that the only way this would happen would be if policies were developed that required teachers to engage in the professional development activities that would enable them to collect data that would serve as evidence of increased academic achievement levels. These policies would need to be supported by the school, district and state.

In the development of the plans for this literature review, numerous key words were used to access information relevant to the focus of the study. The key words used for this study literature review were: departmentalization, educational policies (local, state and federal levels), policies and practices in education, teacher efficacy, self-efficacy, growth versus fixed mind set, professional development in education to enhance and maintain teacher quality, *organizational change*, *preparations for change*, *managing change*, *program evaluation*, *teacher evaluations*, *factors that influence student achievement*, and how to make policy recommendations. The electronic databases that were accessed to locate information relevant to the focus of this study were: EBSCOHOST, ERIC, GALILEO, Georgia Department of Education, ProQuest, Psych INFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, RESEARCH METHODS CASES, School District (in which the study took place), SAGE, and the United States Department of Education. The topics subsequently discussed include the need for change, how to make a policy recommendation organizational change (i.e., preparing for and managing change), professional development (i.e., enhancing and maintaining teacher

quality), and the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. The last part of this literature review presents a brief summary of the information to support the study.

The Need for Change

According to Hood (2015), change has posed problems for schools across the United States. Hood explained that challenges have occurred because many states are opting out of the demands from the NCLB (2002) and developing other strategies to help their students. This means that different schools across the nation are facing new standards and must identify appropriate assessments for the students.

This year for the first time, [the achievement test required by the state], known as TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program), will include algebraic concepts on the fifth-grade test. Hamer [Deputy Superintendent of Academic Operations] says Memphis is bracing for a very heavy downturn in student performance on the exams (p. 1). (Hood, 2015, p.1)

This is the same sentiment expressed by teachers in the sample of the original study in Georgia. It should be recalled that the teachers from the original study explained how they perceived the differences between past and current standards and understood the problems. Participants said that the former test (CRCT) required by the GADOE to test students' level of achievement was a multiple choice test. However, GADOE now requires students to take the Georgia Milestones Assessment System, which requires critical thinking skills (GADOE, 2016). The problem is, if the teachers have not had time

to prepare the students or do not know how to meet the needs of the students as with differentiation, the teachers, students, and schools will be penalized.

Since the education leaders selected departmentalization for the school to help improve student achievement, the teachers in the sample have to become proficient in its use. They understood that they had to keep abreast of current knowledge in their subject area and at the same time learn how to effectively use departmentalization in their classrooms. Provisions were made by the education leaders in the school, based on the policies of the district and state departments of education to engage in professional development activities for some of their subject areas but not for departmentalization.

An observation made during the original investigation was that not all of the participants were clear about using departmentalization in the classroom. Some could articulate or identify the structure of a classroom when departmentalization was used, and others could not. The researcher did explain the differences between team teaching and departmentalization and the participants who were confused could then confirm what their work involved in the classroom. First they described the advantages and disadvantages with its use.

Briefly, some of the advantages of using departmentalization were described in the following manner by the teachers in the original study:

- It gives the opportunity for the teacher to focus on one or two subjects and engage in effective collaborations among colleagues.
- Students benefit from being able to focus on one subject matter; the classroom is set up for that one subject.

- Teaching works if you are working with a person who compliments your teaching style and you work with similar goals in mind. [The disadvantage would be if there were two widely different teaching styles.]
- Departmentalization is extremely helpful. The teacher can concentrate on one subject area and spend more time on it; longer time allows for more in-depth labs and enables the teacher to develop resources.
- Helpful for both the teachers and the students.
- With departmentalization you [teachers] become content specialists.
- The opportunity to work with other colleagues to help improve student achievement.

The disadvantages were described in the following manner by the sample:

- Having to go back to the traditional classroom, you are unprepared to go back to teaching five subjects.
- Departmentalization means a lack of knowledge of student performance in other subjects, only having the data for one or two subjects.
- If you have a bad team, then the students will not learn.
- You are not rotating as many times therefore you get more time with groups of students or each group of students.
- Students are grouped based on their ability level and with departmentalization at my school, each group or class may be at different levels and different pace in the content area. So you have to create three lesson plans or two lesson plans once per week.

- We had no choice about the instructional method. School administration made the decision to use it and the county said departmentalization in fourth and fifth grades; it not good for the lower grades.
- If the teacher is not strong it is not good.
- Students on different levels.
- Structure is not clear, for example, three person team that requires a rotation of at least three separate groups of students or a two man team which rotates two groups of students-need differentiation skills.
- Lack of adequate information about the performance of the students in other subjects and the need for additional lesson plans to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers did not have any input on the decision about the instructional paradigm used in by the school.
- They should involve educators in decisions about teaching and learning in the school.
- Depends on the team; they should allow each school to be able to choose [their team members].
- Poor team.
- Professional development is needed. Focus on professional development.
- Administrators have a different point of view, teachers should move, not the students.
- Administration assigned teachers.

- No strong teachers, negative impact on a lot of teachers and detrimental to student achievement.

The comments made by the teachers are consistent with the research literature. For instance, teachers reported that departmentalization was extremely helpful. Researchers have agreed with that conclusion. For instance, Williams (2009) found that departmentalization allows teachers to use their skills in their content area and improves student achievement because of the opportunity to focus on one or two subjects. In addition, teachers in the original study reported that it was a complex job when they had to focus on all of the subject areas rather than one or two subjects that is an inherent part of departmentalization (Ballou, 2014). Furthermore, the performance of the students in the school continues to decline in some of the courses such as science and social studies. It has been speculated that it could be due to the lack of time on these subjects because of the demands from the state for students to perform on acceptable levels in the other courses, for example, science, mathematics, reading, and Language Arts (Ballou, 2014; Brown, 2012; Cara, 2012; Guisbond et al., 2012).

The educators who participated in the original study perceived departmentalization as an instructional strategy as one with significantly more disadvantages than advantages. However, they believe with support for professional development activities they could help increase student achievement. Participants also pointed out what type of professional development activities they needed. For example, they stated that they needed help with logistics as well as subject matter. For instance, they said consider ESOL and EIP requirements, students who need these lessons would

have to be placed in a class [that is departmentalized] so that they would not miss the classes. If the school is not in control of the structure or time, it would be a problem.

Additionally, responses from the participants highlighted the importance of continuing the professional development of teachers in the context of departmentalization. As reported by the sample, even though the teacher specializes in one or two subjects, there is still quite a bit of work needed to offer students the proper lessons for their learning level. Teachers also expressed concern because they believed that they could teach but were not sure if the students could master the subject area. In terms of the structure, or lack thereof, one teacher explained that they were given an outline that gave them what they need to make sure it is taught, specifically what students need to learn, and what is needed for them to go to the next grade level. However, it gave them freedom to choose how they will teach. New standards require more rigor for the students, the students will need to be able to express themselves critically in written form with the new GMAS, instead of multiple choice responses with the CRCT. More rigor is also required for the teachers, for instance to change their teaching style, and to get their students ready for more rigor, hence, the need for teachers to engage in continuous professional development (Caine & Caine, 2010; Gewertz, 2014; Hood, 2015; Pollock, 2007; Watson, 2012; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

Overall, the teachers believed that they had the ability to teach and meet the increased standards. Nonetheless, they also explained that with departmentalization the work could become overwhelming, was challenging, and would only work under certain conditions. The comments teachers in the sample of the original study made about

departmentalization are similar to those reported in the research literature. While you see more disadvantages than advantages expressed about departmentalization from the sample in the original study, the pattern in the research literature identifies more advantages than disadvantages (Gewertz, 2014; Hood, 2015; Mulvahill, 2016; Watson, 2012).

Hood (2015) indicated that the public schools in Denver, refers to departmentalization as Platooning. It is not a new instructional strategy but one that has been used in middle and high schools in some form for a very long time. Hood stated that in recent times, increasingly more elementary schools have adopted departmentalization/Platooning for the elementary students. The example she provided was that 15 years ago it had been estimated that approximately 5% of the elementary schools in Colorado had used departmentalized instruction. It is becoming more normal now according to the Deputy Superintendent in Denver, Colorado. Approximately 20% of the elementary schools in Colorado have used departmentalization. Hood (2015) reported that the expectation is that its use will continue to increase as the need for intervention remains.

Some of the advantages of departmentalization identified by Hood (2015) were: Provides more opportunities for teachers to collaborate on student progress and curriculum; teachers can share their enthusiasm for the subject matter with the students; benefits go beyond improving test scores; teachers have a partner at parent-teacher conferences, which helps in a situation when a parent has to hear unpleasant news about his/her child.

Hood (2015) also identified some disadvantages with departmentalization.

Departmentalization creates silos because the subject matter is isolated. According to Hood, students need to be able to think critically across subject areas and think deeply about the subject matter and the connections to other subjects. Additionally, in some schools departmentalization means larger class sizes. It seems that teachers have also reported a similar disadvantage as did the teachers in the original study about after they had used departmentalization it was hard for them to go back to the generalist or traditional model of one teacher teaching all of the subjects to one group of students (Hood, 2015).

There were some disadvantages identified by Watson (2012) that were somewhat consistent with those reported by the teachers in the sample of the original study. For instance, the cons were noted as follows: (a) Lots of planning and time is involved with conferences, communications, schedules and procedures, etc.; (b) Debriefing time is needed each day if you share students with other teachers; (c) A high level of trust is needed since you have to depend on your colleagues and adhere to the schedule; (d) You are sharing students with other teachers so you do not get the sense of a classroom community as you do in the tradition classroom, provide additional collaboration time; and (e) challenges with organization for the students because it will be times when they have trouble keeping up with their materials.

Considering some of the advantages described in the research literature, the study gains support. For instance Watson (2012) explained that since you know your subject matter very well with departmentalization, you are better able to differentiate as a result

of your expertise. It should be recalled that the teachers in the sample for the original study indicated that they had trouble being able to differentiate with their students. Therefore, if they were to engage in continuous improvement through professional development opportunities, then their skills would improve in this area. A policy would have to be implemented to support and encourage faculty to participate on the one hand, and require them to participate so that they would be sure to actually attend, document and share what they have learned with their colleagues. Other advantages reported by Watson were: (a) You get to know all of the students on your grade level and not only one class as with the traditional or generalist approach; (b) You can share ideas with your teammates and have help with conferences and parents, and “[the team can] just keep you sane” (Watson, 2012, p. 2); (c) Variety during the day so you and the students are less likely to be bored; and (d) You are only grading one or two subjects.

Gewertz (2017) explained that the new academic standards being required and emphasis on developing students who are critical thinkers by the federal government has resulted in pressure being placed on educators across the United States in grades K-12. The responses have been varied, but the majority of the schools are making efforts to help their students increase academic achievement levels (Mulvahill, 2016). Some efforts have been successful and others could work under the right circumstances.

Departmentalization has been reported as an effective paradigm to help students learn (Gewertz; 2014; Hood, 2015). The question this study asks is, can the teachers in the school that served as the setting for the original study obtain the support they need so that they could be effective and efficient in the classroom? One way it was believed that this

could happen would be a policy recommendation so that the teachers will be able to participate in professional development activities for both subject area and the selected instructional strategy, in this instance, departmentalization.

Project Description

The problem addressed in the study was that, students in the focus school continue to have poor student outcomes (GADOE, 2016; GADOE, 2017a). Education leaders in the school responded with the decision to change their instructional strategy to departmentalization for fifth graders and team teaching for fourth graders. Even though this was the decision made by the administrative staff in the school, teachers who participated in the original study stated that it was not enough. Teachers in the school reported that they needed and wanted continuous professional development on both subject area and the instructional strategy being used. Their focus appeared to center upon the creation of a culture in the school for continuous improvement for all teachers. Zmuda et al., (2004) have documented the benefits students experience when teachers engage in professional development and evidence effectiveness in the classroom.

Some of the disadvantages reported by the sample with departmentalization could be addressed through participation in a professional learning community where attention is given to the improvement of the quality of teaching in the schools (Caine & Caine, 2010), some teachers mentioned the need to collaborate. Teachers in the original sample believed specific topics that needed to be addressed through professional development could be done if they had systematic support from the educational leadership in the school, district, and state. The teachers expressed a united commitment to effect positive

change on academic achievement as reported by Holmes and Maiers (2012). However, it is argued here that the support teachers need would only be possible if policies were developed that required teachers to engage in the professional development activities that would enable them to provide evidence of increased academic achievement levels. Since the NCLB (2002) and as of 2013, the more recent CCSS, student scores in the focus district have declined instead of increased to meet the goal of these mandates. There was significant concern about the decline in students' achievement scores a few years in the district as well as the focus school.

There is a need to integrate holistic changes in the current educational policies so that engagement in professional development activities could become the norm and teachers recognize their contributions to student learning. The expectation is that policy-supported professional development requirements for both the content areas and the instructional strategy used would help improve academic achievement. There are three goals for the study that focus on the teachers and students. These goals are to:

- a. Increase teachers' level of efficacy to teach mandated requirements of focus subjects in the departmentalized classroom (i.e., teacher efficacy);
- b. Increase overall achievement levels of the students through improving teaching to meet new rigor and increase effectiveness of structure in order to increase student achievement by following educator ideas; and

One way it is believed these goals could be achieved would be to make a policy recommendation so that the teachers will be able to participate in professional development opportunities for both subject areas and the selected instructional strategy,

which is departmentalization. Breen (2012) explained that there were ten guidelines that should direct the development of policy recommendations. These guidelines according to Breen are: (1) objective must be identified, (2) target audience must be determined, (3) clearly set out the issue, (4) provide options when it is possible to do so, (5) acknowledge the present economic climate, (6) fit the proposed policy within the existing strategy, program, or government, (7) provide information about similar approaches taken in other countries (i.e., can present an international perspective), (8) tailor the document to the audience; it should be readable, simple, clear and concise, (9) make a clear argument with research showing that the policy recommendation would be beneficial to the individual, community, society, and nationally, and (10) place emphasis on the importance of action. Weill (2012) concluded that the policy recommendation should be written concisely. Specifically he stated that each policy recommendation should have three sections. Weill stated that the issue, recommendation and rationale should be developed for each policy recommended. Doyle (2013) also indicated that the characteristics of a well-written policy recommendation were: Accuracy, conciseness, readability, and presents a good argument. While different formats were discussed, essentially there is agreement in terms of the contents of an effective policy statement (Breen, 2012; Doyle, 2013; Grumble, 2017; Moussa, 2017; O'Connell, 2012; Steinberg & Cox, 2017). Currently, educators in the United States must follow established policies and practices, not only of the school in which they teach but also the local and state districts, as well as the United States Department of Education (2017).

Needed Resources

As explained by the teachers who participated in the original study, departmentalization adds responsibilities to their work and they would need specific training to maintain and enhance their skills so that they can help their students succeed. The plan calls for continuous engagement in professional development opportunities. Some of the requests for training and workshops were: Differentiation skills, sensitivity training as related to teacher expectations, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy to help teachers improve their skills and beliefs in best teaching practices, and growth versus fixed mindset (Dweck, 2017; 2015). In a study from Bang, & Reio, (2017) it was determined that a person's efficacy governs the extents of their proficiency in a given set of circumstances, and that people that have low self-efficacy avoid situations that demonstrate their lack of proficiency while those with high efficacy confront situations and develop better strategies. The authors go further to say that high self-efficacy leads to higher student achievement. Once a teacher has developed strategies for specific content as needed for the school year their efficacy increases as does their confidence and competence in their ability to increase student achievement. In a study by Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra (2017), the authors explained that a teacher's efficacy is reflected in their confident ability to implement curriculum that sustains and enhances student achievement, and their quality of instruction. They go further to state that a teacher's effectiveness is related to three factors: Teacher efficacy is positively linked with their role in facilitating student/teacher interactions. Teacher efficacy is positively linked with a teacher's delivery of the curriculum. Teacher efficacy is linked with their role in

regulating student learning. Dweck (2017) stated that a fixed mindset is when people believe that the basic abilities like talent or intelligence, are traits that are inherently fixed, or rather static. As such fixed mindset traits are more often than not documented rather than developed and these fixed traits are what creates success without much effort, but according to the author this is erroneous thinking. However, in the growth mindset Dweck (2017) summates that people believe that the basic abilities can be developed with hard work and dedication, and that talent along with brains are the starting point. In this way people develop the love for learning and the resilience needed for achievement.

Financial resources are a necessity to cover the cost for the additional professional development opportunities that are continuously needed. The number of opportunities for the training teachers need as well as the number for content specialists would increase. Additional locations and times for engagement in professional development opportunities enable the teachers to integrate the training and experiences into their schedules for work and family life. Since the intent is to build upon the professional development paradigm that is currently in place, it would also be a worthy investment for the training sessions to be available to any teachers in the school and eventually the district who are interested and motivated to attend.

Teachers need additional instructional resources as mentioned in the heading, “Needed Resources” that include financial, technical and resources received from professional development sessions, to use in the classroom as a result of being exposed to new ideas and activities to engage students in the learning process. Hence the budget and ability to order and receive instructional supplies supported by finances and easily

accessible via the internet. The school is responsible for the supplies and not the teachers. Teachers should maintain records of the information they learned and how it was used in the classroom. Therefore it was suggested that each teacher receive a laptop, cell phone, and budget to access the additional instructional supplies.

Finally, teachers should receive recognition for the efforts that they expend on the goal of increasing their effectiveness in the classroom and student learning. Recognition could take the form of being mentioned in the announcement made at the school, luncheon in their honor, tokens of appreciation (e.g., certificates of completion, school coffee mug, t-shirt, pencils and pens with affirmations about the school having high quality educators in the school, recognition by the district and state department of education).

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers to having the policy changes approved by the education leaders in the school and the district include both internal (e.g., technical, social relationships within the school) and external (e.g., cultural, political) obstacles (Holmes & Maiers, 2017). Identified barriers include: (a) an unwillingness to provide the additional funding and personnel that will be needed, (b) resentment from other faculty who are not using departmentalization in the school because of the added attention and resources given to teachers who are using departmentalization in the classroom, and (c) lack of support for the policy recommendation from the school or district. Specific attention would need to be given to the relationships that might be negatively affected so that the goals of the study can be achieved.

Potential Solutions to the Barriers

Schools, teachers and other personnel are penalized when students consistently do not meet the standards required for their grade level. The penalties that have been levied against low performing schools include: Replacement of the principal, limited rehiring (only 50%) of current employees, close the school and reopen it as a charter school, close the school and place the students in schools with higher achievement levels, and complete transformation of the school (Holmes & Maiers, 2012). As explained by Holmes and Maiers, complete transformation refers to replacing the principal of the poor performing school and engaging in measures that would increase the effectiveness of the teachers and leaders in the school. It would also require instructional reforms that are comprehensive, and could lead to an increase in the time students have to learn, the creation of community oriented schools, and more support from the USDOE.

Given the extent of the penalties for poor academic achievement, it seems reasonable to expect education leaders to reinforce positive changes in teaching and learning. If teachers can show support of their impact on student learning with observable outcomes, the means would justify the end. Leaders on the local and state level should be able to see that the policies they approved resulted in an increase in student learning and quality of teaching. A solution to the barrier created when other faculty members in the school show resentment toward teachers who receive benefits because of the instructional strategy used was to reinforce efforts of all teachers who engage in the required and self-selected professional development opportunities. The results were the same, that is, an increase in student learning and the effectiveness of the teachers. Requirements for

engaging in professional development served to highlight its importance to the students, teachers, parents and community. If the stakeholders (i.e., school or district level) who are responsible for making decisions about the acceptance or rejection of the policy recommendations decide that they will not support the policy recommendations, then it would be incumbent for the supporters of the policy recommendation to widen their audience to attract attention and support from representatives in the community. The rationale here was that if students do well in the schools, then society benefits. The responsibility for the education of the students rests with the adults in the lives of the children (e.g., family members, community representatives, educators, as well as politicians on local, state and federal levels). It is also possible for the supporters of the policy recommendation to gain attention from national organizations and business partners to help achieve the goals of the study. In sum, it is believed that, in order for the policy recommendation to be effective, the stakeholders will have to be prepared for the change.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students, Teachers, and Education Leaders

I am the individual responsible for the development and acceptance of the policy recommendation and implementation of the recommendation. Starr (2017) explained the importance of viewing improvement in the school as an adaptive process and not merely a challenge in technical design that can be resolved in systems and organizational structures. Therefore, plans have included acknowledgement of the roles and responsibilities numerous people will have in the success of the study, as well as the adjustments needed as the individuals grow and change as a result of their experiences.

The success of the study will be the result of the synergy created by the efforts of the team.

It is intended for the study to be a dynamic entity, and ever changing. Teasley (2017) described the type of organization culture that will be established from the work required for the success of the teachers and students. Teasley explained that the organizational culture of the school will give stakeholders a “sense of identity, promote achievement orientation, help shape standards and patterns of behavior, create ways of doing things, and determines direction for future growth” (p. 3). The roles and responsibilities for other individuals involved with this study are outlined subsequently.

Students. The focus of this study was with the fifth grade students who are enrolled in classrooms that use departmentalization. The role and responsibility of these students in this study are learners. The expectation was that they would attend school regularly, actively engage in the learning process and do the required work. The plan was for these students to become active learners who are motivated and expected to do well.

Teachers. The role of the teachers was critical for the success of the study and the students. They are the leaders in the classroom and expected to do their jobs well. In terms of the study, their responsibilities included planning, teaching, attending professional development sessions, actively participating in the sessions, provide feedback regularly, meet with their colleagues during the debriefing sessions, and complete all tasks assigned or needed. Furthermore, the plans include written and visual documentation of activities implemented in the classroom for student learning.

Principal. As the leader in the school, her approval, support, and active participation is needed for the success of the study. Observable outcomes were shared with her and all educators in the school regularly. Her support and that of the school board was also be needed for approval and acceptance of the policy recommendation and success of the study. The responsibilities for the principal also included financial resources and the establishment of relationships with education leaders and policy makers on the district and state level for future growth and development of the policy recommendations and study.

Other administrative staff. Financial, technical, and physical resources were needed so that teachers were able to maximize their effectiveness in the classroom and students to achieve positive academic outcomes. Therefore the support and engagement of the assistant principal, directors, coordinators, and supervisors in the school was requested and their feedback solicited.

Instructional support staff. These individuals included the librarian, curriculum specialist, computer technicians, as well as instructors in art, music, and physical education, ESOL, special education, etc. Their responsibilities were to remain committed to the execution of their duties in their roles, and to do their jobs well. They were also be asked to provide feedback about their observations of the students.

Parents. The parents or caregivers are responsible for the physical, mental, emotional and social development of the students. I met with parents and explain the work that their children will be involved. They also asked that the parents support their

children as they complete their homework and assignments given. The goal was the success of the students and they will need assistance.

School board. School board members are representative from the districts. The school board serves as a public link to public schools (Center for Public education, 2017). Members can be appointed or elected. Their responsibility is to look out for the students. They are also held accountable for the performance of their schools (Center for Public Education, 2017). They were viewed as partners in the educational success of the students. Their support will be needed and solicited, through a presentation of the papers findings along with the study plan and timeline that abides by the districts schoolwide calendar.

Professional development staff. These are the individuals who are employed or contracted by the school district to provide training in specific areas for professional development. Professional Development staff who are responsible for the training sessions and workshops for the teachers were selected and assigned based on their specific areas of expertise, for instance, instructional strategies and in particular departmentalization, classroom management, subject area of the teachers, student learning, motivation of students, how to use reinforcement to shape and change behaviors, and other topics as requested by the teachers, principal, and instructional staff at the school.

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan designed for this policy recommendation and implementation involved a formative and summative evaluation with the focus on outcome based data for

the summative evaluation. Houser (2015) described the type of questions that the formative and summative evaluations ask: (a) what needs to be done, (b) how should it be done, (c) is it being done, and (d) is it succeeding (p. 287). Following the outline provided by Houser, the nine steps involved in the development of a program evaluation were adhered (see Table 20). The evaluation team consisted of me and two research assistants who have expertise in the subject matter, test and measurement, and instructional strategies. The stakeholders are the teachers, principal, support staff (i.e., administrative, instructional, and professional development), parents, and school board. Information that assisted with an effective evaluation was obtained from all stakeholders. The type of evaluation depended on the type of program evaluated (McIntosh, 2017).

Table 20

Steps Involved in the Development of a Program Evaluation

Step	Program Evaluation
Step 1	Formation of the evaluation team
Step 2	Determination of relevant stakeholders
Step 3	Identification of a focus for the evaluation
Step 4	Determination of the evaluation model and methods
Step 5	Selection of the evaluation design and methods
Step 6	Determination of the measures that will be used for the evaluation
Step 7	Data Collection
Step 8	Data Analysis
Step 9	Presentation of the results to all relevant stakeholders

Note. This table was adapted from *Counseling and educational Research* by Houser, R. (2015), p. 289. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

The third step was the identification of the focus of the evaluation. The focus of this evaluation was on important characteristics of the study that were reviewed and evaluated (Creswell, 2012; Houser, 2015). These characteristics included evaluations of

staff quality from teachers, professional development staff, how well the study made progress in terms of achieving its goals, and implemented as designed, as well as the usefulness of instructional resources, and the progress of the students.

The fourth step refers to the identification of different evaluation models and methods. This step involved the identification of specific evaluation questions that were answered in the evaluation. Two major questions asked, namely has the program been implemented as designed, and how well was the program implemented.

Step five involved the actual selection of the evaluation methods and designs. It was decided that formative and summative evaluations will be conducted. The questions that were asked during the formative evaluation were such that the researcher was able to determine whether or not the program was implemented as designed. Questions that were asked during the summative phase of the study revolved around ascertaining how well the program achieved its goals. The CIPP (i.e., context, input, process, and product evaluation) model developed by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) is believed to be the best way to obtain the information needed. It focused on the formative and summative evaluations.

The selection of measures for the evaluation is the sixth step and data collection is the seventh step in the program evaluation process as described by Houser (2015). Each variable was operationalized such as an independent variable, so that the best measures in a dependent variable were identified. During the formative evaluation, small focus groups and one-on-one interviews were used as in qualitative data collection technique. Information of interest were whether or not teachers received information

needed in a timely manner, attend the professional development sessions, whether or not the facilitators of the professional development were present and rate how well did they conducted the sessions. The summative evaluation used quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. For instance, teachers were asked to describe what they have learned just like students were given an opportunity to talk about what they have learned since the beginning of the school year. In addition, specific instruments as in quantitative data) were used to obtain information about the achievement outcomes such as grades in classes, progress, participation and placement in science fairs, performance on state required assessments, etc., and teachers level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), along with other performance indicators. Bandura developed this classic theory of self-efficacy and consistent findings have been found that continue to support the relationship between levels of self-efficacy and performance in many different contexts (Green, Conlon, & Morrissey, 2017; Guntern, Korpershoek, & van der Werf, 2017; Mirick & Davis, 2017; Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017; Wallace & Kernozek, 2017). Timelines were developed to ensure that data was collected efficiently and effectively.

The specific questions that the participants were asked during the formative (Appendix I) and summative (Appendix J) evaluations are subsequently outlined. During the formative evaluation (Appendix I) the teachers were asked: (a) Do you think you received information in a timely manner? Please explain your response. (b) Were you able to attend any professional development sessions? If so, which ones did you attend, and do you think they were helpful? If not, please explain why you were not able to attend any sessions, or why you did not think they were helpful. (c) Were the scheduled

facilitators present and on time for each session? Please explain. (d) Do you feel that the facilitators were informative? Please explain. (e) Did you learn anything from the facilitators that would help you in the classroom? Please explain. And, (f) How well do you think the facilitators conducted the sessions? Please explain.

The summative evaluation (Appendix J) included both qualitative and quantitative items. Teachers were asked: (a) Please describe what you learned from the professional development sessions that specifically helped you in the classroom. (b) If you had it to do all over again, were there any sessions that you would not have attended? The quantitative measure that teachers will be asked to complete is the self-efficacy measure (Bandura, 1997). Students will be asked: What have you learned from being in this classroom? Data was also collected about the academic performance of the students such as their grade point averages, progress reports, and performance on the GMAS. As mentioned in Step 12 under Project Implementation teachers were also asked to maintain a notebook with all of the related information, instructions, exercises, and list of available resources they receive from the professional development sessions in their classrooms.

Step eight involves the data analysis phase of the evaluation process. Qualitative data analysis involved thematic analysis of the information collected from small focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews between relevant stakeholders and the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Finally, step nine is the last step in the evaluation process and requires that the findings are reported to relevant stakeholders, and when possible at professional conferences such as American Education Research Association or the Qualitative Research Conference, as well as including plans to have the data published in

peer reviewed journals and lend themselves as a positive contribution to improving education.

Project Implications

This section of the study is used to describe and understand the impact of the study on the world, from the immediate environment to a global level (Walden University Writing Center, 2013). This study took place in an elementary school located in the fifth largest school district in Georgia. This school district provides services for more than 50,000 students from diverse backgrounds, and is located south of metropolitan Atlanta (GADOE, 2017a). The education leaders in the school responded to declining student achievement scores with the introduction of departmentalization for fifth grade classes. Responses of the teachers to this instructional strategy were mixed. However, it was clear that they wanted professional development training and experiences on departmentalization and its use with fifth grade students, in addition to the planned opportunities for professional development for the content area in which they teach.

This study was developed to achieve three goals: (a) increase teachers' level of efficacy in the departmentalized classroom (i.e., teacher efficacy), (b) increase overall achievement levels of the students, and (c) Work to increase teacher efficacy. As such, the expectation was that the potential for findings from this study could have a far reaching impact on the students, teachers, local community, state, nationally, and internationally. The status of education in the United States has educators across the nation concerned about the academic performance of the students (USDOE, 2017).

Educational reforms have been implemented on a local, state, and federal level to help students improve their levels of academic achievement.

Locally, it is possible that findings from the study would result in teachers reporting and exhibiting increased levels of self-efficacy in their ability to respond to the needs of the students in the classroom. If teachers feel as though they can achieve their goals and objectives, then they are more likely to hold high expectations for themselves and their students. Teachers' expectations have been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement (Baron & Branscomb, 2012). The prediction was that as the level of confidence in being able to successfully implement departmentalization in the classroom increases, so too will the levels of self-efficacy of the teachers. Students will benefit from motivated, experienced, talented teachers. In addition, a study conducted by Miller, Ramirez, and Murdock (2017) found that when teachers have high levels of self-efficacy, students perceive them as competent and they show respect for the teachers. Through the use of the paradigm in this study, teachers will also be able to respond to the individual needs of the students to help them realize their potential. Support for this belief also comes from a study conducted in China. Lam & Chan (2017) reported findings from their study which showed that when students received negative feedback about their performance on a reading comprehension exam in English, their levels of self-efficacy decreased. In contrast when they received positive feedback about their performance, the result was an increase in self-efficacy. When the source of the feedback was assessed in the positive feedback condition, positive feedback from the students' mother led to a higher increase in self-efficacy than positive feedback from the teachers and fathers.

The plan calls for the policy recommendation to support the interest and efforts of the teachers to increase their skills, knowledge and abilities with the goal being to effect positive change in the classroom. When students are able to learn they are more likely to remain in school, persist, and complete the requirements for graduation (McGee, Saran, Krulwich, 2012; Mirick & Davis, 2017; Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszn, & Platt, 2011). America needs students who will be able to join a work force that will rely heavily on skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (McGee et al., 2012). Not only would the students be able to attain graduate and professional degrees in the STEM fields, they will also be able to remain competitive in a society that is becoming increasingly more technologically advanced. America also needs diversity in the work force. In helping the teachers, you empower them to perform efficiently and effectively which will increase positive student outcomes (Bang, & Reio, 2017; Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017). The policy recommendations were designed to meet the needs of declining student achievement through improved teacher efficacy.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of the study was that teachers and relevant stakeholders will have continuous professional development opportunities as a result of the acceptance of the policy recommendation. In addition, the teachers requesting professional development opportunities appear to be motivated to succeed and willing to exert efforts to improve their performance in the classroom. Another strength of the study is also seen from the focus on self-efficacy levels of teachers and students given the impact that self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) has been shown to have on performance in different settings (e.g., education, job performance, medical, and sports). Bandura (1996) further to stated that when teachers' are secure in their sense of self-efficacy, the stronger their pledge to improving student achievement. Conversely, instructional effectiveness may not fare well if teachers do not feel as though they have a sufficient sense of self-efficacy to complete their teaching goals (Bandura, 1997; Baron et al., 2012).

A few limitations were apparent when developing the study, the purpose of which was to address the problem of declining student achievement. First, there are many factors that could influence the academic performance of students in the schools. Even though my attention in this study is on the impact of self-efficacy of teachers' effectiveness and on the performance of students, there could be other explanations for the consistent decline in academic achievement levels of the students in both the focus school as well as the district. The fact that standards changed in Georgia a few years before this study, along with the required tests and measurements used to assess the

achievement levels of students (GADOE, 2010) could be a reason why the performance of students continues to decline in spite of the efforts made by the educators and education leaders in the school. Researchers conducting studies in the future may be able to determine what variables in the current setting have an impact on academic achievement. The generalizability of the results from the study are also limited to school settings that share similar characteristics and demographics of the participants used in this study.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are alternative approaches that could be used to address the problem of low academic achievement among elementary students. For instance, there are a variety of circumstances that need consideration when undertaking the job of improving student achievement, such as allowing sufficient time for both the teachers and students to be able to understand the standards in order to meet the state required assessment results. In this instance, an alternative approach would be to do nothing and see if, in time, the achievement level of the students will improve. Another alternative would be to provide more direct support to students, individually, to raise their achievement scores. However, the teachers have asked for assistance. It would seem that it is incumbent upon the education leaders in the school to respond to the expressed needs of the teachers. If the needs are not met, the school could become one of the state's focus or priority schools which require concentrated state support for three years. To avoid having this happen, the district must work with GADOE to assess the school's leadership, and the district has to provide instructional coaches to support the teachers. The school has to develop a plan

for student achievement, provide educators with learning time and mandatory GADOE professional learning and have an assigned school improvement specialist (GADOE, 2017).

In order to produce positive change, collaborative efforts with all major stakeholders in the schools are needed to ensure the success of the students and, hence, society.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

What I learned about the processes specific to the research and development of the study was that, when using interviews as the primary data source for qualitative research, the number of participants should be kept to a manageable number in order to properly analyze the data. In order to implement a workable study, a maximum of 10 participants proved satisfactory based on the size and demographics of the focus school as well as the wealth of information provided by the sample. When the number of participants increases beyond 10, it might become more difficult to manage the information to address the needs of teachers and their students in the upper level grades. Most of the schools within the district have anywhere from six to eight upper-level classrooms, for which the schools' administrators are seeking to formulate departmentalized instructional plans to work toward the goal of improving student achievement. When more participants are added to a study, it is possible that the researcher will become inundated with the many themes revealed. A good practice appears to be, as suggested by most researchers, to end data collection once saturation has occurred (Houser, 2015).

A requirement of the study is that I present a reflective analysis about my personal learning and growth of self as a scholar, practitioner, and study developer, specific to the research and development of the study. Upon reflection in regards to my personal learning and growth, I would venture to say the lesson that became most apparent was that my ideas and thoughts were not universal. Even though I was warned by both my advisor and the various resources I perused not to allow any preconceived notions to steer my interviews and participants, I found that I had to work diligently not to push for my agenda. That was sound advice, and I am happy that I did not contaminate any of the data.

I decided to focus on departmentalization due to my personal appreciation of the time and development allowed for the teacher to become a master in either one or two subjects. While many of the teachers appreciated the concept of departmentalization, how I viewed the concepts involved in the alternative teaching method was very different than that of the participants. I started thinking that if an individual performed in a professional manner he or she could formulate and develop plans with any colleagues assigned to the same team. This was not only a false assumption but many participants argued that positive chemistry among team members was essential for efforts to increase student achievement.

Lastly, teachers saw the dynamics of working within subject areas and that they could become specialists. The administration had a set of different issues to consider before deciding if they would allow departmentalization in their school. For instance, they also had to decide which teachers would best fit into their assigned role and assigned

subject area. With the transcribing of each interview, I learned and grew as a scholar. I learned not only about the importance of remaining objective but also how each individual within a setting, regardless of role and whether that person is a teacher, team teacher, or administrator, has to have a voice in the development of any study that is designed to benefit the students within the schools.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Upon reflection about the importance of the work conducted, I have come to the conclusion that the study is important. It was designed to address a problem that has short-term and long-term implications for the future of the United States. In the very near future the country will need a workforce that can respond to the needs of a modern society (Bowen & Mills, 2017). Currently, too few female and underrepresented students are pursuing careers in the STEM area (McGee et al., 2012). The policy recommendation and study are designed to respond to the needs of the students and help the teachers increase their levels of effectiveness in the classroom, in order to have a positive impact on the self-efficacy levels of the teachers. Based on my findings I was able to conclude that concern about the performance of the students is justified, and the need for empirical investigations that can contribute to positive social change remains critical.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The potential impact for positive social change and student achievement on all grade levels adds merit to the implementation of the study. On an individual level, focusing on the personal and professional development of the teachers and students at the focus school presents the expectation of increased levels of self-efficacy for teaching

mandated levels of instruction, as well as the effectiveness of the teachers and student learning in the classroom. Implications for social change can also be discerned from the potential findings from the study. If teachers are empowered to teach their students effectively and students are able to experience an increase in academic achievement levels, then the confidence, or self-efficacy levels of both of these stakeholders increase, which means that future performance levels would be expected to continue to increase.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal for education is not only our district but across the United States is that when students can be supported to excel in school, the future looks brighter. McGee et al., (2012) speculates that, soon, the United States will not have a workforce that can respond to its future needs if we cannot compete academically and professionally with students from other countries. For example McGee et al., (2012), concluded that the number of students who plan to develop careers in the STEM courses is decreasing rather than increasing, and there is little diversity in the fields. Decisive intervention strategies are needed. It is my belief that this study is a step in the right direction. It was designed to involve all of the relevant stakeholders in the identification of ways to help students achieve positive outcomes and meet the increased rigor required due to recent mandated curricular changes. Collaborative efforts such as these appear to be effective and supported in the research literature (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008).

According to McGee et al., (2012) students in the United States must be able to successfully compete with their domestic and international counterparts. With the experiences, advances in technology, and levels of expertise in the field of education, it

seems that effective solutions can be identified. The research literature is replete with studies with findings about effective strategies to help students increase their academic achievement levels (Cara, 2012). During my research I was able to reflect on my original intent of pursuing alternative solutions to increasing low student achievement and was pleasantly surprised when it was revealed that many of my colleagues supported the belief that their levels of effectiveness in the classroom could positively impact their students. With that in mind a policy recommendation restructuring the school environment to focus on teachers' expertise in various subject areas through professional development for departmentalization, and teachers' sense of self-efficacy can have a positive impact for other schools as well.

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Appendix A: Policy Paper Project

Elementary Teachers' Self Efficacy for Improving Student Achievement

by

Regina A. Epps

Background of Existing Problem

The problem that the focus school is presently facing is the declining student achievement scores in fourth and fifth grades, pivotal elementary testing grades. Declining test scores have consistently been a concern of teachers and administrators. During faculty meetings at the focus school, teachers have indicated that they desire more professional development and support in developing instruction to meet the needs of struggling learners in all subject areas. Presently reading and occasionally math are the predominant professional development programs offered by the county during pre/post planning and as state standards change. Although other subject areas are offered to county employees as an option or as textbooks are adopted they are rarely required, despite the high turnover of upper elementary teachers within the county. School data indicates that there are approximately 659 students enrolled in the school with 56% being Hispanic, 35% are African-American, and the remaining 9% are Caucasian, Asian or other. The community in which the focus school is located is one of the poorest in the county, explaining why 97% of the school's students are eligible for free or reduced lunches and qualifies as a Title I school. With the school demographics and socioeconomic status of the surrounding community, student achievement and gap in practice makes it that much more imperative to focus on teachers' expertise in various subject areas that enhance student learning in those areas.

The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE), Georgia has reacted, to low student achievement in its attempts to improve student outcomes (GADOE, 2014), through changing standards and increased rigor. Attention has been given to state

performance standards, assessments, changes in the curriculum/instruction, supplementary programs, and the funding from federal programs is designed to provide resources, assistance, and monitoring to help schools “ensure that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and to achieve proficiency on high academic standards” (GADOE, 2014, p. 1). According to Ballou (2014), the recent job discontent in relation to low student achievement might be accredited to teachers’ feelings about the necessity for more support and training regarding best practices in fulfilling CCSS, as well as negative experiences of its preliminary implementation.

My case study was specific to the school and schools within the district which displayed similar data which investigated the phenomenon based on teachers’ perceptions of low student achievement and to further understand teachers’ ideas of why student achievement is low along with teachers’ perspectives within a conceptual framework of perceived sense of self-efficacy for meeting increased standards.

The policy recommendation that I propose outlines mandated professional development in the subject areas that upper elementary teachers are expected to teach to mastery for the assigned school year, that build both teaching and student efficacy.

Goal of Project

The project evolved from interviews with teachers along with archival data collected from the original study. That study was designed to describe and understand teachers’ perceptions about the reasons their students’ overall achievement was low and ways to help increase student achievement. While some of the teachers believed that the instructional model of departmentalization that had been selected could help improve

student achievement, they also believed that they needed more support so that they would be effective in the classroom. As such, the educators recommended continuous professional development for teachers so that they would be able to address the needs of all of their students when departmentalization was used in the classroom. Continuous professional development that is determined based on subjects in which the educator will apply throughout the school year, rather than an overall/blanket delivery of the one or two subjects in which the district finds to be the main priority for the year. Real world data based critical thinking strategies and resources that are applicable to subjects in which the educator must teach to mastery.

Georgia Professional Standards Commission

At present the district follows Georgia Professional Standards Commission (July, 2017) outlines as required to maintain and update/renew certification of its educators as Standards Professional Certification when the educator earns up to two Proficient or Exemplary TAPS ratings within 5 years of consecutive service. In addition, educators can have one or less unsatisfactory or ineffective performance ratings along with satisfying their LUA (local unit of administration) professional learning requirements. Clayton County Public Schools requires attendance in professional learning trainings during its pre and post planning calendar and as assigned, professional learning (currently two additional professional learning days for the school year). These courses are principally developed with reading as the primary focus, with the occasional math course added, based on achievement scores. While the district offers a variation of professional learning courses, science and social studies which are testing subjects in the upper elementary

grades are only mandated when standards have changed or during a textbook adoption, otherwise these are optional to the educator. Differentiated Instruction is also offered as an optional professional development course which provides strategies and resources that aid teachers in preparing instruction for a variety of learning styles and levels.

Literature Review

The purpose of this project is to recommend policy change that implements departmentalization locally in the upper elementary grade levels, based on teachers' ideas about what supports they may need to feel capable in improving student achievement that addresses the gap in practice. Scotten (2011) proposes that a policy recommendation focuses on a particular policy that offers recommendations to stakeholders. The author also says that it is the job of the researcher as done in this project to bring attention to the current problem, offer possible solutions and explain how the recommendation impacts the school as well as the district. Starr (2017) explained the importance of viewing improvement in the school as an adaptive process and not merely a challenge in technical design that can be resolved in systems and organizational structures. Ongoing/continuous and meaningful professional development for staff based on subject/content and differentiated instruction, in order to address specific achievement needs of students, work with diverse student populations, foster a culture of high expectations and collaboration, among other job requirements on what seems to be a nearly infinite list of roles and responsibilities (Chalmers & Keown, 2006).

The project outlines a policy recommendation that mandates professional development for teachers in classrooms who are teaching only one or two subjects in

order to become more efficient in those subjects. Neither the curriculum plan nor the professional development/training curriculum and materials offered by the district are appropriate given the goals and objectives for the current project.

After transcription of the responses from the participants and analyses of the data, the outcome that best presented itself for developing this project was the impact of content specific professional development on teacher efficacy as an aid in delivering content to meet new standards and increased requirements for the students as previously described in Section 1. As shown in the Table below, teachers' responses, as well as the educational administrator share one common theme, namely, professional development activities that would help to improve student achievement. As can be seen, teachers admit they would need professional development activities that would help their students, other than the standard reading and occasional math that is scheduled into the yearly calendar. Unfortunately, the teachers also agreed that without mandate or the use of professional learning or staff development days built into the school calendar they are less likely to participate due to the personal time required to attend. Best case scenario would be the use of professional learning days that allow teachers the opportunity to choose content specific subjects in which to focus. The conclusion made in this instance is that teachers believe if they could improve their effectiveness (i.e., time management, content areas, planning, etc.), through content specific professional development then the students would have the opportunity to increase their levels of achievement.

Table A 1

Professional Development Areas Suggested by Educators

Participant	Professional Development Areas
RP1	Lesson planning; locating a mentor for modeling for guidance that has shown consistent growth
RP2	Professional development with Professional Learning Center; collaborate with a teacher that is an expert
RP3	Differentiation and technology; professional development In Special Education
RP4	Differentiated instruction; time management (e.g., how to transition from one subject to another in the time allotted)
RP5	Planning or differentiation; any reading professional development that helps is direct our teaching towards the requirements of GMAS; how to plan for students not performing on grade level and how to challenge those above grade level
RP6	Lesson planning on new standards; how to prepare students for a computerized test when they have not been exposed to the fundamentals of computers and typing; how to teach a whole class and below level learner; spiral review of the standards throughout the entire school year; the pull out method—is it effective; collaborating with someone who does well; grade level professional development
RP7	Effective practices for ELA; scheduling (e.g., where are we supposed to work and for how many minutes; getting administration to trust us more
RP8	Math (i.e., breaking, deconstructing the standard, rewriting it in my own words so I can understand what it is and what's required of the students
RP9	Pacing workshop to show me how to get everything taught that needs to get taught
RP10	Collaboration; Professional Learning Communities; content area

According to Protheroe (2008), teacher efficacy refers to the confidence teachers hold about their ability to have a positive impact on student learning. Based on information obtained from the findings in this study, according to the teachers, it is

possible that teacher efficacy could be improved by mandated professional development within subject areas that teachers encounter in a departmentalized setting. It is expected that teacher efficacy would have a positive influence on student outcomes.

The project calls for the policy recommendation to support the interest and efforts of the teachers to increase their expertise, knowledge and capabilities in other words their efficacy, with the goal being to influence positive change in the classroom. The teachers in the sample from the study indicated that they had concerns related to being able to differentiate with their students. Hence, if they were to engage in continuous improvement through professional development opportunities, then their skills could improve in this area. The policy suggests implementation that supports and encourages faculty to participate, and requires them to participate so that they would be sure to actually attend, document and share what they have learned with their colleagues.

The policy recommendation paper developed focuses on mandating professional development for teachers in the departmentalized upper elementary classrooms and addresses the importance of increasing student achievement through improved instructional strategies as teachers become content specialists.

Policy Recommendations

I chose a policy recommendation for this project because the focus school has experienced a yearly turnaround of new teachers in upper elementary classrooms and the teachers in these grade levels have been strongly encouraged to improve science and social studies achievement scores and to seek courses that aid in their teaching process, in their own time, but such courses are not mandated, nor are they regulated to ascertain

teacher participating. Teachers have also been strongly encouraged to obtain strategies/skills that focuses on differentiation and lesson planning for small groups that address all leveled learners, either through the expansion of their own resources or from content specific professional development offered sporadically throughout the school year. A majority of the participants of the study have not taken advantage of the courses, mostly due to a conflict in scheduling, usually such courses are available either after hours or on weekends. The participants are extremely concerned that the majority of district allocated professional learning time is aligned with reading achievement, which does not consistently support the other pivotal testing subjects required of the upper elementary grade levels.

A policy recommendation was defined by Breen (2012) as a policy that provides written advice about policy prepared and presented to a specific group (or groups) or person/s who has the authority to make the decision about the policy or to at the very least influence the decisions about the policy. Breen, who is the Policy Officer for the Centre for Aging research and Development in Ireland, challenged academic researchers to write recommendations for policies that are grounded in research that will enable people who are responsible for policy making to act upon actual change in the policy as well as society. When a review of the literature was conducted many different models were described (e.g., Breen, 2012; Doyle, 2013; Weill, 2012). There were commonalities among the models which suggested specific content for the policy recommendation. In the opinion of this researcher, the CARDI model written by Breen presented information that was most relevant for this project.

Weill (2012) concluded that the policy recommendation should be written concisely. Specifically he stated that each policy recommendation should have three sections. Weill stated that the issue, recommendation and rationale should be developed for each policy recommended. Doyle (2013) also indicated that the characteristics of a well-written policy recommendation were: Accuracy, conciseness, readability, and presents a good argument. While different formats were discussed, essentially there is agreement in terms of the contents of an effective policy statement (Breen, 2012; Doyle, 2013; Grimble, 2017; Moussa, 2017; O'Connell, 2012; Steinberg & Cox, 2017). Currently, educators in the United States must follow established policies and practices, not only of the school in which they teach but also the local and state districts, as well as the United States Department of Education (2017).

The final points that need to be made before the description of the project are: (a) the organization, and in this instance it would start with the school, will have to be prepared for change, change would need to be managed and people will need to be motivated to change (Adhanom, 2017; Alqahtani, 2017; Moussa, 2017; Pastorino & Doyle-Portillo, 2012; Teasley, 2017); (b) professional development is used to maintain and enhance teacher quality, and (c) teacher quality does impact student achievement (Starr, 2017;). Starr argued that change in the school is an adaptive process where all stakeholders would need to collaborate to solve problems. Furthermore, Starr stated that one of the most important responsibilities for the leader in the school is to ensure that the teachers and instructional staff feel empowered to work in collaboration so that they can continue to improve the school as well as their work. Steinberg and Cox (2017)

concluded that school principals who are granted autonomy to manage the operations in the school were more likely to embrace change than are non-autonomous principals. Findings showed that non-autonomous principals indicated misalignment between the district priorities and the school, with the school obtaining limited support from the district for improvements in the functioning of the school.

This could be an effective strategy because it would mean that both the education leaders on the district level and educators on the school level would be invested in the well-being of the teachers and students. There appears to be a need to make holistic changes in the policies so that engagement in professional development activities would be the norm and teachers actively engaged in helping their students realize their potential. The prediction is that policy-supported professional development requirements for both the content areas and the instructional strategy used would help improve academic achievement. Therefore, there are three goals for the study that focus on the teachers and students. The primary goals of the project would be to: (a) increase teachers' level of efficacy in the departmentalized classroom, teacher efficacy, and (b) increase self-efficacy for mandated changes in curriculum that would be intended to lead to increased overall achievement as reported by the participants. A secondary goal would be to provide data that would show that teacher efficacy had a positive impact on student achievement.

The county adopted a new reading series in the 2015-2016 school year, changed the standards for social studies in the 2016-2017 school year and adopted a new

consumable science series in the 2017-2018 school year. The following table illustrates the professional development that occurred for the three school years 2015-2108:

Table A 2

District Scheduled/Mandated Professional Development			
School Year	Pre-Planning	Post-Planning	Professional Learning
2015-2016	8/3-8/7/15 8/5/15-Imagine It (New Reading Series Training K-2) 8/5/15-Reading Wonders (New Reading Series Training 3-5)	5/20, 5/23-25/15 5/25/15-(Follow Up Training to New Reading Series K-5)	8/26/15 TAPS 9/16/15 Infinite Campus (Gradebook Training) 10/7/15 Data Analysis 1/14/15 Collaboration 2/12/15 Differentiated Instruction/Remediation 3/16/15 Testing Preparation
2016-2017	8/1-8/5/16 8/3/15-Imagine It (Changes to Reading Series Training K-2 and accompanying Technology) 8/3/15-Reading Wonders (Changes to Reading Series Training 3-5 and accompanying Technology)	5/24-5/26/17 5/26/17-Social Studies (Changes to Standards, K-12)	8/24/16-TAPS 9/21/16-Infinite Campus (Gradebook) 10/7/16-Data Analysis 10/31/16-Math (Changes to Standards Grades 3-5) 11/8/16-Letters Training (Phonics K-2) 1/2/17-Collaboration 2/17/17- Differentiation Instruction/Remediation
2017-2018	8/1-8/4/17 8/2/17-Imagine It and	5/23-5/25/18	8/23/17-G Suite (Technology Training)

	<p>Reading Wonders (Redelivery/New Teachers/New To Grade Level)</p> <p>8/2/17-Science (Adopted Changes to Consumable/One Appointed Representative per Grade Level)</p> <p>8/2/17-Social Studies (Changes to Standards/One Appointed Representative per Grade Level)</p>	<p>Training-TBD</p>	<p>9/28/17-Data Analysis</p> <p>10/10/17-Edutrax (Technology Training)</p>
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Note: Adapted from “2017-2018 School Calendar” Clayton County Public Schools and Focus School Archived Agendas (2015-2018).

Existing Supports

The district in which the school is located has existing policies that describe the rules and regulations for employees who are interested in professional development opportunities. One major difference is that the professional development opportunities are preselected by the district and the schools have very little input on the topics that are offered. Teachers are expected to participate in the listed approved professional learning sessions. Teachers are only required to attend professional development opportunities to receive certification to teach or recertification. The changes in the process are subsequently described.

Whether or not a teacher must show that s/he has attained the requisite professional learning units for certification or recertification depends on when the certification was issued or expired. For instance, if the certification for the teacher

expired in 2010, then s/he would have to show proof of the standard professional learning units obtained as required, currently this is satisfied with the mandated pre and post planning professional learning. If certification for the teachers ended in the years 2011-2015, then they would not have to earn any required professional learning units. There are specific time periods in which the professional learning units have to be obtained in order for them to be considered valid. A similar process could be used for teachers who have departmentalization classrooms (or any new instructional strategy supported by the school) so that they could use the professional learning units as evidence of professional development in their annual evaluations. In order to provide teachers with professional development that centers around mastery in one or two subjects the district has a set number of early release days/professional learning days available and can be slotted for professional development at the discretion of administration, that directly relate to the subjects in which they will teach for the appointed school year, rather than the one or two subjects, such as reading and math, in which the district regulates for the school year.

Project Implementation

The policy recommendation will build upon the professional learning communities that schools have available on the district level. After years of extensive research, Caine and Caine (2010) concluded that there was an art to learning together and there are numerous benefits for the teachers and students. In order to create a culture of continuous improvement or sustainable change, reform measures are needed that include changes in the policies and adjustments that need to be made to ensure the changes made would result in positive consequences. It is also important for the project to be replicable

so that other schools and districts are able to replicate the work that will occur as a result of the policy recommendation. The project will formally seek approval from the administrators in the school during the Fall of 2017. The plan would be to implement the project as of Spring 2018. The expected outcomes from the engagement of teachers in continuous professional development opportunities is expected to have both short term such as an increase in positive perceptions about the ability of the teachers to effect positive change in the intellectual and personal lives of the students and long term benefits that offer sustained academic achievement, retention of teachers in the field. The timeline established for each phase of the project is subsequently outlined.

1. After appropriate approval has been earned and received by the Dissertation Committee, Institutional Review Board of Walden University, I will formally meet with the principal of the school. Informal meetings had occurred during the development of the plan to ensure that the principal recognized the importance of his role for the success of the project. (August, 2017)
2. Continuous revisions will be made as I work with the teachers, instructional support in the school and on the district level, and other related stakeholders. (September-October, 2017)
3. Once the project has been approved by the principal, meetings will be arranged with him, teachers, other administrative staff, and professional development staff to fine tune and finalize the plans and schedule the start of the project. (January, 2018)

4. The approved policy recommendation will be printed and distributed to all relevant stakeholders including the school board. (January, 2018)
5. Teachers who are assigned to departmentalization classrooms will be asked to:
 - (a) review the scheduled professional development opportunities to select the specific ones they will attend during the spring semester, and (b) provide the names of the teachers that they would prefer to work; if possible their preferences will be honored. Plans would include make up sessions in the event of any cancellations. (January, 2018)
6. The official start date for the professional development opportunities will be February 1, 2018. The sessions will continue as long as needed or requested with the integration of new topics that evolve from the work of the teachers.
7. Teachers will be asked to have monthly debriefing sessions as a group to discuss lessons learned, changes needed, and ensure that consistent participation is feasible. (February 2018 –June 2018)
8. Before participation in any of the professional development sessions (pretest) and after the end of the sessions in the academic year (posttest), baseline measures will be obtained from the teachers (i.e., self-efficacy, knowledge about departmentalization, attitude towards teaching and perceptions about their students).
9. Teachers will receive a stipend each semester to cover travel expenses and the cost of a lunch so that their desire to improve their effectiveness in the classroom would not cause any financial strain for their household.

10. A banquet will be held to recognize the work of the teachers and support from the administrative and instructional staff. All of the supporters of the policy recommendation and implementation of the project that is designed to increase the effectiveness of the teachers and academic achievement for the students will be invited and recognized. (June 2018)
11. Teachers will receive certificates and professional learning units for each session attended. (June 2018)
12. Teachers will also be asked to maintain a notebook with all of the related information, instructions, exercises, and list of available resources they receive from the professional development sessions in their classrooms so that the information is readily available to them as needed. (February 2018 -May 2018).

Conclusion

The policy recommendation and project are designed to respond to the needs that directly address student achievement and the gap in practice for both the focus school and the county whose aim is to help teachers increase their levels of effectiveness in the classroom which is estimated to have a positive impact on the self-efficacy levels of the teachers and their students. Pivotal intervention strategies are needed. The project is intended to include all of the pertinent stakeholders in the identification of ways to support students in achieving positive outcomes along with meeting increased rigor required of current mandated curricular changes.

With the advances in technology, and levels of expertise in the field of education, effective solutions can be identified. The research literature includes many studies that present findings about effective stratagems to help students increase their academic achievement levels. In helping the teachers with focused professional development in the specific subjects they will be teaching, they are empowered to perform with greater knowledge efficiently and effectively which will increase positive student outcomes (Bang, & Reio, 2017; Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017). The policy recommendation will work to meet the needs of declining student achievement through improved teacher efficacy.

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Appendix B: IRB Approval Form

Dear Ms. Epps,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Elementary Teachers' Perspectives of Low Student Achievement and Methods to Influence Improvement."

Your approval # is 08-23-16-0049301. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on August 22, 2017. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden

website: <http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,

Libby Munson
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@waldenu.edu
Fax: [626-605-0472](tel:626-605-0472)
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Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this

link: <http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

Appendix C: 2014 Colleges and Career Ready Performance Index Percentages

CCRPI Score

52.7%

Sum of Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points

Achievement Points	Progress Points	Achievement Gap Points	ED/EL/SWD Performance Points	Exceeding the Bar Points	Financial Efficiency Rating	School Climate Rating
36.1	14.6	2	0 0	0		

Progress

Elementary School Content Area Assessments	Count of Students Typical/High Growth	% Meeting	Count of Students with Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
CRCT: English Language Arts	53		110
CRCT: Reading	61		108
CRCT: Mathematics	64		110
CRCT: Science	67		118
CRCT: Social Studies	83		117
Total	328		563
Percent Meeting Typical/High Growth			.58259
Weighted Performance			(.58259)*25

Appendix D: 2013 College and Career Ready Performance Index Percentages

CCRPI Score

60.1

Sum of Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points

Achievement Points	Progress Points	Achievement Gap Points	Challenge Points		Financial Efficiency Rating	School Climate Rating
			ED/EL/SWD Performance Points	Exceeding the Bar Points		
37.7	15.9	6	0	.5		
			.5			

Progress

Elementary School Content Area Assessments	Count of Students Meeting Typical/High Growth	Count of Students with Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
CRCT: English Language	64	113
CRCT: Reading	78	113
CRCT: Mathematics	78	113
CRCT: Science	85	118
CRCT: Social Studies	60	117
Total	365	574
Percent Meeting		.63589
Weighted Performance		(.63589)*25

Appendix E: 2012 College and Career Ready Performance Index

The 2012 Study Year CCRPI reports were released on May 7, 2013. They have been updated to reflect the indicator language and calculation changes utilized for the 2013 CCRPI reports. These updates provide an “apples to apples” comparison between the CCRPI reports for the 2012 and 2013 school years.

CCRPI Score

66.8

Sum of Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points

Achievement Points	Progress Points	Achievement Gap Points	Challenge Points		Financial Efficiency Rating	School Climate Rating
			ED/EL/SWD Performance Points	Exceeding the Bar Points		
39.3	17	9	1 1.5	.5		

Appendix F: Interview Questions and Protocol

Introduction to each interviewee:

Researcher: The purpose of this interview is to gather information related to my dissertation topic of alternative instruction that will support increased student achievement. I appreciate your participation in this study and your willingness to be interviewed. This interview will last 30-45 minutes. Please feel free to look at the copy of the questions as we discuss them.

Interview Questions:

1. What is your perspective of the reasons for declining student achievement scores in the past few years?
2. How would you define departmentalization?
3. How would you define team-teaching?
4. If you could be involved in departmentalization or team-teaching how do you think it would be helpful for teaching and students learning? What may be the disadvantages?
5. Is departmentalization or team-teaching applied on your grade level now? If so, how? (If you answered no to this question, skip to question 9).
6. If you are presently employing departmentalization or team-teaching how would you describe the effectiveness at your grade level?
7. Did you have any involvement on the choice to departmentalize at your grade level? If so, explain your role.
8. How would you define your level of ease with the use of departmentalization or team-teaching?
9. Have there been some challenges to executing departmentalization or team-teaching within your grade level? Please explain.
10. What is your perception of the use of departmentalization or team-teaching as a method of improving student achievement scores?

11. What are your perceptions of student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings?
12. Discuss your feelings of your ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS.
13. What specific subject areas do you consider to be the main challenge to meet the increased goals of GPSS? What would you suggest could help improve your ability for meeting student needs in that area?
14. What specific areas of professional development do you think may help you meet the demands of the increased standards and possibly aid you in increasing student achievement?

Appendix G: Transcripts with Reflective Notes and Additional Questions

During the course of the interviews there was opportunity to ask the participants to either expand on or add comments to their initial responses, those suggestions for expansion or inclusion are italicized within the appendix.

Interview with #4DA. Thank you for taking the time in meeting with me for this interview. The purpose of the interview is to gather information related to my dissertation topic, regarding alternative instruction to support increased student achievement. I appreciate your participation in the study your willingness to be interviewed. Please feel free to look at the hard copy of the interview questions as we go along. Please feel free to look over the questions as we move along.

This interviewee has taught for over 20 years in both private and public schools at the middle and elementary school levels. The first 10+ years were in a regular middle school classroom so they have experience in departmentalized settings, but for approximately 7 years they have become certified and have taught in an EBD (Emotional Behavioral Disorder) classroom, mostly self-contained.

1. What is your perspective of the reasons for declining student achievement scores in the past few years?

I think that the kids have gotten where they have been tested so much that they don't care how they score anymore, especially the last two years with the GMAS (Georgia Milestones Assessment System), which were thrown out anyway, so they don't count for anything. They're just not taking it seriously. The children are able to do better they just don't care.

2. How would you define departmentalization?

That's where a teacher will teach one or two subjects rather than all five and it allows the teachers to specialize more in a subject. I think departmentalization is a good idea because it gets the students ready for middle school and high school.

3. How would you define team teaching?

The interviewee in this case lumps both departmentalization and team-teaching into the same category. When asked if they felt there was a difference they replied that the concept was the same, the only difference they saw was that it could be either two teachers on a team or three, but in each case the teacher only has to teach either one to two subjects and they can specialize in those subjects.

4. If you could be involved in departmentalization or team-teaching how do you think it would be helpful for teaching and students learning? What may be the disadvantages?

I think it's helpful, like I said for specialization for the teachers because its hard teaching all the subjects in one classroom especially in the upper grades, where students become more vocal about sitting in one place all day long. Again it gets the kids ready for middle and high school and a lot of private schools begin in some of the earliest grade levels with children changing classrooms. *The participants in this case mention later on in the interview their own children's experience in transitioning as early as the first grade in private school.*

Disadvantages the amount of time that is wasted in between the classes for the transition period. *So do you think that could go a little smoother, is that what you are saying?* The loss of time because some teachers, based on what I have observed at our school is that some teachers are ready to transition based on an agreed upon schedule and have their kids in the hallway and sometimes their out their 5-10 minutes waiting on the other teachers to finish up. Teachers need to be more respectful of each other's time and follow the schedule.

Interview with #8MW, this participant has taught for over 18 years and in a variety of positions. They have worked in both self-contained and departmentalized classrooms, a majority of the grade levels and presently works as a support (ESOL) teacher for the focus school.

11. What are your perceptions of student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings?

My perception is that student achievement in departmentalized classrooms versus traditional settings used appropriately, intentionally that achievement rises because teachers basically have that one content area they can hone their skills and go to professional developments research strategies just for that content area. The result of that, the year that we worked on a grade level, our scores were pretty good. They were really good we had, what, ninety percent hundred percent.

Quick question, you mentioned PD's in there, do you think they're important to honing your skills? Yes, because education alone is changing and as you can see the curriculum has trickled down, there's a lot of things I learned in middle and high school but they're now learning in elementary. If you haven't been teaching those concepts because they've been in the secondary schools you have to go back and re teach or re learn those concepts in order to better serve the needs of your children.

12. Discuss your feelings of your ability to teach and meet the increased goals of GPSS.

GPSS is based on common core but it's called Georgia performance state standards now. It's supposedly increased rigor, do you think that even as an ESOL teacher you're meeting that rigor? No, I feel that they're above the student's capability and I feel as though based on the data for the district, that's for everyone, it's a small portion of students across the districts that are able to meet these goals. I feel as though I can teach it, the standards, but it takes a lot to try and get them to master it. They are very broad and then you have to hone in and do this portion today and then the next portion it's so much within one standard sometimes and you just have to, you know, really break it down and I don't know it gets very over whelming though.

13. What specific subject areas do you consider to be the main challenge to meet the increased goals of GPSS? What would you suggest could help improve your ability for meeting student needs in that area?

How do you feel about the GPSS and math? Why do you think math has proven to be the most challenging of those standards? It's the verbiage, I think it's more so complex that when one person reads it they have one perception, and another person reads it's they have a different perception. Standards should be written in a way that when anyone reads it they should have a general understanding, the same general understanding, of what is required or what the standard is demanding. I think I would suggest that just basically grasping, having, that initial understanding of the standard first and foremost and then I would be able to better drive my instruction in order to assist students with the concept.

14. What specific areas of professional development do you think may help you meet the demands of the increased standards and possibly aid you in increasing student achievement?

You mentioned math, would that be one you could consider something you would be interested in, if you ever had to go back into the classroom? Yeah definitely, math, but specifically just breaking, deconstructing as they say, the standard, the math standard, and rewriting it in my own words so that I'm able to understand what it is that the standard is requiring of the student but only for my understanding I wouldn't rewrite it for the students. It's just for me to have that initial understanding.

You'd keep it the same way but rewrite it for yourself to explain it better? Yes.

Do you think teacher self-efficacy plays a part in student achievement? What you believe in your ability to teach effectively in order to increase student achievement. Do you think you can reach your goals? Do you think you've got the knowledge to do it? As a teacher do you think your self-efficacy, your confidence in what you do, plays a part in student achievement? Definitely, yes, I definitely feel like my self-efficacy does play a part in student achievement because if I'm unaware or have the lack of confidence in teaching a concept or content area, for that matter, then I'm not going to do much for my students.

I'm of no use for them for that matter. I would need to do a self-reflection and, you know, I would normally do that self-reflecting on the lesson or of where my depth of knowledge is in order to, you know, instruct the students at a level where they can meet these standards and push for student achievement. First I have to nurture myself. I have to first nurture me because I am giving off knowledge, you know, that's what we're doing we're passing on knowledge and I don't want to pass on the wrong information. I mean it happens at times but, I mean, for the most part you don't want to go in there in just teach them wrong from the get go.

All right, last question, there was a time lower grades were even wondering if it was something they could do, departmentalization. Do you think it would work at the lower grade levels? No, I do not think departmentalization would be effective at the lower grade levels because number one students at that level are just really getting acclimated to school, to the structure of school, organization within the school day, as to, what happens at the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, the end of the day. I think that should be their focus and just getting them to read, learn how to read. No, they don't need to do any movement or teachers either. If those teachers feel as though they need to be departmentalized they need to come to upper grades and they're not, they don't want to. No, if they're really good in an area, well teach it with your heart out when you get to that area, whether its math I should see it I should see, "Oh, she has a love for this", you know, it should shine through. The reason I say that, not just to shut them down, because that is a good question, however, when they're upper grades we're preparing them for the next level. They're getting ready to go to secondary school they need to know what is there, what is in their future, and how it's going to work.

Interview with #10JK, the participant was the only administrator among the group. They have been in education for well over 15 years briefly as a self-contained EIP teacher and then at the district level as a curriculum coordinator and most recently approximately 7 years as one of the administrators for the focus school.

1. What is your perspective of the reasons for declining student achievement scores in the past few years?

We actually went up this past year and when I formulated these questions it was when the focus school's CCRPI was approximately 59 but the school has gone up at least 5 points since the inception of this paper. I think a couple of reasons; one of the reasons I think is the change over from Georgia standards into common core standards. I remember when we came out with common core standards, our district had a district wide training or series of trainings about common core but we really did not get into the standards of the common core. So, what I've found is for a lot of teachers, and administrators, there was an adjustment in how we actually taught students based on what the common core was actually asking us to do or asking students to be able to do by the end of their grade level. With that being said, that is one of the reasons why we spend so much time with unpacking the standards because what we also did was, often times it could leave

different interpretation for what the standards are actually asking the students to be able to do. So in one grade level, although there are some recursive standards that scaffold to each other, one perspective in second grade might be different than the teachers in third grade so the teacher in third grade has expectations in terms of what students should come with and the second grade left them with a different perspective because of their interpretation of the standards. That was a lack of collaboration, and so I think we're getting smarter now with collaborating and making sure we all have the same understanding of what the standards are asking us to be able to do. So that when we're teaching, you know, we're intentional with that. The other thing is the changes in the assessment system; we went from CRCT to the Georgia Milestone. The CRCT, for all intents and purposes, we were told was a less rigorous assessment for the students, in order for them to exceed if you will, they did not have to answer as many questions it didn't require students to go as in depth, we didn't have to write as much because the writing assessment was separate. Now it's included or a part of the reading and math, and students are expected to be able to write critically and write about what they understand. So it meant that we had to change the way we thought in our teaching practices and so our preparations for the assessments had to look a little different. Even something as simple as making sure our student utilize the computer a lot more because now our students are assessing on the computer and the goal is for all students to assess on the computer. Well that's a totally different set of skills that some teachers find difficult along with all the other demands they have for teaching the content area itself while not always having that support to do that. So the change of assessments, the change in the standards, and then, definitely not the decline in or lack of resources we have plenty of resources and some people would probably say we have too many resources because there's so many to choose from and it can become overwhelming. I mean what we're finding though is that, less is more, if you will. That's kind of my, one of my, or some of my reasons why I think the declining student achievement scores. Schools just have to think about so much more, you know, when we had the old accountability system it was reading and math was the focus. So schools really focused on just reading and math with the new accountability, CCRPI, everything counts, access, attendance, reading levels, all content areas, and growth in each. There's a lot to think about when one day you're addressing student needs, behavior, guidance counseling, so there's different things and climate is a part of it so there's a lot of different things that teachers have to think about in schools when they're approaching student achievement. So it's not just about the content area.

Appendix H: Project Formative Evaluation Data Collection

Participants

(A) Do you think you received information in a timely manner? Please explain your response.

(B) Were you able to attend any professional development sessions? If so, which ones did you attend, and do you think they were helpful? If not, please explain why you were not able to attend any sessions, or why you did not think they were helpful.

(C) Were the scheduled facilitators present and on time for each session? Please explain.

(D) Do you feel that the facilitators were informative? Please explain.

(E) Did you learn anything from the facilitators that would help you in the classroom? Please explain.

(F) How well do you think the facilitators conducted the sessions? Please explain.

Appendix I: Project Summative Evaluation Data Collection

Participants

(A) Please describe what you learned from the professional development sessions that specifically helped you in the classroom.

(B) If you had it to do all over again, were there any sessions that you would not have attended?

Students

(A) What have you learned from being in this classroom?