ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO PROCESSES, PRACTICES, AND PERCEPTIONS

Tanya Elizabeth Schmidt, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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The use of prereferral problem solving has rapidly expanded over the last ten years because, in part, participation facilitates school professionals' ability to effectively address students' academic and behavioral difficulties. Successful implementation of prereferral problem solving is also credited with significantly reducing special education rates, as students are provided with targeted intervention services. This qualitative study documented the experiences at one school when school professionals implemented a prereferral problem solving model called The Collaborative Action Process (CAP).

Data gathered at the selected school reflected implementation over a two year period. Data sources included interviews, direct observations and recordings of problem solving meetings, reviews of student records, artifacts, and permanent products. Data were also gathered to explore the CAP implementation experiences of school professionals at twelve other elementary schools within the same school district.

Findings from this study indicated that CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year differed significantly from implementation during the 2003-2004 school year. During the 2002-2003 school year, implementation integrity was extremely high, most school professionals enthusiastically participated, perceptions of the process were

predominantly positive, many referred students' academic and behavioral difficulties were successfully addressed, and special education rates at the school were significantly reduced. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, school professionals evidenced minimal adherence to implementation procedures and they expressed significant concerns about the feasibility and benefits of participation. During that year, students' needs were not successfully addressed and the reductions in special education referral and eligibility rates were not maintained.

School professionals cited the district's decreased financial and personnel support as causing the dramatic diminution in the success of the CAP. However, implementation was actually influenced by complex, often reciprocal, relationships among the district, the building administrator, and the school professionals. Specifically, the following conclusions were drawn: district support influences implementation; district facilitators potentially influence implementation; the principal's attitude and level of enthusiasm influences implementation; the principal's level of control and participation influences implementation; teachers' perceptions about the feasibility of participation influence implementation; teachers' perceptions about the benefits of participation influence implementation; and, collaboration among school professionals influences implementation.

THE COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS:

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO PROCESSES, PRACTICES, AND PERCEPTIONS

by

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Chapter 1: Framework for the Study

The last twenty years have brought many changes to the population of students who are educated in the public school system. Within a general education classroom, one can now expect to see students from multiple races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes. They have varied levels of ability, motivation, language proficiency, background knowledge, and support at home (National Alliance of Black School Educators [NABSE], 2002; Schrag & Henderson, 1996). Such diversity has been achieved through much advocacy and legislative reform and is now celebrated for its many benefits (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 1994).

However, the heterogeneity now found within the classroom, combined with increasingly rigorous educational standards, poses new challenges for classroom teachers. Many students are readily able to achieve the goals and objectives set forth by their classroom teacher(s); others have difficulty meeting the academic and behavioral expectations. For this group of struggling students it is now increasingly common that additional school personnel collaborate with the classroom teacher to facilitate their success (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003; Burns & Symington, 2002; Schrag & Henderson, 1996).

This process of intervening with general education students who are experiencing learning or behavioral difficulties within the general education classroom is often referred to as prereferral intervention. During the 1980's, prereferral intervention gained increasing acknowledgment and popularity because it was viewed by many as a way to help curtail the rising rate of students found eligible for special education by providing interventions in the general education classroom (Cooke & Friend, 1990).

Multiple prereferral approaches were developed and implemented. One of the initial models utilized a behavioral consultation approach where a teacher and a consultant would engage in stage-based problem solving to develop, implement, and evaluate interventions designed to address the student's need(s) (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). However, some researchers and practitioners raised concerns about the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the consultant, since the latter was often perceived as the expert. To address this, an approach frequently termed 'collaborative consultation,' which emphasized equality among participants was developed (Chalfant, Pysh, & Moutrie, 1979; Pugach & Johnson, 1989). By the late 1980's, this approach "was commanding considerable attention" (Cook & Friend, 1991, p. 27).

Today, many schools and districts have chosen to adopt a 'hybrid' model, incorporating the stage-based problem solving seen with behavioral consultation and the inter-personal emphasis of collaborative consultation (Fuchs et al., 2003). And, although some variation exists in the prereferral problem solving processes used in schools (e.g., how many people engage participate in the process, or how many stages guide the problem solving process), they share a unified goal. Specifically, participation by school professionals aims to prevent the need for special education services by systematically identifying, understanding, and remediating academic and behavioral challenges presented by students within the general education classroom (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999).

This study was a year-long, qualitative investigation into the processes, practices, and perceptions related to prereferral problem solving. Specifically, it was the documentation of a team and a school's experience with implementation of a 'hybrid'

problem solving model. For the purposes of this study, the term prereferral problem solving is used as the 'all-encompassing' term to describe the process educators use to address the needs of students who are struggling to meet the academic or behavioral expectations in their classroom before eligibility for special education services is considered.

Benefits and Concerns Related to Prereferral Problem Solving

Prereferral problem solving has numerous benefits. For students, there are reductions in the overall rate of screening and testing for placement into special education (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2002; Hartman & Fay, 1996; Kovaleski, Tucker, & Stevens, 1996; Levinsohn, 2000; McDougal, Clonan, & Martens, 2000; Ormsbee & Harring, 2000; Schrag & Henderson, 1996), reductions in the rate of disproportionate numbers of African American students referred to and placed in special education (Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003), increases and improvements in learning opportunities within the general education classroom (Hartman & Fay, 1996; Ingalls & Hammond, 1996; Knoff & Batsche,1995; Rosenfield, 2001), behavioral improvements (Allen & Blackston, 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris, & Roberts, 1996), academic improvements (Burns & Symington, 2002; Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank 1999; Levinsohn, 2000), and decreases in student retention rates (Hartman & Fay, 1996; Kovaleski, Tucker, & Stevens, 1996).

Benefits to teachers include enhancement of professional support and collaboration (Bahr, Whitten, Dieker, Kocarek, & Manson, 1999; Costas, Rosenfield, & Gravois, 2001; McDougal et al., 2000; Ormsbee & Harring, 2000; Rosenfield & Gravois,

1996), improvement in attitudes, tolerance, and skill in dealing with challenging student behavior (Costas et al., 2001; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Gresham & Kendell, 1987; McDougal et al., 2000), and improvement in the gathering, interpretation, and use of assessment data (Batsche & Knoff, 1995; Ingalls & Hammond, 1996).

Although prereferral problem solving has been associated with many positive outcomes, research has not demonstrated unequivocal success. Specifically, some researchers have found only moderate levels of support from teachers and administrators for the process and its perceived benefits (Athanasious, Geil, Hazel, & Copeland, 2002; Bahr, 1984; Fuchs et al., 1996), unimpressive academic interventions and outcomes (Knotek, 2003; Rock & Zigmond, 2001), and variable levels of implementation fidelity (Allen & Blackston, 2003; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000). Maintenance and institutionalization of prereferral problem solving programs has also proved difficult in some situations (Fuchs et al., 1996; Hammond & Ingalls, 1999). Thus, while research documents many benefits associated with prereferral problem solving, it is also acknowledged that the use of this process has grown at a rate which exceeds its empirical basis (Burns & Symington, 2002; Rock & Zigmond, 2001). Poignantly illustrating this concern, Fuchs et al. (2003) stated:

> Those who have researched their respective [prereferral problem solving] programs have tended to demonstrate remarkable perseverance and professionalism and should be commended. But none of this diminishes the fact that, as we write, many practitioners are using unvalidated prereferral intervention processes (p. 163).

Characteristics Promoting Effective Prereferral Problem Solving

What is clear from the research is that there are specific factors which facilitate the efficacy of prereferral problem solving (Kovaleski, 2002). Thus, rather than looking to nomothetically classify a given process as effective or ineffective, it becomes more useful to examine factors such as participant skill level, interpersonal relationships, program implementation, and administrative support.

Participants in prereferral problem solving should possess certain skills to promote the success of the process. For example, participants should have the ability to accurately identify and analyze the unique difficulties of a student and then effectively conceptualize and operationalize an appropriate intervention (Deno, 2002; Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985; Kovaleski, 2002). They should be able to readily draw upon empirically proven strategies to address specific academic and behavioral concerns and exercise creativity in implementation design (Bahr, 1994; Knoff & Batsche, 1995; Knotek, 2003; McDougal et al., 2000; Rock & Zigmond, 2001; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). Proficiency in collecting, graphing, and analyzing data about a student's level of performance at time of referral and response to an intervention is also critical (Flugum & Reschley, 1994; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, et al., 1990; Kovaleski et al., 1999; Levinsohn, 2000; Ormsbee & Harring, 2000; Rock & Zigmond, 2001; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). Finally, participants should have the ability to plan for maintenance and generalization of gains achieved through the problem solving process (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). Development of these skills is especially important for general education teachers, as they are most frequently involved in the prereferral

problem solving process and implementation of student intervention plans (Berdine, 2003; Buck et al., 2003).

Certain characteristics regarding the purpose and relationships associated with prereferral problem solving have also been shown to be important. Specifically, it is vital that participants understand the mission and goals of prereferral problem solving, as well as their unique role in the process (Hammond & Ingalls, 1999; Iverson, 2002; Kruger, Struzziero, Watts, & Vacca, 1995; McNamara & Hollinger, 2003; NABSE, 2002; Ormsbee & Haring, 2000; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996, 1998; Sindelar & Griffin, 1992; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). All who participate should demonstrate respect for one another and foster a sense of equality, collegiality, and collaboration (Bahr, 1994; Bahr et al., 1999; Carter & Sugai, 1989; Iverson, 2002; Kruger et al., 1995; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). Classroom teachers, in particular, must genuinely perceive themselves taking an active and vital role in all stages and aspects of the prereferral problem solving process (Athanasious et al., 2002; Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000; Gresham & Kendell, 1987; Ingalls & Hammond, 1996; Knotek, 2003; Kovaleski et al., 1999; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). To foster positive interpersonal dynamics, participants should also possess effective communication skills, such as open-ended questioning techniques, active listening skills, and the ability to establish rapport with one another (Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985; Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1998).

Adoption of a comprehensive, structured, and well-defined collaborative problem solving model has been shown to impact process fidelity, intervention plan integrity, and student outcomes (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstron, & Stecker, 1990; Fuchs et al., 1996; Knotek, 2003; Kovaleski, 2002; Telzrow et al., 2000). The level of implementation

within each school needs to be monitored and the outcomes of the process carefully and continually evaluated (Bahr, 1994; Burns & Symington, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Fuchs, Fuchs & Bahr, 1990; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr et al., 1990; Kovaleski et al., 1999; Kruger et al., 1995; Levinsohn, 2000; McDougal et al., 2000; Rock & Zigmond, 2001; Sheridan & Welch, 1996). If needed, adaptations to the model can be made based on the unique needs of a particular school, without diluting key aspects of the problem solving framework (Hammond & Ingalls, 1999).

At the school level, the role of the administrator has been shown to be critical to facilitate positive outcomes (Kovaleski et al., 1999; Schrag & Henderson, 1996). The administrator must endorse the use of prereferral problem solving such that a positive attitude, as well logistical support for the process is omnipresent. This includes providing release-time and flexibility in scheduling, creatively allocating resources, and securing additional classroom support to implement strategies, as appropriate. Additionally, active and genuine administrative promotion of a new vision accompanying the paradigm shift towards prereferral problem solving has been shown to be vital (Athanasious et al., 2002; Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Kovaleski et al., 1999; Kruger et al., 1995; Mamlin & Harris, 1998; McDougal et al., 2000; NASDSE, 1994; Rosenfield, 1992; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996, 2002; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). Administrative encouragement of parental involvement and participation is also important (Hammond & Ingalls, 1999; Knoff & Batsche,1995; Kovaleski, 2002).

At the district level, attitudes and policies which promote the use of prereferral problem solving must also be considered. Specifically, providing finances (for release time and instructional support, as appropriate), giving assurance that participation in early

intervention activities in the general education setting will not result in reductions of special education resources or positions, and providing effective professional development opportunities related to building the necessary skills of those involved with the problem solving process all promote the likelihood of success (Burns & Symington, 2002; Fuchs et al., 1996; Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Marston et al., 2003; NABSE, 2002; NASDSE, 1994).

Research Considerations

Many have raised concerns about the research that has been done to investigate prereferral problem solving (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2003; McNamara & Hollinger, 2003). Frequently noted are limitations related to the overall quality of the research in this area, as well some specific voids which should be filled to advance our understanding of how prereferral problem solving actually operates within a school (Athanasious et al., 2002; Buck et al., 2003). As the research on prereferral problem solving was expanding, Gresham and Kendell (1987) somberly reflected that even the studies considered to be the best in this area were of minimal quality. The authors concluded:

> To say that there are ‘experts’ is an oxymoron because expertise denotes that an individual has special knowledge in a particular field. We simply do not know enough about [prereferral problem solving], how it works, under what conditions it works, or the most important variables in predicting successful outcomes (p. 314).

What is perhaps more disconcerting is that subsequent and more current literature reviews have come to similar conclusions (Burns & Symington, 2002; Fuchs et al., 2003; Schrag & Henderson, 1996; Sheridan & Welch, 1996; Welch et al., 1999).

Because surveys and post-hoc analysis of district-supplied data and artifacts dominate the research related to prereferral problem solving, one frequently cited concern is the lack of data investigating process integrity (Athanasious et al., 2002; Bahr, 1994; Fuchs et al., 2003; Kruger et al., 1995; Levinsohn, 2000; Sheridan & Welch, 1996; Wilson, 2000). These methods have the inherent limitation of not being able to verify the actual processes used within a school. In other words, a team may report that they utilize a particular prereferral problem solving model, but there is no way to ensure it actually translated into practice. This paucity of information becomes especially important in light of the finding that even when the same model of prereferral problem solving is implemented in schools within the same school district, there is considerable variability in how it is actually used in each building (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985).

A predominant recommendation to help fill this void and advance our understandings of prereferral problem solving is to gain insight through direct observation of the processes within schools (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Welch et al., 1999). Recommended questions to guide this exploration include: Who were the students referred for problem solving, and why?, How closely did participants follow their problem solving model?, What processes were used in pursuing the prereferral problem solving goals?, and What dynamics characterize the interactions and relationships among participants? (Bahr, 1994; Costas et al., 2001; Myles, Simpson, & Ormsbee, 1996; Welch et al., 1999). Additionally, many researchers suggest that qualitative methodology be used for this investigation to help illuminate the complex dynamics involved in prereferral problem solving (Athanasious et al., 2002; Mamlin & Harris, 1998; Welch et al., 1999).

Another recommendation is to expand our understanding of how individuals representing various educational specialties perceive and participate in prereferral problem solving. This is important because currently, information from general education teachers and district-level administrators are the predominant data sources (Costas et al., 2001; Myles et al., 1996). However, since preliminary findings suggest differences may exist in the perceptions of others who frequently participate in the process (e.g., counselors, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and special educators), gathering data from a wide variety of sources is critical (Bahr, 1994). Additionally, given the vital role building administrators can have with prereferral problem solving, collecting data related to their understanding of and participation in the prereferral problem solving process also seems warranted. Finally, little is known about how teachers perceive the prereferral problem solving process. Preliminary findings suggest that their perceived level of support as well as their personal expectations and goals (e.g., Will a referral facilitate the development of an intervention plan?; Will a referral satisfy a mandated hurdle before a special education screening can occur?) influence the nature of their participation as members of a problem solving team (Athanasious et al., 2002; Fuchs et al., 1996; Knotek, 2003). However, additional investigation is needed to better understand this relationship.

In summary, the use of prereferral problem solving is becoming increasingly popular in schools because it is seen by many as an effective approach to addressing academic and behavioral concerns presented by students in general education classrooms and averting unnecessary referrals for special education services (Buck et al., 2003; NASDE, 1994; Schrag & Henderson, 1996). However, perceptions and outcomes related

to this process appear to be influenced by complex interactions among multiple factors which should be further explored. Rock and Zigmond (2001) emphasized this need when they concluded:

> What this research suggests is that the guiding research question in outcome studies should not be "Are [prereferral problem solving] programs effective or ineffective?". The answer to that question has been explored but will remain controversial. Rather a guiding research question must be, "How can educators redesign and refine the processes"? (p. 160).

This study was designed to address some of the conceptual and methodological weaknesses identified in existing research investigating prereferral problem solving. Specifically, the goal was to explore the processes and perceptions of a second grade team implementing a stage-based problem solving model, called the Collaborative Action Process (CAP), through the use of qualitative methods. The school which served as the focus of this study is referred to by the pseudonym 'Pleasant Valley Elementary'. Qualitative methodology was selected for this study to allow for the development of a model that would describe the team's experiences with the process and extract the unique meanings that participation had for the teachers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

As described in Chapter Three, data sources were originally anticipated to include direct observation of second grade CAP team meetings, reflection probes completed by team members following each meeting, interviews with team participants and other school staff involved with the process, and review of relevant student records, permanent products, and artifacts. However, due to unexpected changes in the implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2003-2004 school year, additional data

in the form of interviews and written responses to interview questions were also gathered from professionals at other CAP elementary schools in the same district and from district-level CAP personnel to capture their perceptions of and experiences with the Collaborative Action Process.

Guiding Research Questions

The following research questions guided data collection and analysis. Further elaboration regarding the development and evolution of these questions and a listing of additional sub-questions is provided in Chapter Three.

1.) How is the CAP implemented at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

2.) What is the nature, severity, and impact of the characteristics / referral concerns of students who are discussed by the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

3.) What, if any, influence does the CAP have upon students' experiences at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

4.) How does participation in the CAP influence the behavior of school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

5.) What are school professionals' beliefs and expectations related to the process and outcomes of the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

6.) What role(s) do administrative forces have with the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

7.) What experiences have other elementary schools within the district had with the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year?

Definition of Terms

Several terms used throughout the discussion of this study are clarified here. This is particularly important because many of the terms related to prereferral problem solving models are often used interchangeably. However, there are both connotative and denotative differences related to the philosophies and processes involved.

Prereferral problem solving. Prereferral problem solving is the term that is used throughout this study to refer to the generic process used to help a classroom teacher better understand and address the academic or behavioral need(s) of a student. The overarching goal of prereferral problem solving is to provide effective and efficient intervention services in the general education setting and preclude inappropriate referrals for special education services. The process typically involves the student's classroom teacher and at least one other school professional and utilizes a stage-based framework (e.g., problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and plan evaluation) (Allen & Graden, 2002). Some prereferral problem solving models utilize a team format, some use a consultative format, and others use a combination of both (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996).

Problem solving teams. Problem solving teams are used in many schools to develop prereferral interventions (Buck et al., 2003). By definition, a team consists of at least three participants. In prereferral problem solving, one member is the teacher who has the concern and others may include any or all of the following: special education teachers, building administrators, curriculum specialists, guidance counselor, school psychologist, nurse, speech-language pathologist based on the presenting need(s) of the

student. Teams typically use a stage-based model to guide the problem solving process (Schrag & Henderson, 1996).

Consultation. Instead of using problem solving teams, some schools use a consultative format. Consultation is considered an in-direct service delivery model, because a consultant and the classroom teacher engage in systematic stage-based problem solving to address the student's need(s) (Fuchs et al., 2003). Consultants are usually strategically selected based on the particular needs of the students, and may include professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, and special education teachers.

Collaborative Action Process. The Collaborative Action Process (CAP) is the prereferral problem solving process implemented in some schools in a district located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This program was developed by the school district in part to respond to concerns about the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2002). Within a school, there are typically grade level CAP teams and a building level CAP team, both of which involve participants utilizing a four-stage problem solving process: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention planning and implementation, and plan monitoring and evaluation. Specific forms have been developed to guide participants through the process and facilitate data collection and analysis. Additional information about the CAP is provided in Chapter Two. The processes, practices, and perceptions of the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School were the focus of this study.

In this chapter, an overview of the framework for this study was provided. Specifically outlined were the benefits and concerns associated with prereferral problem

solving, the characteristics related to effective implementation of the process, and the limitations of existing research. The guiding research questions were listed and definitions of relevant terms were given. In Chapter Two, the literature relating to prereferral problem solving is reviewed and a description of the CAP is provided. In Chapter Three, the study's methodology is explained. In Chapter Four, the study's participants are introduced and a description of actual implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years is provided.

In Chapter Five, the impact of participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary is explained and school professionals' perceptions of the process are described. In Chapter Six, the roles and impact of administrative forces on the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School is discussed. Additionally, the experiences of other CAP schools are outlined, and the role of administrative forces in those schools is discussed. In Chapter Seven, the findings of this study are summarized, and the themes that emerged are discussed. The implications for practice and future research are described and limitations of this study are reviewed.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature germane to prereferral problem solving. First, an overview of the rationale for the process is provided, presenting highlights of how legislative, philosophical, and logistical factors all contributed to the increased use of prereferral problem solving in schools. Next, a general description of the prereferral problem solving process including an overview of a stage-based model considered to be "Best Practice" is provided. This framework is outlined to enhance understanding about the elements that are considered essential, irrespective of what specific prereferral problem solving format (e.g., consultation dyad or problem solving team) is used (Allen & Graden, 2002).

Then, descriptions and analysis of two comprehensive prereferral problem solving models, Project Achieve and Instructional Consultation Teams, are offered. Research on Project Achieve and Instructional Consultation Teams was purposefully selected for review because these two programs served as the foundation for development of the Collaborative Action Process (CAP). However, because there is minimal evaluative research investigating Project Achieve and Instructional Consultation Teams, additional studies evaluating two other prereferral problem solving programs, Mainstream Assistance Teams and Instructional Support Teams, will also be presented. Research about these teams is considered to be among the most rigorous in the field, such that the findings provide additional insight about the benefits and challenges associated with prereferral problem solving (Burns & Symington, 2002; Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar et al., 1992). Finally, a description of the CAP is provided.

References for this review were accessed using several different methods. The goal was to conduct an exhaustive search and review of the literature related to prereferral problem solving, such that the most relevant sources informed the development of this study and subsequent analysis of the data. Initially, broad searches were conducted using the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Articles First, and PsycINFO data bases. Descriptors for these searches included: collaborative problem solving, collaborative problem solving teams, pre-referral, pre-referral intervention, Mainstream Assistance Teams, Student Assistance Teams, Instructional Support Teams, behavioral consultation, instructional consultation, disproportionality, special education referral, school change, and institutionalization.

Reading and reference lists were obtained from some of leading researchers in the field of prereferral problem solving and reviewed for additional articles. The reference list from each article retrieved was also used to obtain additional research. Hand-searches were done with the following journals from 1985 through the current issues: Educational Leadership, Exceptional Children, Journal of Educational Psychology, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Journal of School Psychology, Journal of Special Education, Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, Learning Disabilities Quarterly, Review of Educational Research, School Psychology Quarterly, and School Psychology Review. Finally, relevant articles were obtained from the series, Best Practices in School Psychology.

Rational for Prereferral Problem Solving

The use of prereferral problem solving has been expanding rapidly since its introduction, with 72% of states now either requiring or recommending the use of the

process (Buck et al., 2003). However, the popularity and increased utilization of prereferral problem solving cannot be attributed to a single cause, but rather appears to be the result of multiple, converging factors (Cook & Friend, 1991; Fuchs et al., 2003; NASDSE, 1994; Schrag & Henderson, 1996). The over-arching theme is a desire to reform the identification of and intervention with students who are experiencing difficulty in their general education classroom(s). Supporting this goal are: legislative influences, a desire to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of students identified as requiring special education services, the recognition that certain groups of children are disproportionately identified as being in need of special education, the desire to provide effective, targeted instructional interventions to students in the general education classroom, the need to increase the relevance and utility of assessment data, and the growing desire to promote collegiality and professional development opportunities for teachers. Each of these factors is now discussed.

Legislative influences. Prior to the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (PL 94-142), many students with academic, behavioral, and physical disabilities were denied their right to a free and appropriate public education. However, with this federal legislation, numerous due process guarantees were set forth to remedy what had become recognized as egregious violations of the rights of many children and families (Carter & Sugai, 1989; Pugach, 1985). Among the mandates of PL 94-142 was that instruction be provided in the least restrictive environment and that multi-disciplinary teams be used to determine eligibility for special education services. This meant screening, testing, and placement decisions could no longer be made solely

by any one professional, but instead must be made from different perspectives by a diverse group of team members, including the student's parent(s) (Iverson, 2002).

Subsequent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act helped refine and clarify the purpose of multidisciplinary teams, specifying that a stronger emphasis be placed on collaboration among the key participants (administrators, parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, supporting student services staff) in eligibility decision making. Also mandated is the use of systematic prereferral interventions (Allan & Graden, 2002; Rosenfield, 2001; Telzrow et al., 2000).

The No Child Left Behind Act which was passed in 2001, reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It also promotes the use of prereferral problem solving. The No Child Left Behind Act emphasizes the use of empirically based early intervention programs to support students who are at risk for academic failure in the context of increasingly rigorous standards and higher levels of accountability (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Collectively, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and the No Child Left Behind Act support the use of prereferral problem solving as one way of ensuring that all students receive high-quality instruction in the least restrictive setting (Allen & Graden, 2002).

Concerns about rising numbers of students in special education. Although legislative mandates in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act contain certain provisions to encourage the use of prereferral problem solving within schools, unintended (and unwritten) consequences from the laws served as an additional impetus for expanded use of this process. For example, multidisciplinary teams were focused primarily on answering diagnostic and administrative questions (e.g., Does this child have a disability?

If so, does he or she qualify for special education services?) (Iverson, 2002). And, although consideration of these questions represented an improvement over what was done prior to passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, it lead to what is frequently called a 'refer-test-place' scenario. (Lyon, 2002; Pugach, 1985; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1998; Safran & Safran, 1996). Paramount among the concerns, was the unpredicted, and seemingly uninhibited, rise in referrals and placements of children into special education programs.

Illustrating this point, Ysseldyke (2001) documented that approximately 90% of the students who are referred for special education are formally tested; and of those tested, 73% are determined eligible to receive special education services. Consequently, the overall number of students receiving special education services rose from 3.8 million during the 1978-1979 school year to 6 million in the 1997-1998 school year. The 'refer-test-place' procedure also created an atmosphere in many schools where teachers felt that additional help or services for children experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties could only be accessed through a formal referral for special education, and only remediated by specially trained special education personnel or other specialists (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; NABSE, 2002; Schrag & Henderson, 1996).

The burgeoning demand for special education services also dictated a concurrent increase in the funding allocations for special education (Parrish, 2001). Specifically, the additional per pupil expenditure for special education students has been estimated to be $5,918 (Chambers, Parrish, & Harr, 2002). This rise, as Fuchs et al. (2003) noted: "did not escape the attention of school boards, school superintendents, politicians and other stake holders in public education, some of whom began calling for the immediate

downsizing of special education" (p. 160). These cost increases, situated within the context of a pervasive scarcity of financial resources for education, served as a powerful incentive for schools to increase the use of prereferral problem solving as a way to provide quality instruction in the general education classroom and avert inappropriate special education placements (NASDSE, 1994).

Concerns about disproportionality. Accompanying concerns about the general rise in special education placements, is a specific edict to address the disproportionate number of students from minority groups, most frequently African Americans, who are found eligible to receive special education services (Gottlieb & Alter, 1994; NABSE, 2002; National Academy of Sciences [NAS], 2002; NASDSE 1994; 1995). The current concerns regarding disproportionate representation of minority students can be traced back as early as the Brown vs. BOE Supreme Court decision in 1954, when widespread resistance to mandated desegregation translated into special education classes being used as a "smoke screen for segregation" (NASDSE, 1995, p. 1). Numerous legal battles followed and in 1968, Dunn's seminal article that criticized school practices of mis-labeling minority students as educable mentally retarded commanded the attention of the research community (Dougherty, 1999; NASDSE, 1995). Subsequent investigations by independent researchers, as well as the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) have documented the persistence of disproportionate rates of special education referrals and placements of minority students (Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone, 1991; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; NABSE, 2002; NAS, 2002; NASDSE 1994, 1995; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Shinn, Tindal, & Spira, 1987).

Some researchers have raised questions about whether race and ethnicity are perhaps more accurately viewed as proxies for broader categories such as socioeconomic status (e.g., MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). However, irrespective of its nexus, the persistence of such patterns is unequivocally viewed as problematic because it suggests potential "inequity in educational opportunity, differential graduation rates, differential earning power upon graduation, and differential enrollment in post secondary educational institutions" (NABSE, 2002, p. 7). Prereferral problem solving is cited as one approach to avert inappropriate referrals to special education (McNamara & Hollinger, 2003; Reschly, 1997) and has been shown to reduce rates of minority disproportionality (Levinsohn, 2000; Marston et al., 2003).

Desire for improvements in instruction. Also serving to promote the use of prereferral problem solving is the desire to provide early and effective instruction for all students in the general education classroom (Gottlieb & Alter, 1994; Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). Frequently cited in conjunction with this philosophy are the changing demographics of the country and our schools, which translate into students being more linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse. This can present increasing academic and behavioral challenges to general education teachers (NASDSE, 1994; Schrag & Henderson, 1996).

To address the needs of all students, there is increasing consensus around the benefits of providing systematic, empirically documented instructional strategies as soon as concerns are noticed, rather than waiting to intervene until after students fall significantly behind their peers (Berdine, 2003). For example, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) unambiguously stated that school

reform needs to incorporate a model that is based on prevention and early intervention for all children who are at risk for experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. They further clarified that such targeted instruction should occur in the general education classroom, and not be contingent on special education eligibility.

Such a philosophy was also endorsed by Lyon (2002), who assailed the "wait-to-fail" special education model currently used. He explained:

> Many children have difficulties reading not because they are LD, but because they are initially behind and do not receive the classroom instruction that can build the necessary foundation language and early reading skills. . . We now have substantial scientific evidence that early intervention can greatly reduce the number of older children who are identified as LD. Without early identification and the provision of effective early intervention, children with LD, as well as other students with reading difficulties, will require long-term, intensive and expensive special education programs, many of which continue to show meager results. Early intervention allows ineffective remedial programs to be replaced with effective prevention (p. 3).

Prereferral problem solving is endorsed as one way to facilitate teachers designing and implementing these early, systematic interventions. It is viewed as beneficial because it helps teachers understand and address the learning and behavior challenges of all students, not just those who are deemed eligible for special education services (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Ingalls & Hammond, 1996; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002; Reschly, 1997; Rosenfield, 2001).

Desire for improvements in assessment. Commenting on the 'refer-test-place' system used to determine eligibility for special education, Batche and Knoff (1995) explained:

> Because testing was, in and of itself, a required activity for determining eligibility for special education programs, there was little or no pressure (from consumers or the profession) to expect more from the assessment process than the eligibility recommendation. . . During the heyday in the rise of special education services, intervention was linked to assessment only through the selection of a special education program for a student, not the development of specific outcome strategies. The special education placement was the intervention. The outcomes of assessment were evaluated in terms of the appropriateness of a placement decision (p. 569).

Increasingly, questions about the utility of the psychological and educational tests mandated for determining special education eligibility have been raised and the emphasis has shifted to expand the process of assessment so it is directly linked with competency enhancement and intervention planning (Reschly, 1988; Ysseldyke, 2001). Specifically, it has been recommended that norm referenced data be replaced with ecologically focused assessments that provide information related to the opportunities for learning within the classroom environment, the match between a student's skill level and the instruction provided, and the student's response to targeted interventions (Allen & Graden, 2002; Reschly, 1997).

These forms of assessment serve as the cornerstone for the prereferral problem solving process. In contrast to the traditional assessment battery used to determine

whether a student meets the criteria for one of the federally defined disability categories, data collected throughout the prereferral problem solving process are strategically selected to inform the teacher about a student's specific strengths, areas of need, and ideographic growth in response to intervention (Costas et al., 2001; Iverson, 2002; Knoff & Batsche, 1995).

Professional development and support. The growth of prereferral problem solving has also been facilitated by the increased need for professional cooperation, support, and assistance. Participation in prereferral problem solving can promote interdisciplinary collaboration within the school and among other service providers that helps teachers collaboratively brainstorm strategies, gain feedback, and evaluate instructional innovations (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2002; NASDE, 1994; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). Teachers also report that the process facilitates the level of support they feel which, in turn, allows them to be less stressed about the challenges posed by students within their classrooms (Athanasious et al., 2002). For many educators who have historically found themselves in a very isolated and individualistic profession, this level of support represents a welcome change (Fullan, 1996, 2001).

Prereferral problem solving can also provide opportunities for professional development, related to the skills necessary for problem solving, effective group interactions, intervention design, targeted instructional strategies, classroom management, and collection and use of assessment data (Knoff & Batsche,1995).

General Description of Prereferral Problem Solving

Prereferral problem solving is a process used to intervene with students experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. A primary goal is to provide targeted

interventions to address the student's unique need(s), such that a referral for special education services is not required (Schrag & Henderson, 1996). However, as Sindelar et al. (1992) aptly noted:

> Although it is clear that prereferral intervention ends with referral for special education assessment, its initiation is less clear, because, in a sense, all regular class activities are undertaken with the purpose of maintaining students there. The key word in this distinction is 'remedial'; pre-referral intervention does not occur until teachers recognize learning or behavior problems and take remedial actions to correct them (p. 254).

Typically, prereferral problem solving involves an initial request by a teacher for assistance because a student is experiencing difficulty in the classroom. A stage-based problem solving model is then used to hypothesize about the possible reasons for the student's difficulties, identify appropriate intervention(s), develop a plan to address the concern(s), and then monitor and evaluate the success of the plan. The student will either respond positively such that original difficulties are significantly reduced or successfully eliminated and there is not a need for further action; or if the concern persists, a formal referral for special education services may be pursued. Of the students who are referred for prereferral problem solving, most are described as having mild or moderate difficulties with the chosen interventions typically consisting of instructional and curricular modifications, behavior management strategies, counseling services, or small group instruction (Bahr, 1994; Buck et al., 2003; Whitten & Dieker, 1996).

Although a teacher could independently engage in prereferral problem solving, the process typically involves working with at least one other professional. In some

schools, the process involves a teacher working in a dyadic format with a consultant. When the teacher is supported by at least two other individuals, it is usually considered to be a problem solving team (Fuchs et al., 2003). Some prereferral problem solving models involve the entire team collaborating from initial referral though termination. Others use a team to field initial referrals, and then use a dyadic model, where a consultant or support teacher is selected by the team to work directly with the teacher to develop and evaluate intervention plan(s) (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996).

When a team format is used, composition has been shown to vary, with some teams consisting of as many as sixteen members (Whitten & Dieker, 1996; Wilson, 2000). Members typically include any or all of the following: general education teachers, special education teachers, math and reading specialists, guidance counselors, school nurses, speech-language therapists, staff development specialists, school psychologists, school social workers, and building administrators. Frequently, there are a core group of team members (e.g., principal, special education teacher, referring teacher), with other professionals asked to collaborate on individual cases, based on a student's unique area(s) of concern (Kruger et al., 1995).

Prereferral problem solving teams can be chaired by various members, including school psychologists, general education teachers, administrators, counselors, and special education teachers, with other team members frequently assuming other responsibilities (e.g., time keeper, recorder, and process observer) (Bahr et al., 1999; Buck et al., 2003; Kruger et al., 1995; Whitten & Dieker, 1996). In some schools, teams meet on a consistent pre-determined schedule (i.e., once a month), and in others they are convened responsively, based on need (Hammond & Ingalls, 1999; Schrag & Henderson, 1996;

Wilson & Dieker, 1996). Prereferral problem solving meeting times average 45 to 60 minutes (Kruger et al., 1995; McDougal et al., 2000).

'Best Practice' Problem Solving Model

Allan and Graden (2002) outlined a generic four-stage model for prereferral problem solving which is viewed as representing 'Best Practices'. This framework is described here because it clearly delineates the elements seen as critical for promoting success with any prereferral problem solving model. The authors suggested the use of a team to maximize collaboration among school professionals, but indicated their model could be adapted for use by a teacher and consultant.

Before beginning the four steps in the problem solving model, Allen and Graden (2002) emphasized the importance of establishing rapport, trust, and mutual respect among participants. This is called Step 0: Establishing a Collaborative Relationship. During this step, basic communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and effective communication are critical since the goal is to ensure that everyone understands the process, and is willing and able to commit the time and energy required to successfully engage in the subsequent steps. As the building blocks for the process are solidified, the authors noted how "calm rational composure must prevail among participants such that they are ready to move beyond 'problem admiration'" (p. 571). Common pitfalls during this stage include rushing through without establishing the necessary relationships and understanding, or having someone immediately take the role of expert, where others will then look to him or her for the answers.

Step 1. The next step in Allen and Graden's (2002) model is Problem Identification. During this stage, the authors recommended conceptualizing the problem

as a funnel; broadly beginning with identification of all concerns, assets, and related factors, and then working to more specifically understand and clarify the concerns. When there are multiple issues, they recommended targeting the 'keystone' variables (i.e., those which are the most influential such as prerequisite skills related to phonemic awareness, social skills, or self regulation) because improvements in these areas will often positively affect other concerns. Assessment designed to ascertain the student's current level of performance should be started in this stage because the baseline data can be used to determine the discrepancy between current and expected levels of progress. It will also help evaluate the success of subsequent intervention(s).

According to Allen and Graden (2002), a critical outcome of this stage is defining the target behavior(s) and the identified replacement behavior(s) in observable and measurable terms. All participants should actively engage in the process of clarifying specific concerns and establishing goals, as each often represents a unique area of expertise. However, the person presenting the concern (most frequently the teacher or parent(s)) should ultimately be the one who determines which are the most salient problems and goals to ensure that "primary ownership for defining the situation of concern rest with the person(s) experiencing the problem situation" (p. 573). The authors also cautioned against rushing through this step before the problem is clearly and adequately understood, citing the tendency to remediate the first problem mentioned, without fully understanding and prioritizing other potential areas of concern. Finally, they stressed the necessity of adequately operationalizing the concerns, rather than stating the problem in global terms (e.g., The child is unmotivated; The child has ADHD)

because it inhibits the process of setting realistic goals and identifying appropriate interventions.

Step 2. The second step in the Allen and Graden (2002) model is Problem Analysis. This stage should be guided by questions such as: Why is the problem situation occurring?, What is contributing to the mismatch between actual and desired levels of performance to the target behavior(s)?, What resources are available to help resolve this problem situation?, and What is the goal or expected outcome of the intervention (i.e., the desired level of performance)? Answers to these questions are sought using an ecological approach, which considers all possible factors that could inhibit or support the student's performance. The goal is to understand the functional relationship between the student's behavior and the conditions under which the behavior is most and least likely to occur. This involves using targeted, intervention-oriented assessments.

The specific assessment techniques should be determined based on the unique circumstances of the problem situation, but might include behavior rating scales, review of records and permanent products, curriculum based assessments, and focused observations. The data collected should be very specific and used to answer pre-determined questions about the presenting areas of concern. When possible, teacher(s) and parent(s) should actively participate in the assessment process because:

> If assessment is seen primarily as the domain of an 'outside expert' such as the school psychologist, then the teacher or parent cannot be an active partner in problem analysis and a valuable partner is lost… it is the responsibility of all participants to contribute to the determination of information needed, to the

collection of data based on logical division of responsibilities, and finally the use of data in decision making (p. 575).

According to Allen and Graden (2002), the primary goal of this stage is to gain an adequate understanding of the problem situation and the variables that are contributing to the difficulty. Specifically, participants should clarify the discrepancy between actual and desired levels of performance for each targeted behavior, and then specify observable and measurable goals for the subsequent intervention(s). The authors caution that there is a tendency to not give adequate time to the process of problem analysis, but instead rush to solve the problem. In other words, a team would discuss the problem (Step 1) and then immediately jump to designing an intervention plan (Step 3), without adequately understanding the contributing variables. It is also vital that assessment data be directly linked to the data that were collected during the problem analysis stage, and be specifically targeted to directly inform intervention design. Finally, they caution that the hypothesis formed about the presenting concern(s) should not be related to factors that are unalterable, or internal to the child. Rather they need to relate to the larger environmental context that can be modified as part of an intervention.

Step 3. Step three in Allen and Graden's (2002) model is Plan Implementation. This stage involves what are described as the complex task of exploring possible intervention strategies, carefully selecting a strategy based on all that is known about the problem situation, writing and implementing a specific intervention plan, and monitoring the student's progress. This stage poses the question, 'What are we going to do to resolve the current problem situation?'. The initial task is to generate and explore the possible range of strategies which are considered likely to address the specific concerns.

Generalized brainstorming, however, is not productive at this point. Instead, participants should collaboratively use their expertise and creativity to decide which strategies are viable, well-supported by research, and logically related to reducing the discrepancy between a student's current performance and the desired goal. Additionally, an intervention should not be thought of as a place (e.g., resource room support), but rather should consist of specific instructional strategies.

Once the potential intervention strategies are outlined, Allen and Graden (2002) suggested that the person who is primarily responsible for carrying out the plan, take responsibility for final selection of what will be included in the plan. All participants should agree upon and write a plan clearly outlining every component of the intervention; how progress is monitored, who is responsible for each aspect of the plan, the setting where the intervention is conducted, and beginning and review dates. As part of the progress monitoring, there should be timelines, goals, and criteria for performance, as well as measures of intervention adherence and efficacy. Results should be graphed, and the decision making system for deciding when an intervention should be changed should be determined before the plan is implemented. Finally, although the specific responsibility for implementing the plan will often rest with one individual, all participants are responsible to support the plan as part of the collaborative effort.

Step 4. The final step in Allen and Graden's (2002) problem solving model is Plan Evaluation. It involves continuous monitoring of the pre-specified outcomes to determine whether the student's goals are being met. Once an intervention has sufficient time to be implemented, data are evaluated to determine how well it is working. If the student's goals are achieved, then it must be determined whether the problem is resolved,

or if there is need for continued intervention. Planning for maintenance and generalization can then become the focus, as well as development of a plan for any other goals which may have been previously identified, but not yet addressed. Conversely, if the data suggest that the goals are not being met, then fidelity of implementation and appropriateness of the plan need to be considered. This may require reexamination of the variables that were originally thought to be contributing to the problem situation, as well as any new factors which may now be pertinent.

Allen and Graden (2002) specifically recommended their model serve only as a flexible guideline. Explaining this, the authors stated:

> Actual problem solving rarely proceeds in a sequence as orderly as described. Rather, it often is necessary to move back and forth between steps or, sometimes, to return to an earlier problem solving step and re-work steps of the process as new information is gathered or communication among participants improves (p. 579).

In summary, the model proposed by Allan and Graden (2002) emphasized collaboration, systematic problem solving, and the use of an eco-behavioral perspective to understand the factors that contribute to a student's difficulties. It facilitates the development of targeted interventions and requires data-driven decisions. Taken together, it provides an excellent framework outlining the essential components that should guide prereferral problem solving.

Project Achieve

Program description. Project Achieve is a comprehensive school reform program first implemented during the 1990 school year at an elementary school in Lakeland,

Florida to address the increasing academic and behavioral difficulties exhibited by students at the school (Knoff & Batsche, 1995). It has multiple goals including, improving teachers' ability to develop effective academic and social skill interactions, providing comprehensive intervention services in the general education classroom, increasing parental involvement, and facilitating a school climate where all staff members see themselves as responsible for every student in the building. These goals are attained with multiple program components including intensive professional development, a comprehensive social-skills program, parent training, and a prereferral problem solving model called Referral Question Consultation (RQC) (Knoff & Batche, 1995).

Paralleling the philosophy that supports most prereferral problem solving models, Project Achieve involves a change in beliefs related to the role of special education within a school (Knoff & Batche, 1995). Replacing the traditional refer-test-place model, the authors believe assessment should be an on-going process that identifies and confirms the specific reasons why a student is experiencing difficulty. Interventions are targeted appropriately, delivered in the general education setting, and monitored for effectiveness. Only if students are resistant to such interventions, are special education services considered. The RQC process is the prereferral problem solving approach used to support these beliefs. It most commonly involves the referring teacher working with a consultant, however additional professionals may also be asked to participate if they have expertise related to the student's need(s) (Knoff & Batsche, 1995).

According to Batsche and Knoff (1995):

> RQC uses the scientific method in an empirically based search for why a referred problem is occurring. After behaviorally clarifying the presenting problem, RQC

> focuses on functionally explaining and confirming why the referred problem is occurring so that effective interventions to resolve the student's problem and facilitate continued academic and social progress ultimately can be developed. . . [RQC] requires school professionals to go beyond simply describing the social and academic problems that students are exhibiting, encouraging them instead to complete functional analysis of referred problems in the environment in which they occur (p. 582).

The process relies heavily on curriculum based assessment techniques to examine the unique relationship between the task demands, the instructional environment, and the student. The hypotheses developed through RQC are designed to directly inform instruction in the general education classroom, rather than providing information to confirm or disprove a student's eligibility for special education services based on the federal criteria (Batsche & Knoff, 1995).

Request Question Consultation involves seven steps: (1) Reviewing all existing data on the referred student, (2) Conducting a consultative interview with the referral source to behaviorally define his or her initial concerns and to determine assessment and intervention goals, (3) Developing hypotheses, prediction statements, and data-based referral questions to explain and confirm why the initial concerns are occurring, (4) Selecting multi-modal assessment procedures that will specifically answer the referral questions and facilitate the link between assessment and intervention, (5) Formally confirming the hypotheses through assessment data such that intervention strategies are selected and implemented or new hypotheses are generated and assessed, (6) Monitoring change in the areas of concern to determine the impact of the intervention, and (7)

Developing a written report documenting the RQC process, the interventions tried, and the intervention outcomes as they relate to the resolution of the initial referred concerns (Knoff & Batsche, 1995).

Research. There has been one published article reporting outcomes from Project Achieve (Knoff & Batsche, 1995) and one study that investigated just the RQC component of the program (Telzrow et al., 2000). Knoff and Batsche (1995) collected data at Project Achieve's original implementation site and from a matched comparison school. Data related to special education referral and placement rates, retention rates, and suspension rates were collected using a multiple baseline design, with data collection lasting three years post-implementation. The authors reported improvements in all areas over the three-year period; referrals to special education declined by 75%, special education placement rates declined by 67%, discipline referrals declined by 28%, retentions declined by 90%, and suspensions declined by 64%. The control school did not experience similar improvements.

However, while these improvements are substantial, the context under which they were experienced needs to be considered. Project Achieve is a highly-supported comprehensive program, and while the authors believed that RQC and its accompanying paradigm shift in teacher behaviors and attitudes led to the improvements experienced at this school, a component analysis was not included in the design of the study. Thus, it is impossible to tell the extent to which the prereferral problem solving process, specifically, was responsible for the improvements. Additionally, no reliability or validity information was provided for the data that were collected, and only minimal statistical analyses were conducted.

Telzrow et al. (2000) evaluated the use of RQC in Ohio, where a team format, rather than a teacher and consultant dyad was used. The state had encouraged, but not mandated, schools to adopt the prereferral problem solving model, with 329 participating during the 1996-1997 school year. For this study, teams were asked to submit 'best-case' documentation (including the problem solving worksheets documenting the process, and student progress data). The researchers believed that design helped standardize the data, since each team was representing exemplary cases from the RQC model. Usable data were available for 227 teams, representing 69% of the total schools participating in the program.

Based on the data submitted by teams and information provided by the state when they evaluated each team, Telzrow et al. (2000) drew a number of conclusions. First, although it was originally hypothesized that a team's years of participation with RQC would directly correlate with the fidelity of how the model was implemented, the data did not support that relationship. However, the authors proposed that rather than there being an absence of a relationship between a team's level of experience with a problem solving model and their implementation of that model, it may instead be due to changes in staff (i.e., a school may have implemented the model for five years, but the team members may not be consistent) or 'implementation drift' where those who are more experienced with the process might become somewhat lax in applying specific problem solving elements with fidelity. Thus, the relationship between experience with prereferral problem solving and fidelity of the process remains unclear.

Upon more careful examination of the problem solving elements, Telzrow et al. (2000) found that teams were relatively consistent and successful in their ability to

describe a student's target behavior in measurable and observable terms. However, the baseline data teams used to support these conclusions consisted predominantly of indirect measures. Regarding student goals, teams did appear to initially include criteria to help determine success, but did not consistently appear to have plans which included target dates for monitoring progress and the treatment integrity of interventions. Some quantifiable data were collected to track student response to intervention, but graphing of this data was rare. It was also noted that teams tended to focus on child characteristics, rather than exploring other contributing factors within the larger ecological context.

Telzrow et al. (2000) summarized their findings by saying that the fidelity with which the teams implemented the prereferral problem solving model fell well below the state's desired standards. They hypothesized that this might be the result of a poorly conceptualized model or procedures for problem solving. This would be particularly relevant to the Ohio schools that were studied because the model being used was still evolving and being revised, while schools were implementing it. Other possibilities, they believed, might have included a lack of training for effective implementation of the process, changing personnel, or perhaps a lack of intervention skills. Irrespective of the reason, the authors emphasized that there is an extremely complex relationship between effective problem solving and the numerous variables that facilitate and inhibit its success.

Given that the data submitted represented a team's 'best case,' yet Telzrow et al. (2000) found significant concerns, including those relating to fidelity of the problem solving model, one has to then wonder if even less adherence would have been found if the sample were not comprised of teams who volunteered and were considered

exemplary. In other words, if the ‘best case’ teams are struggling with implementation, skepticism about the experience of teams who would be classified as ‘average’ or ‘worse case’ certainly seems warranted. The primary limitation of the Telzrow et al. (2000) study was a lack of direct data sources. Instead of observing the RQC team meetings, the authors interpreted the prereferral problem solving process and outcomes by using team-generated written documentation.

Instructional Consultation Teams

Program description. Instructional Consultation Teams (IC-Teams) have evolved out of the original Instructional Consultation (IC) prereferral problem solving model. With IC, teachers work with a consultant in a dyadic format. However, because teachers expressed a desire for more structure and support than the consultants provided, the use of a team was added to the program (Rosenfield, 1992).

Within a school, IC-Teams can consist of anywhere from seven to sixteen rotating members (e.g., the building principal, special education teachers, general education teachers, the reading and math specialists, the school nurse, and a pupil services representative) (Wilson, 2000). The team is lead by an on-site facilitator, who is most frequently the school psychologist (Rosenfield & Gravios, 1996). The team serves as a single point of entry for teachers to raise their concerns about a student, after which an individual team member is identified to serve as the case-manager, and engages in consultation with the teacher.

Instructional Consultation Teams are predicated on three assumptions related to students, the classroom environment, and the larger school community (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). First, it is assumed that all students are learners. Thus, the goal of the

process is to identify the best strategies to promote learning, rather than simply identifying certain deficits within a student. A critical task in doing this is to understand the relationship between the student, the academic task, and the instructional setting. The second assumption is that the focus of the inquiry process needs to be on ensuring an instructional match within the general education classroom, not on finding a new place for instruction. Consequently, placement in a special education class, a remedial program, or recommending retention are not seen as effective 'interventions.' Instead, identifying the most effective instructional and management strategies to address a child's unique areas of concern becomes the focus for problem solving. Specifically, the authors noted that:

> The goal is to work collaboratively to explore the entry line characteristics of the child so that instruction is pegged at the child's instructional level- utilizing research-based effective instructional and management interventions, and then to monitor progress to determine the child's rate of learning, improvements in behavior, or both (p. 16).

According to Rosenfield and Gravios (1996), the third assumption of IC-Teams involves the importance of building a problem solving learning community in the school. Emphasis is placed on promoting shared responsibility for the learning outcomes of all students, similar to that found in other professions such as the medical or legal field, where professionals are encouraged, and expected, to consult and collaborate with one another.

IC-Team participants follow a very well-defined, stage-based process model which includes entry and contracting, problem identification and analysis, intervention

planning, intervention implementation, and resolution / termination (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). The focus is primarily on understanding and addressing students' concern(s) within an ecological framework. Decisions related to the problem solving process are made by analyzing systematic data related to the classroom and the individual child collected before, during, and after an intervention.

IC-Teams use what Rosenfield and Gravois (1996) consider to be the 'best practices' in teacher professional development and support. Specifically, those participating in IC-Teams receive extensive training, beginning with participation in a comprehensive week-long workshop, and being supplemented with individualized and responsive training and continued professional development delivered through modeling and coaching. Training focuses on developing skills related to five topics which include problem solving skills, effective communication skills, assessment, interventions, and data collection techniques (Bartels & Mortenson, 2002; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996).

The importance of understanding and promoting organizational change is also emphasized with the IC-Team model, with the recognition that changing beliefs and behaviors within a school does not occur automatically or easily (Rosenfield, 2001; Rosenfield & Gravios, 1996). The adoption of a comprehensive program, such as IC-Teams, is thought to be best conceptualized in stages, beginning with 'initiation', then 'implementation', and concluding with 'institutionalization'. To gain both formative and summative information about where a particular school is in this progression and where additional training needs to be provided, Rosenfield & Gravois (1996) developed the IC-Team Level of Implementation (LOI) Scale consisting of data collected through interviews, record reviews, and observations. However, the authors cautioned that "there

is no ‘cookbook’ to achieve institutionalization of IC-Teams, just as there is no standard manual for achieving lasting change in schools” (p. 165).

Research. Much of the published literature relating to IC-Teams is narrative, rather than evaluative. The theoretical beliefs about IC-Teams are extensively described, and positive outcomes are noted in these descriptions. However, such accounts are predominantly anecdotal and the methodology is not consistently rigorous (i.e., Bartels & Mortenson, 2002). Two pieces of primary research, however, do provide some insight into team functioning, team members’ perceptions, and student outcomes.

Costas et al. (2001) investigated the perceptions of teachers in an urban elementary school that had been using IC-Teams for four years. Because of the high level of implementation, the school was seen as having institutionalized the process. The researchers invited all staff members to share their experiences and perceptions of the process by participating in semi-structured interviews. Of the approximately twenty-five teachers in the building, three teachers volunteered to do so. One volunteer was a case manager, one an experienced referring teacher, and one a new referring teacher. Based on transcribed and coded data, the authors concluded that IC-Teams were associated with many positive outcomes.

Related to professional changes, the interviewees described how IC-Teams facilitated their ability to collect, interpret, and make instructional modifications using curriculum based assessment techniques such as running records, informal reading inventories, site-word lists, and anecdotal records (Costas et al., 2001). Teachers indicated that the IC process increased their ‘instructional handbag,’ because they learned new interventions to address academic and behavioral difficulties, strategies to improve

their classroom management, and techniques to incorporate the use of differentiation and flexible grouping. Participants also described how they came to adopt the philosophy that problem solving is more effective than labeling, and that the focus of an intervention should be in the general education classroom. Finally, teachers noted how the IC-Team process helped them feel supported and encouraged which resulted in their feeling less stress and an increased sense of personal fulfillment from their jobs.

A year after the interviews were conducted, Costas et al. (2001) distributed follow-up surveys to gain additional input from teachers who participated in the IC-Teams process. Within the school, only six of the twenty-five teachers used the process to address concerns about seventeen students. Surveys for fifteen of these referred students were completed. The authors re-confirmed teachers' satisfaction with the process, and concluded it resulted in increased confidence in addressing academic and behavioral concerns, the ability to generalize the strategies learned to other students in their classroom, and an improved sense of professional support.

Taken together, the interview and survey data suggested that the teachers who elected to use the IC-Teams process were generally satisfied with the model (Costas et al., 2001). However, because the number of participants was so small and comprised of only volunteers, it can not be considered a representative sample, even within that school. Interpretation of the findings must also consider that data were only gathered about perceptions, rather than through observations of actual practices. Further, the authors noted that while teachers expressed positive views of the process, the school had been implementing and refining its use of IC-Teams for four years and had initial challenges with details such as processing referrals and setting up consistent meetings.

Levinsohn (2000) compared the outcomes of the IC-Team model with those achieved through a Student Support Team (SST). The author contrasted IC-Teams with the SST, and explained that the later used less formal problem solving procedures and did not emphasize data collection procedures that informed teachers about a students' instructional level. For this study, data were collected for seventeen second grade students from nine schools who were referred to the IC-Team for concerns related to reading achievement during the first three months of school and for twenty second grade students from twelve schools who were referred to the SST for similar concerns. Achievement was tracked using scores from the Summative Assessment Checklist, a criterion referenced test given by general education teachers to all students in their class to measure reading achievement. Fidelity of the problem solving process was tracked using the Student Documentation Form for the IC-Team students and the Action Plan for the SST students. Data documenting special education referral and placement rates were also collected.

Levinsohn (2000) concluded that use of the more formalized IC-Team process lead to more successful outcomes. Related to reading, it was found that students referred to IC-Teams scored significantly poorer than those referred to the SST at the beginning of the year on the criterion referenced reading test. However, the groups were statistically indistinguishable post-intervention. This lead the author to conclude that students who received prereferral intervention services through IC-Teams made more progress than those who were referred to the SST.

Additionally, Levinsohn (2000) found that of the students served by IC-Teams, only one (6%) was subsequently screened for special education and found eligible. In the

SST group, eight (40%) of the students referred were eventually screened and found eligible. The author noted that not only is this statistically significant, but it translated into students being placed into special education from the SST at a rate which is almost seven times greater than that of the IC-Teams. Analysis of the racial distribution of those placed with the SST model suggested potential disproportionality.

Based on information from the Student Documentation Form (SDF) and the Action Plan Form, Levinsohn (2000) also concluded that there were significant differences between the two models. All of the cases processed through IC-Teams had an SDF, whereas only 35% of the cases from the SST had a completed Action Plan. Of the forms that were completed for the two groups, clear differences were found in the kinds of interventions and goals included. Interventions documented on the SDFs were oriented at developing specific skills (e.g., sight words with the use of flashcards) and were designed almost exclusively to be implemented by the student's classroom teacher.

In contrast, interventions recorded on the Action Plans cited general areas of concern and focused on where a child would go for the intervention. They also showed a trend towards providing assistance to the student outside of his or her general education classroom (e.g., work with the reading specialist, small group support with the special education teacher). However, even with the IC-Teams, there was a notable lack of regularly graphed student data, with only 58% of the SDFs including graphs, and even fewer (35%) evidencing collection of baseline data.

As with Costas et al.'s (2001) research, Levinsohn (2000) did not include any direct measure of the prereferral problem solving processes used. The SDFs and Action Plans served as proxies for evaluating treatment integrity, but the lack of any direct

observation is a definite limitation to Levinsohn's conclusion that treatment integrity enhances problem solving team outcomes. None the less, the results suggest that the mere presence of a problem solving team does not ensure positive outcomes.

Mainstream Assistance Teams

A series of studies were conducted to evaluate the efficacy of a prereferral problem solving model called Mainstream Assistance Teams (MAT). Although the name connotes the use of a team structure, consultative dyads were also incorporated into the process as the authors refined the model. The research evaluating MAT is notable for its methodological rigor, and consequently, is often cited as being the most reliable and valid indicator of the functioning and outcomes associated with prereferral problem solving (Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar et al.,1992).

As an initial investigation, Fuchs and Fuchs (1989) compared three variations of the MAT model. Each version utilized a multidisciplinary team in conjunction with a behavioral consultant (BC) for the problem solving process (problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation). Data were collected on 48 fifth and sixth grade 'difficult to teach' (DTT) students in four experimental and five matched control schools. Teachers in the experimental schools were recruited to participate, and were then randomly assigned to one of three variations of (BC).

The first version, BC 1, involved the consultant and the teacher engaging in problem identification and intervention planning, but did not include any monitoring of the student's progress (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989). The second version, BC 2, included the components of BC 1, but also required the consultant to make at least two classroom visits to observe the DTT student and provide feedback about the intervention. The third

version, BC 3, involved the conditions found in BC 2, but also required the consultant to formatively evaluate the intervention effects. To increase the fidelity of the problem solving process consultants used written scripts to guide them through the stages.

Based on results from a behavioral rating scale, Fuchs and Fuchs (1989) concluded that, when compared to the students in the control group and the BC 1 condition, teachers of students in BC 2 and BC 3 significantly improved their perceptions of DTT students' targeted behavior. However, the observational data were not as consistent. Given that discrepancy, the researchers suggested that the results might best be interpreted to support the conclusion that teachers viewed the targeted problem less severely after participating in the more inclusive versions of BC even though actual behavioral changes were not as prevalent. The authors also reported that the interventions used with all three versions of BC were poorly conceptualized and inconsistently executed. Specifically, despite the fact that nearly all of the interventions were utilizing reinforcement to reduce the targeted behavior, over half of the teachers did not maintain any written record to monitor student behavior. Based on this finding, the authors concluded that the problem solving model used with the MAT might require more directness to be successful.

A second study by Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr et al. (1990) was designed to build on the authors' initial understanding about how to maximize the benefits of MAT. This research involved eliminating the use of the multidisciplinary team and developing a more prescriptive problem solving model, where teachers and consultants were directed to choose from a limited set of interventions. Using that framework, consultant and teacher dyads in five experimental schools were randomly assigned to one of the three BC

conditions (each being the same as in Fuchs and Fuchs (1989)) and two matched control schools were selected. Data collection procedures also mirrored those in Fuchs and Fuchs (1989), with the only additional source of data being analysis of whether students met their goals on contracts that were developed as part of every intervention to address the targeted behavior.

Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr et al. (1990) found that teachers' ratings of the targeted behaviors improved for BC 1, BC 2, and BC 3, but not for the control group. Specifically, the more inclusive versions (BC 2 and BC 3) promoted more positive student change, where pupils in these groups reduced the behavioral discrepancies between themselves and their peers, and maintained these gains three weeks after the formal intervention project had ended. Commenting on their findings, the authors noted how it is not surprising that the more comprehensive BC versions are more effective. However, because the additional components found in BC 2 and BC 3 require additional time and energy (an average of six hours of total time per student), using these versions may be less feasible within a school.

Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr et al. (1990) also explained that they did not initially intend to develop a prescriptive problem solving model, but were instead trying to emphasize collaboration and discovery. However, the interventions that previously resulted from that approach (i.e., Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989) were not seen as impressive and teachers perceived the give and take of the original process as overly time consuming. In contrast, when reflecting on the more prescriptive model, the same teachers indicated higher levels of satisfaction. They also did not express any concern about the prepared interventions being too coercive or denigrating, which was one of the researchers' concerns as they

modified the model. Reflecting on the findings from the two studies, the authors stated that the results suggested:

> The form and substance of consultation should be consonant with the specifics of the situation. In some schools in which stress is high, expertise in consultation is low, and consultation time is nonexistent, prescriptive approaches appear better suited for success than collaborative ones. We have no doubt that in different situations, more collaborative approaches may represent a better choice. Moreover, situations change. As teachers and support staff as well as school administrators become more experienced, confident, and positive regarding consultation related activity, prescriptive approaches might give way to more collaborative efforts (p. 511).

A third study by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990) was designed to further clarify the complexity related to prereferral problem solving using MAT. The model investigated in this study was similar to that used by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr et. al (1990), where the team was eliminated and only consultant and teacher dyads were used. The counselors at 17 schools were selected as consultants and then randomly assigned to either the short (which lasted 14-22 sessions) or the long (which lasted 18-28 sessions) versions of BC. As was seen in Fuchs et al. (1990), contracts were used to help monitor and reinforce improvements in the targeted behavior.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990) concluded that, overall, both the long and short versions of BC were successful, with students meeting their daily goals 75% and 78% of the time, respectively. Additionally, teachers and students expressed generally positive views about the interventions, the contracts, and the consultation process. Compared to

the controls, statistically significant differences were found in the teacher ratings of student behavior for both versions of BC, such that post-intervention, the student's target behavior was viewed as less severe, more manageable, and more tolerable. The long and short versions did not differ from one another. Statistically significant differences were found in the special education referral rates between both conditions of BC compared to the control group, but not between the long and short versions.

From this data, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990) concluded that the shorter version of BC appeared to be as effective as the longer version. However, the authors cautioned that actual differences between the two groups were less significant than they intended, thus there was not considerable distinction between the two conditions. Similar to the conclusion made by Fuchs et al. (1990), Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990) concluded that the pre-assembled, multi-faceted package facilitated the process. Additionally, they noted how prereferral problem solving depended on many complex factors and required a "melding of art and science" to be effective within a school environment (p. 128).

In a final study, Fuchs et al. (1996) further investigated prereferral problem solving using MAT, with the goal being to evaluate the efficacy of the process with only minimal support from university personnel. Eight of the consultants from the Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bahr (1990) study participated in this follow-up study. Each consultant recruited three teachers; two who would participate in problem solving process and one to serve as a control. The teachers identified their most 'difficult to teach' (DTT) student, who exhibited performance, not competence problems (i.e., one who possessed academic skills at least near grade level, but who was still performing poorly). The consultation dyads were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions. The first group received

‘more’ support from the university project staff, meaning that they met face-to-face with the consultant at least once during each phase of the problem solving process and spoke by phone at least four additional times. The average contact time for the ‘more’ group was 208.75 minutes. The ‘less’ group involved the university project staff having only four ten-minute phone contacts with the consultant.

Findings related to the general outcomes were similar to those reported in the previous studies, with the data showing that participation in both the ‘more’ and ‘less’ groups lead to improvements in students’ targeted behaviors (Fuchs et al., 1996). Special education referral and placement rates were also lower for both conditions when compared to the control group. However, despite the fact that the school had institutionalized the model, meaning the consultants had successfully assumed responsibility for the problem solving process, and were effectively implementing it with only minimal support from the university project-staff, the school discontinued use of the program the following year.

Fuchs et al. (1996) further described that despite extensive training for over 150 educators in thirty-four elementary schools, and research which documented the positive outcomes of prereferral problem solving, none of the schools involved in any of the studies maintained the MAT once the university partnership ended. Numerous systematic factors including special education funding formulas and policies, a lack of administrative support, and concerns about professional roles were hypothesized to have contributed to this dramatic “Disappearing Act” (p. 264). Summarizing the experience, the authors commented:

> During the multi-year MAT project, we were convinced that if the MAT were shown experimentally to cause meaningful improvement in the classroom behavior and academic performance of the DTT students, then the district would require, or at least strongly encourage, all elementary and middle schools to establish MAT. Such was our simplistic cause and effect view of change. We were blind to the importance of factors in the larger context that spelled trouble for the MAT even before the project began (p. 264).

Instructional Support Teams

Multiple researchers have examined the prereferral problem solving model that was implemented throughout the state of Pennsylvania in response to escalating referral and placement rates (Hartman & Fay, 1996; Kovaleski et al., 1996, 1999; Rock & Zigmond, 2001). In 1990, the state revised its special education standards to phase-in the use of a model called Instructional Support (IS) Teams. This model uses a multidisciplinary teams in conjunction with individual support teachers to engage in the problem solving process (entry, hypothesis forming, verifying, and outcome). Pennsylvania's model is also unique in that schools are mandated to use prereferral problems solving interventions for a minimum of 60 days before a formal referral for special education services can be submitted (Kovaleski et al., 1996).

To evaluate the outcomes and cost effectiveness of the Pennsylvania model, Hartman and Fay (1996) analyzed data from 1047 elementary schools using IS-Teams. The authors reported that once implemented within a school, the process was used to assist more than 8% of the student population, which represented an increase in the number of students receiving intervention services compared with what was reported

prior to use of IS-Teams. When compared to pre-implementation data, decreases were found in retention, special education referral, and special education placement rates.

To evaluate cost effectiveness, Hartman and Fay (1996) standardized the data to represent hypothetical schools using the IS-Team model and compared them to schools using the traditional special education processes. From this analysis, the authors found that the IS-Team program did not overtly save money. However, because behavioral and academic interventions were provided to more children for approximately the same amount of money required with the traditional special education model, the authors concluded IS-Teams were cost effective.

Kovaleski et al. (1999) also investigated Pennsylvania's prereferral problem solving model. Specifically, they explored the relationship between the level of implementation and student performance. One hundred seventeen randomly selected schools using the IS-Team model were matched with non-IS-Team schools, and data were collected for almost 2000 students. Data sources included observations, an informal reading comprehension task, and level of implementation data gathered by the state evaluation team.

The authors found that in the areas of reading comprehension and time on task, students in the high implementation group showed statistically greater gains than did students in low implementation or control groups (Kovaleski et al., 1999). By the end of the study, students in the high implementation group were starting to approximate the performance of their average achieving peers. Summarizing their findings, the authors explained the "results confirm the importance of implementing a program with high integrity in order to maximize program effectiveness. . . Data clearly show that schools

that implemented the IS-Team process at high levels consistently performed better over time" (p. 180). Based on their data, the authors further concluded that minimal implementation of a prereferral problem solving model did not appear to result in outcomes which were any better than was traditionally done.

This research by Kovaleski et al. (1999) is important because of its breadth and depth and because it is one of the only studies that includes a direct measure of student achievement and growth. And, although the authors did not directly observe the problem solving meetings, they were able to anecdotally identify some basic features that appear to influence the level of implementation. Specifically, they noted that certain team characteristics (e.g., broad participation, egalitarian group norms and procedures, effective logistics), strong principal leadership, extensive up-front and on-going data collection, and the involvement of a support teacher to help implement and modify the interventions appeared to be necessities.

Research by Rock and Zigmond (2001) investigating the IS-Team model over a two-year period provides additional support for the conclusion that the mere existence of a prereferral problem solving process in a school does not automatically translate into positive outcomes. Their research involved analyzing descriptive data from 140 students who were referred to IS-Teams. The authors found promising decreases in rates of special education referral, special education placement, and retention during the first year. However, by the end of the second year, almost 60% of the students who were originally referred had been found eligible for special education services and 44% of the students had been retained. It was also determined that the reason for referral seemed to

influence the outcome; with students exhibiting behavioral concerns fairing better than those who were referred for academic reasons.

The Collaborative Action Process

Historical and philosophical context. The Collaborative Action Process (CAP) is the prereferral problem solving process developed and used by one school district located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The original impetus for the development of this program was a decree from the school district's superintendent, titled "Our Call to Action: Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, Because All Children Matter". He stated:

> We have a challenge before us. Student achievement needs to be improved for all students and the gap in student performance by race and ethnicity needs to be closed. We are committed to using an inclusive, collaborative process to design an effective response to this challenge (Montgomery County Public Schools [MCPS], 1999, p. 3).

CAP became one of the components involved in the district's initiative to address the challenges that accompany increasing diversity by asking the question "Why are some children not successful and what can we do about it?" (MCPS, 2002, p. 4).

The Superintendent's plan was also designed specifically to respond to concerns identified by the U.S. Department of Education's, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) regarding the need to reduce the overrepresentation of minority students in special education (MCPS, 2002). Administrators from the school district and OCR developed a partnership agreement to ensure the district consistently:

> ... provide equal access to public education and promotes efforts toward high achievement for all students. . . and that disproportionality does not result from disparate treatment of the affected students by the district's special education identification, evaluation, and placement procedures or practices (p. 8).

A keystone of this agreement was the requirement that a prereferral problem solving model be developed, implemented, and evaluated (MCPS, 2002).

For the past twenty years, schools within the district used a process called the Educational Management Team (EMT) to address the concerns of students who were experiencing difficulty in the classroom (MCPS, 2002). The EMT process involved a multidisciplinary group of professionals using a two-staged model; problem identification and intervention implementation. However, this approach was found to not be very effective in developing prevention oriented or early-intervention activities. It did not incorporate the practices, roles, and functions that facilitate effective teams, as there was an over-reliance on specialists to develop interventions. Additionally, recommendations made by the EMT frequently involved out-of-class supports or a formal referral for special education services. The CAP was specifically designed to address these concerns and incorporate new federal and state regulations requiring extensive intervention before a student is referred for a special education evaluation (MCPS, 2000).

The CAP has seven basic assumptions which serve as the foundation for the model (MCPS, 2002). First, it is believed that all students can learn and when they are not learning, it is the responsibility of educators to analyze what might be inhibiting their academic achievement and target intervention(s) appropriately. Second, the process of learning is viewed as a unique interaction between the student and the instructional

environment. Consequently, problem solving should analyze and address factors such as classroom features, instructional methods, curricular demands, individual student and teacher characteristics, home and school and community issues, social skills, and peer-peer and peer-adult interactions. Third, because many variables influence learning, assessment needs to be comprehensive and target multiple factors involving the student, the teacher, the classroom, and the home and community.

Fourth, participation in the CAP should lead to implementation of situation-specific interventions that improve student achievement. Fifth, services provided with the CAP are need based, rather than eligibility driven and should be delivered primarily in the general education setting. In other words, rather than seeking to find a student eligible for special education services, the CAP identifies the necessary support based on a presenting problem. Sixth, assessments should be functionally linked to intervention, rather than being global in nature. Specific questions related to the student's concerns are developed and then data collection takes place in the context where the problem is occurring. Finally, teacher collaboration is essential with the CAP and participation in the process should help develop professional skills related to analyzing a problem, designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions.

Team structure. The CAP uses a team of school-based educators to engage in the problem solving process with general education teachers (MCPS, 2002). Members on the team may include: counselors, special educators, speech pathologists, school psychologists, reading specialists, staff development specialists, administrators, and behavioral support staff. One of those individuals serves as the 'CAP coach' and assumes responsibility for facilitating the problem solving steps, ensuring the proper

paperwork is completed, and evaluating the process. Some schools have multiple CAP teams, meaning each grade-level has a team and there is also a building-wide team, whereas others have only building level teams. Each team meets approximately two or three times a month to discuss new referrals and monitor the progress of on-going cases.

Problem solving model. The problem solving model embedded in the CAP involves four steps: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention planning and implementation, and plan monitoring and evaluation (MCPS, 2002). The over-arching philosophy is to describe and understand, rather than label behavior. The first step, Problem Identification, helps the teacher and team clarify the problem by collecting all pertinent information. This might be from permanent records, teachers, parents, or independent observers. The goal is to generate desired behaviors or academic performance levels. The referring teacher is expected to complete the "CAP Student Referral and Problem Identification Profile" form in preparation for this step. The information is then discussed with the team. The CAP forms can be found in Appendix A.

The second step, Problem Analysis, is guided by the "CAP Student Problem Analysis Worksheet" and involves investigating why there is a discrepancy between desired and actual performance (MCPS, 2002). The focus is on determining whether the student's difficulties are the result of a skill deficit (i.e., the student can't do it) or a performance deficit (i.e., the student won't do it). Consideration is given to the duration, intensity, and frequency of the problem and involves examining instructional and curricular factors, teacher and teaching factors, student factors, school environmental factors, and home and community factors. Data are gathered using multiple methods

which may include, curriculum-based assessment, behavioral rating scales, portfolio reviews, classroom observations, review of records, and parent, teacher, and student interviews.

The third step, Intervention Planning and Implementation, focuses on answering the question "What can be done to remove barriers to learning and promote desired behaviors and / or promote academic levels of performance?" (MCPS, 2002, p. 22). The team collaborates to propose interventions that specifically target the student's concerns, seeking to draw on strategies that are empirically proven, easy to monitor, conducive to the regular classroom routine, and feasible for the teacher to implement. During this stage, the "CAP Student Intervention Plan" is written, outlining the specific strategies that are implemented, the person(s) responsible for each aspect of the plan, the criteria for success, and evaluation methods.

The final step in the CAP problem solving model is Plan Monitoring and Evaluation, and is guided by the "CAP Student Intervention Plan Evaluation" form (MCPS, 2002). During this step, the team documents student progress in the targeted area(s), and plans for maintenance and generalization of the gains. If a student did not respond positively to an intervention plan, the team re-visits the problem analysis and intervention planning stages, and makes appropriate changes and modifications to the intervention plan. If improvements are still not seen, the case may be referred to the building level CAP team or to the IEP screening committee. However, this is only done "in severe cases when an educational disability is suspected and the problems are consistently resistant to targeted and comprehensive general education interventions that are implemented as designed" (MCPS, 2002, p. 24).

Available data. In accordance with the OCR partnership, the school district agreed to collect evaluation data on the impact of the CAP (MCPS, 2002). Specifically, data were internally collected for the six schools who voluntarily piloted the program during the 2002-2003 school year in the following categories: total referrals to grade level CAP teams, total cases resolved at the grade level CAP teams, total referrals to building level CAP teams, total cases resolved at building level CAP teams, total referrals that went to screening for special education, and total numbers of students who were found eligible for special education.

The district reported that among the six schools, 261 referrals were made to grade level CAP teams, with 162 (62%) of those being successfully resolved. Ninety-nine cases were referred to building level CAP teams, with 51 (52%) of those being successfully resolved. They indicated that 34 students were referred for special education screening, with 24 (70.6%) of those students eventually being found eligible for services.

At Pleasant Valley Elementary, the district reported that 41 cases were referred to grade level teams, with 39 of those being reported as successfully resolved. Two cases were referred to the building level CAP team, with neither being resolved. Two students were reported as being referred for special education screening, with neither of those being found eligible.

However, feedback from the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary suggested that the district's reported data should be considered with some caution. They indicated that approximately 100 students were referred to grade level CAP teams during the year. The building level CAP team had at least 20 referrals, many of which were characterized as being successfully resolved. According to the special education teachers at Pleasant

Valley, two students were coded as being eligible for special education services during the 2002-2003 school year. This data obviously differs from what the district reported. The district data is also somewhat difficult to interpret because the CAP operates differently in each school with some using the grade level teams extensively, and others funneling the majority of referrals to the building level teams. Additionally, the lack of data from non-CAP schools makes comparisons impossible.

In this chapter, literature related to the prereferral problem solving process was reviewed. Specifically, the rationale for prereferral problem solving was outlined, the steps used in a “Best Practices” model were described, and relevant evaluation research was presented. The chapter concluded with a description of the philosophy, procedures, and outcomes of the CAP. The methodology for this study is described in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. First, an overview of the qualitative design is offered. Next, the guiding research questions and sub-questions are presented and discussed. Next, the site and participant selection process and a description about the chosen school and team is offered. Then, researcher roles and bias, site entry, and relevant ethics are reviewed. Next, the specific research strategies and data analysis techniques are described. Finally, reliability and validity issues that impacted this study are discussed.

Design of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative research design. Qualitative methodology is characterized by being naturalistic, meaning that the investigation is carried out in 'real-world' settings, rather than under manipulated or controlled conditions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). With qualitative research, the specific settings and individuals being studied are most often purposefully selected to best achieve the goals of the research (Isaac & Michael, 1997). The researcher is seen as the primary instrument for data collection, which allows his or her tacit knowledge and intuition to detect the subtleties of human behavior that are being studied (Anthanasious et al., 2002). The process of data collection and analysis is inductive, flexible, and recursive, with emerging themes and participants' perspectives being used to inform and modify the design and direction of the research. From a qualitative study, one can expect rich, thick descriptions that provide ideographic understandings about a particular phenomenon or environment, as well as the meaning it creates for the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Isaac & Michael, 1997).

Qualitative research. Based on the recommendations that emerged from the review of the literature relating to prereferral problem solving, the initial goal of this study was to document the processes, practices, and perceptions of an exemplary team. However, as often happens with qualitative research, early themes emerging from the collected data indicated that the focus of this study would need modification. Whereas the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School had been characterized by both school personnel and district administrators as extremely successful during the 2002-2003 school year, in the fall of 2003 it was questionable whether the prereferral problem solving process would even be implemented at the school during the 2003-2004 school year. Specifically, while grade-level CAP teams were expected to meet approximately every two weeks, by the end of October not one team had yet convened. Given that status, it was questionable whether this study could be continued at that school.

However, as described in Chapter Four, the staff and administration at Pleasant Valley decided that despite changes in support (i.e., loss of money to provide release time for teachers to meet during the day and the reduction of 1.5 special education positions) from the district which they perceived as detrimental to the implementation of the CAP, they remained committed to the goals of prereferral problem solving, and would do their best to continue with the process. Within that context, it was decided that research related to implementation of the CAP at this school was still viable; in fact, many have purported that exploration of the challenges associated with program implementation is, itself, indispensable (Meyers, 2002). This point was poignantly made by Nastasi (2002), who explained “researchers seldom report on what went wrong in a project. . .

inconsistencies in implementation are viewed as threats to validity rather than evidence of natural occurrences. Thus, practitioners find themselves without sufficient knowledge for addressing potential barriers" (p. 219). She further summarized that "we often learn more from what went wrong than from what worked well" (p. 222).

In response to the changes in implementation of the CAP, the focus and intent of this study were modified accordingly. It evolved to become the documentation of a team and school's experience with prereferral problem solving after reductions were made in the amount of money and personnel available to support implementation of the process. Corresponding modifications in research strategies are discussed later in this chapter.

Qualitative research is particularly well suited to help understand prereferral problem solving because the process takes place in unique school settings where there are a plethora of factors and variables influencing the process and its outcomes (Welch et al., 1999). Attempting to experimentally control these variables for a quantitative study has been noted to be nearly impossible, and doing so potentially diminishes the nuances that appear to influence the process (Anthanasious et al., 2002; Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997). In contrast, qualitative techniques can help elucidate the characteristics and conditions associated with implementation in a school setting (Nastasi, 2002).

For example, many of the studies previously investigating prereferral problem solving have failed to document the actual processes used within the school (Welch et al., 1999). Teams and participants report that they engaged in problem solving, but there is little explanation of what was actually involved and the fidelity of the model used remains unknown. Given the consistent finding that high levels of implementation appear to influence outcomes, understanding levels of fidelity, as well as the factors

which serve to promote or inhibit implementation levels appears critical (Telzrow et al., 2000; Kovaleski et al., 1999). Qualitative methodology was specifically selected for this study to help illuminate these factors.

Modified analytic induction. The specific qualitative design chosen for this investigation was a case study using modified analytic induction. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), this method is used to investigate a particular problem, issue, or situation. The goal is to develop a descriptive model based on the data collected. Specific questions are the focus of the research, and then data seeking to confirm or disprove the model is sought. The initial model of prereferral problem solving process at Pleasant Valley Elementary School was developed using the literature provided by the district, conversations with staff members, and informal observations of the CAP at the school during the 2002-2003 school year.

Based on a synthesis of this information, it was anticipated that Pleasant Valley Elementary would implement the CAP essentially in accordance with the district's framework, as described in Chapter Two. There would be both building and grade-level CAP teams operating within the school, with the latter expected to meet on a regular basis to discuss teacher or parent initiated concerns. The district's CAP forms would be used to guide the team through the four stages of prereferral problem solving. Student intervention plans would be developed, monitored, and evaluated by the team, with the majority of strategies being implemented by the student's teacher in the general education setting. Where appropriate, however, remedial programs using a small-group format may also be recommended.

Given the modified analytic induction paradigm, collecting data to verify or disprove this hypothesized model which closely mirrored the district's implementation expectations became the initial goal as this study commenced. As themes emerged, data collection then focused on further understanding that topic. The specific themes are discussed in Chapter Four, Five, Six and Seven, but the following description provides an example to illustrate the recursive data collection process. One of the first themes to emerge was the teachers' perception that changes in support (i.e., loss of time and personnel) from the school district were detrimental to the implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary. As this emerged, additional data were sought to verify or counter this perception and then adjust the developing model. Similarly, as teachers' repeatedly opined how early intervention services should be provided by staff other than themselves, data to further clarify views about inclusion was gathered and incorporated into the evolving model.

The flexibility of qualitative research also allowed the research strategies to be expanded, as appropriate. Based on the emerging themes and unanticipated changes in implementation, additional data related to implementation of the CAP at other schools were collected to help identify whether the experiences at Pleasant Valley were unique. Elaboration on the specifics of these data sources is provided later in this chapter, and are mentioned here to illustrate the beneficial aspects of qualitative methodology in this study.

Guiding Research Questions

Within the modified analytic approach, research questions are used as the foundation to develop a model or theory. The expectation is that questions which

initially guide the study may need to be modified or redefined to either broaden or narrow the scope of the model that emerges through the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Based on the literature review presented in the previous chapter, initial research questions were developed to capture teachers' experiences and perceptions of the CAP. The following concepts were specifically targeted: beliefs and expectations related to the CAP (e.g., Do teachers feel participation in the CAP is professionally fulfilling?), the impact of student characteristics (e.g., What influence do student characteristics have on intervention integrity?), logistical implementation of the CAP (e.g., How does the team implement the problem solving stages?), the influence of participation on teacher behavior (e.g., Do teachers use strategies recommended through the CAP with other students in the classroom?), administrative influences (e.g., What is the role of the principal with the CAP?), and student outcomes (e.g., How does the CAP influence students' experiences in the classroom?).

As anticipated, modification to the initial research questions was necessary, and appropriate, with this study. As the data began to suggest that implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year differed significantly from what was expected, the initial research questions were adapted to more accurately inform the evolving model. Specifically, questions related to administrative influences became increasingly salient and those designed to investigate student outcomes became less important since minimal adherence to the CAP model appeared to be resulting in little or no impact for students. The wording of the research questions was also modified to more precisely capture potential differences in the CAP between the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years since that comparison was omnipresent in the data. Additionally, questions

about the experiences of other elementary schools implementing the CAP were added to further illuminate the larger context of the district. The final questions and sub-questions which guided data collection were:

1.) How is the CAP implemented at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

1a) How does the second grade CAP team implement the problem solving model?

What, if any, differences related to implementation of the problem solving model are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

1b) How is student progress monitored? What, if any, differences related to how student progress is monitored are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

1c) How are student outcomes measured? What, if any, differences related to how student outcomes are measured are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

1d) How does the actual implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary differ from the proposed district model /framework? What, if any, differences related to implementation compared to the district's model are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

2.) What is the nature, severity, and impact of the characteristics / referral concerns of students who are discussed by the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

2a) What is the nature and severity of the concerns related to students who are referred to the CAP team? What, if any, differences related to the nature and severity of

the concerns of referred students are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

2b) How do the characteristics of students who are referred to the CAP team compare with other students in the same grade level? What, if any, differences related to characteristics of referred students are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

2c) What impact do referral concerns have on the process and outcomes of the CAP? What, if any, differences related to the impact of referral concerns on the process and outcomes of the CAP are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

3.) What, if any, influence does the CAP have upon students' experiences at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

3a) How does the CAP influence students' experience in the general education classroom? What, if any, differences related to how the CAP influences students' experience in the general education classroom are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

3b) How does the CAP influence students' experience outside the general education classroom? What, if any, differences related to how the CAP influences students' experience outside the general education classroom, are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

3c) How does the CAP impact special education referral, testing, and placement rates? What, if any, differences related to how the CAP impacts special education

referral, testing, and placement are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

4.) How does participation in the CAP influence the behavior of school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

4a) According to school professionals, what, if any, impact does participation in the CAP have on teacher behavior in the classroom? What, if any, differences related to the impact of participation in the CAP on teacher behavior are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

4b) How does participation in the CAP impact the roles of general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals? What, if any, differences related to the impact the CAP has on the roles of general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

4c) How does participation in the CAP impact collaboration among the school professionals? What, if any, differences related to the impact of the CAP on collaboration are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

5.) What are school professionals' beliefs and expectations related to the process and outcomes of the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

5a) According to school professionals, what knowledge and skills are needed for participation in the CAP? Of the identified knowledge and skills, in which areas do school professionals feel confident and which areas do school professionals feel they need additional training?

5b) According to school professionals, what contextual factors and support are needed for participation in the CAP? Which of these factors and forms of support are evident in the school? What, if any, differences related to contextual factors and support are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 year with the 2002-2003 school year?

5c) According to school professionals, does the CAP facilitate productive problem solving and educational planning/servicing related to the referred student(s)? What, if any, differences related to school professionals' opinions about whether CAP facilitates productive problem solving and educational planning/servicing are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

6.) What role(s) do administrative forces have with the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School?

6a) What is the role of the principal in the CAP? What, if any, differences related to the role of the principal in the CAP are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

6b) How does the principal influence the CAP? What, if any, differences related to the principal's influence with the CAP are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

6c) What influence do district level philosophies, decisions, and policies have on the CAP? What, if any, differences related to the influence of district level philosophies, decisions, and policies on the CAP are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

6d) What influence do state / federal level philosophies, decisions, and policies have on the CAP? What, if any, differences related to the influence of state / federal

level philosophies, decisions, and policies on the CAP are evident when comparing the 2003-2004 school year with the 2002-2003 school year?

7.) What experiences have other elementary schools within the district had with the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year?

7a) How is the CAP interpreted / perceived at other elementary schools during the 2003-2004 school year?

7b) How have other elementary schools implemented the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year?

7c) What influence have administrative forces had on the CAP at other elementary schools during the 2003-2004 school year?

Site Selection

Selection process. The school for this study was purposefully selected based on the recommendations made by researchers such as Rock and Zigmond (2001) to learn from those who are successfully implementing prereferral problem solving. This selection was accomplished by discussing the goals of this research with Mark Kennedy, the district-level administrator who coordinated the CAP and asking that he identify a school that exemplified successful implementation. Mr. Kennedy recommended Pleasant Valley Elementary because he believed the school had excellent administrative support for the CAP, genuine staff commitment to the philosophy of prereferral intervention, skilled teachers, high levels of process fidelity, and impressive student outcomes as evidenced by dramatic reductions in special education referral and placement rates. Based on that nomination, a meeting was held with the principal of Pleasant Valley (Donna McHenry) in the Spring of 2003 to discuss the goals and logistics of the study.

Ms. McHenry concurred with Mr. Kennedy's assessment that Pleasant Valley was successfully implementing the CAP and agreed to participate.

Selected school. Pleasant Valley Elementary School was part of a large school district located just outside a major metropolitan city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The school had approximately 470 students in grades K-5, as well as a Head Start (pre-kindergarten) program serving another 15 children. Eighty-five percent of the students were Caucasian, seven percent were Hispanic, six percent were African American, and two percent were Asian. Approximately 17% of the students were eligible for free or reduced meals, and 10.5% of the students received special education services.

Pleasant Valley had one building administrator, one counselor, two full time special education teachers, one staff development specialist, one reading specialist, and one speech pathologist. There were 20 general education teachers, and four paraprofessionals. The average class size in grades one and two was 25.7 students and in grades three to five was 24.9 students. The school shared a school psychologist with the middle school and high school that were part of the same feeder pattern.

Pleasant Valley Elementary School served a somewhat unique community within the school district. Geographically, it was located in the far northwest corner of the county and considered by many to be an 'anomaly' because it retained a rural feel that was rare in the rest of the region. It was characterized by winding country roads and majestically rolling hills speckled with horse farms and crop fields. The community had one stop sign at the center of town, and no traffic lights. Access to the town was achieved by driving approximately ten minutes from the nearest populated area in the

county. As Ms. McHenry jokingly commented, “If someone ends up out here by accident, it’s because they are really, really, really lost.”

According to the Pleasant Valley’s Principal, the school’s student population was dominated by students from families best characterized as blue-collar or working class, with many children being raised on the farms where their parents were laborers. Recently, the upper-middle class population in the community had been growing, as evidenced by extensive construction of large modern homes in planned developments. However, even with this demographic shift, Pleasant Valley Elementary was still viewed very much as a neighborhood school where all students and parents were genuinely and warmly welcomed. On any given day during this study, the visitor’s ‘sign in’ log contained a full page of names, as parents frequently came in to spend time in classrooms, in the library, or doing other tasks around the building. In the afternoons, there were multiple extra-curricular activities that occurred at the school, as well as groups of neighborhood children who came back to enjoy the playground equipment.

Pleasant Valley Elementary used what the district called a home-school inclusion model to provide special education instruction. This meant that the majority of the academic and behavioral support for students with Individual Education Plans was provided by the special education teachers co-teaching in general education classrooms. Additional resource room instruction was then given to those students who required more intensive support.

When the school district first introduced the CAP, all principals were provided with a brief overview of the district’s newly developed prereferral problem solving process. Participation was voluntary, but, according to the principal at Pleasant Valley,

the district provided additional staff support as an incentive to the schools opting to pilot the program during the 2001-2002 school year. Pleasant Valley Elementary School was one of six (out of 125) schools that agreed to pilot the CAP, primarily because the principal felt it would be another way for her to promote inclusion and provide early intervention support to students, without requiring special education classification.

Participant Selection

Selection process. Once Pleasant Valley Elementary was identified as an appropriate school for this study, a grade-level CAP team was selected. Again, because the goal of this study was to develop a model describing successful implementation of a prereferral problem solving process, a team that met those criteria needed to be identified. This was accomplished by convening a meeting with the building level CAP team at Pleasant Valley. Participating in this meeting were the two special education teachers, the speech-language pathologist, the staff development teacher, the counselor, the principal, and the school psychologist. It was determined that this group would be best suited to select a team because each person had served as a member of the building level CAP team during the 2002-2003 school year and, with the exception of the principal, as a coach for a grade-level CAP team. Consequently, these individuals had the unique perspective of participating in problem solving at the grade-level and observing how teachers presented a CAP referral to the building level team.

An overview of the study was presented to this group, with particular emphasis being placed on describing that the goal was to learn more about successful implementation of prereferral problem solving. The group dialogued approximately fifteen minutes about issues such as organization of meetings, consistency with follow

through, intervention skill level, and philosophical orientation related to the CAP. Based on that discussion, a unanimous decision was reached that the second grade team would be the best choice for this study.

Selected team. The selected second grade team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School consisted of four teachers. A detailed description of each participant is offered in Chapter Four. Here, an overview is provided. The team leader, Kay Baden, along with two other teachers, Jacqueline Shoemaker and Gail Sullivan, had classes consisting of only second grade students. One other teacher, Susan Pollock, had a class comprised of equal numbers of first and second grade students. This group of students, referred to as the 'one-two-combo' within the school, were specifically selected and grouped together because they were self-directed learners demonstrating reading and math abilities at or above grade level. As is discussed in Chapter Four, although the principal of Pleasant Valley Elementary considered Susan Pollock a member of the second grade team, Ms. Pollock did not concur with that characterization. Instead, she indicated, she was a "team of one".

The 2003-2004 school year represented the first time that the three (or four, if you include Ms. Pollock) second grade teachers worked together as a team. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Pollock and Ms. Baden taught second grade together, but Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan were assigned to first grade. Ms. Baden's position as team leader was also a new experience for her. This designation meant that she was responsible for coordinating meetings and activities for her grade-level, and that she served on the building level Instructional Leadership Team (ILT).

Researcher Biases and Role

Because the qualitative researcher is intimately involved with data collection and analysis, acknowledging and understanding his or her potential influence is essential (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). One important consideration of potential bias was that during the year of this study, I was employed by school district as a pupil personnel worker, with Pleasant Valley Elementary being one of my assigned schools. In this role, it was my responsibility to support the students and staff of the school when there were concerns about issues such as truancy or suspected abuse and neglect. Occasionally, I would be asked to join the building level CAP team to provide information to parents or help link them with community resources. I did not participate in the grade level CAP meetings. I would probably best be characterized as a 'tangential' person to the majority of the staff in the building.

Being known by the staff where one is doing research had potential limitations as well as potential benefits. One limitation was that participants' behavior during meeting observations and their responses during an interview were potentially influenced because of our familiarity. However, my role as a pupil personnel worker at Pleasant Valley Elementary never involved teacher evaluation, but rather was seen as being supportive of the staff and students, consequently reducing the risk that participants modified their behavior or censored their responses. This was evidenced during the second CAP meeting when one of the special education teachers noticed the tape recorder sitting on the table after arriving a little late. Initially, he became nervous because he thought their discussion was being recorded by a parent. However, Ms. Baden reminded him that it was "only for Tanya's paper," and the team did not appear to lose a beat. Additionally,

during the interviews, participants were reassured that the purpose of this study was to gain understanding, rather than evaluate performance.

Instead of serving to inhibit responses, the pre-existing professional relationship I had with the staff at Pleasant Valley appeared to validate my genuine interest in promoting the success of the students and the school. For example, following our initial interview, Ms. Sullivan noted that she was excited to have me documenting the team's experiences, explaining that if "anyone can let them know how we're struggling out here, it will be you."

Another consideration of potential bias was my past experience as a special education teacher. Specifically, I worked for four years in a middle school, providing inclusive special education services to students with mild to moderate academic and behavioral difficulties. For some students, this inclusive instruction proved very successful; with others it was less so. But, I philosophically believe in effective inclusion. Because it's impossible to conduct value-free research, acknowledging my support of inclusion, and, by association, prereferral problem solving was important (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). During my years as a middle school teacher, I did not directly observe implementation of a prereferral problem solving process. My first direct experience occurred when I observed various CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year. Based on those observations, I was optimistic about the potential benefits of prereferral problem solving, and supported implementation of the process. Within that context, specific measures were taken to reduce the chance that my personal bias influenced the data collection or data analysis in this study. These

included the triangulation of data sources, negative case analysis, peer debriefing, and member checks. An elaboration of each strategy is offered later in this chapter.

Because one of the goals of this study was to observe the CAP as it naturally occurred at Pleasant Valley, I did not directly participate in the CAP meetings. Rather, my role was to observe the process as unobtrusively as possible. Acknowledging that my very presence could have some effect on the process and participants' behavior, I followed suggestions made by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), and took special care to be discrete and respectful of the participants. Before each meeting, I briefly reviewed my purpose for being there and reminded each team member that participation in the study was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time if he or she felt uncomfortable.

Site Entry

Gaining entry to Pleasant Valley Elementary was facilitated by the fact that I was already familiar with the school staff. Consequently, my initial task was not the traditional one of making introductions and earning respect. Instead, it became the need to 're-introduce' myself in a new role as a researcher. This first occurred during the meeting of the building level CAP team where I sought the nomination of the team that would serve as the focus for this study. During this meeting, I outlined the context of the study and explained that the direct level of involvement for members of the building level CAP team included participating in an interview.

Indirectly, they would be involved because I would be attending CAP-related meetings and events where they may also be present. I explained that the identities of all team members, students, and other school district staff discussed in this study would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I reviewed the guidelines associated with

informed consent, emphasized that everyone had the right to refuse participation or to withdraw permission at any time. All members of the building level team agreed to participate and maintained participation throughout the year.

Ethics

In addition to ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent of participants, there are other ethical considerations that guided this study. For example, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) noted how the participants should not be exposed to any risks which may outweigh the benefits of the research. In this study, there were no significant risks, but many potential benefits in terms of learning how to maximize the positive impact of prereferral problem solving within a school.

I was keenly aware of the need to handle all interpersonal aspects of this research with care and sensitivity and to ensure that all participants were treated with respect. For example, culturally congruent pseudonames were carefully selected with input from each participant. Additionally, input and feedback from participants was actively sought through frequent conversations where we dialogued to see if my developing perceptions were consistent with theirs. I offered my emerging understandings to seek active feedback supporting or disagreeing with these ideas such that additional data could then be sought. Member checks (as discussed later in this chapter) were also conducted to ensure that interpretations made were a valid reflection of participants' experiences.

Research Strategies

This study involved multiple research strategies to collect data. These included interviews, meeting observations and recordings, demographic information sheets,

permanent products and artifacts, reviews of student records, contact summary sheets, and field notes. A summary of the data sources can be found in Appendix B.

Interviews. All interviews conducted for this study were audio taped and followed a semi-structured format using an interview protocol. Broad topical questions were posed, and then follow-up dialogue occurred based on the information offered by the interviewee. The interview protocols can be found in Appendixes C1-C5. Before all interviews began, the purpose of the interview and informed consent were reviewed and permission to audiotape the interview was obtained. Each interview was conducted by me, and lasted approximately one hour. As discussed later in this chapter, field notes reflecting on the experience were written immediately following each interview.

Upon completion of an interview, the audio tape was labeled by date and context and maintained in a secured file cabinet. All of the audio tapes from the interviews were transcribed verbatim by me, using the format suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Transcripts were headed with the school's pseudonym, context of the interaction (e.g., Initial Interview), participants, date, time, and any other pertinent information. Speakers were identified using their initials before the text, and a new line was used every time there was a new speaker. A sample interview transcript can be found in Appendix D.

Upon completion, every interview transcript was checked by a retired educational professional, not associated with this study. Her job was to identify any (and all) cases where the transcript did not identically reflect the dialogue on the audio tape. There were no instances where significant errors were found. In the few situations where discrepancies were noted (e.g., the absence of an "uh-huh"), the tapes were reviewed and appropriate corrections were made to the transcripts.

Initial interviews were conducted with the individuals who were anticipated to comprise the second grade CAP team before any CAP meetings were held. Specifically, this included the four second grade teachers and the special education teacher who was assigned to be the coach for that team. It was expected that follow-up interviews would also be conducted with these individuals to gain their perspective of the year. However, for reasons that are explained in the next section of this chapter, the second grade CAP team ended up including only three second grade teachers. Thus, second interviews were only conducted with these teachers.

To incorporate the recommendation that our understanding of collaborative problem solving be broadened to include the perspectives of multiple school personnel (Bahr, 1994; Costas et al., 2001; Knoff & Batsche, 1995), interviews were also conducted with additional staff members involved with the CAP at Pleasant Valley, but not on the second grade team. Specifically interviewed were: the principal, the staff development teacher, the special education teacher not on the second grade CAP team, the ESOL teacher (who was a special education teacher during the 2002-2003 school year, but had to be reassigned when that position was eliminated), the counselor, the speech language pathologist, and the school psychologist. These individuals were selected because each had served as a member of the building level CAP team, and were grade-level CAP coaches during the 2002-2003 school year.

When it became evident that implementation of the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year was going to be dramatically different than it was during the 2002-2003 school year, it became beneficial to seek additional perspectives related to the implementation of the CAP at other schools within the same district. Specifically,

Student Services Staff for all the CAP schools in the same field office region who were implementing the CAP were contacted to find out whether they would be willing to be interviewed about their experiences with implementation of the process. These individuals were selected because they serve as liaisons between the district-level CAP administrators and the schools.

A total of eight individuals were identified and contacted to seek participation. Six agreed to be interviewed, and the other two indicated they did not have time for an oral interview, but provided written responses to the interview questions. Three CAP facilitators for the district also agreed to provide written responses to the interview questions. Additionally, the school district's director of psychological services, who also was the coordinator and supervisor for the CAP agreed to be interviewed.

Meeting observations and recordings. Because inclusion of direct observations of the prereferral problem solving is one of the most frequently cited recommendations to advance our understanding of the process, each second grade CAP meeting was audiotaped and directly observed by me (Bahr et al., 1999; Telzrow et al., 2000; Welch et al., 1999). Based on the implementation of the CAP model during the 2002-2003 school year, it was anticipated that the team would meet approximately every two weeks. However, as discussed further in Chapter Four, the second grade CAP team convened only three times between September and June. Their first meeting lasted approximately two hours, and the subsequent meetings lasted approximately an hour and a half. During meeting observations, specific attention was paid to group dynamics as well as the fidelity of the problem solving model, since both were hypothesized to impact outcomes

of prereferral problem solving. Observation notes were discreetly written during the meeting, and field notes were completed immediately thereafter.

The transcription procedures used with the CAP meetings were very similar to those used with the interviews. After each meeting, the audio tape was labeled by date and context (e.g., second grade CAP Meeting #1) and maintained in a secured file cabinet. The tape was then transcribed verbatim, by me. Transcripts were headed with the school's pseudonym, context, participants, date, time, and any other pertinent information. Appendix E contains an example of a meeting transcript. Once completed, the transcript was then checked for accuracy by the same retired educator who checked the interview transcripts, and any discrepancies were noted. A few minor errors were found and corrected to reflect the dialogue as accurately as possible. There were three instances during the CAP meetings where brief pieces of dialogue were not able to be accurately recounted on the audio tapes because multiple conversations were occurring at one time. In these situations, 'inaudible' was noted in the transcript.

Meeting probes. To gain additional information about team members' perceptions of the CAP, participants were asked to respond to three written questions at the conclusion of each meeting. Appendix F contains a meeting probe. The premise being that during the meeting, participants might not spontaneously share their thoughts and feelings with one another, but gaining that understanding could provide insight about their behavior and interpretation of the CAP. After each CAP meeting, all participants completed meeting probes.

Demographic information sheets. Prior to participating in the initial interview, each second grade CAP team member was asked to complete a demographic information

sheet to provide background information. This technique was specifically recommended by Athanasious et al. (2002) as an efficient way to gather basic information. All five individuals expected to be members of the second grade CAP team completed the demographic information sheet.

Permanent products and artifacts. In addition to collecting data through observations and interviews, permanent products corresponding to the CAP were reviewed. These included the CAP forms which were completed by the teachers and the summary sheet that was maintained during each of the CAP meetings. Documents were reviewed for completion, as well as for content. Specific attention was given to whether the recorded information corresponded to the problem solving process, or if it was disparate with the discussion that actually occurred. For example, after each second grade CAP meeting, the team's meeting log was compared with the meeting transcript to verify that the written documentation was an accurate reflection of the meeting dialogue (e.g., summary of the main discussion points, inclusion of all students discussed, notation of all recommended interventions).

Evidence of data collection and monitoring of CAP interventions was also sought since this has been shown to be an area of difficulty for prereferral problem solving teams (e.g., Levinsohn, 2000). Additionally, artifacts related to the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary were collected throughout the year. These included documents relating to implementation during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 (e.g. agendas, guidelines, multiple iterations of the CAP forms), correspondence between the school staff and the district CAP facilitators, relevant mailings sent to parents, and literature published about district assessments and curriculum standards. Some items were voluntarily and spontaneously

given to me during the course of the year, as people felt they might offer some insight into understanding the culture and status of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Others were collected at meetings I attended related to the CAP.

Review of student records and data. The school records of students discussed by the second grade CAP team were reviewed for pertinent information about the referral concern and previous intervention(s). Specifically, this included demographic information, report card grades and comments, official reading achievement levels that were recorded in September and June of each school year, standardized test scores in reading and math on the Terranova Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) administered in April 2004, and narrative information related to prior and current educational intervention services (e.g., previous CAP information, 504 plans). This information was synthesized with data from the 2003-2004 school year and an educational history summary was compiled for each student. A sample can be found in Appendix G.

Contact summary sheets and field notes. Two additional sources of data, contact summary sheets and field notes were maintained throughout this study. For each observation, interview, or other planned or unplanned discussion related to the CAP, a contact summary sheet was completed. Adapted from that used by Mamlin and Harris (1998), the contact summary sheet summarized the interaction and helped maintain focus on the research questions. A sample contact summary sheet can be found in Appendix H.

Field notes were also maintained in conjunction with each observation, interview, or other interaction. Specifically, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) noted how:

> The tape recorder misses the sights, smells, impressions, and extra remarks. . . field notes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data (p. 108).

Two forms of field notes were maintained throughout the course of this study. First, there were those completed in response to a particular event (e.g., interview, observation, meeting). Kept in conjunction with the contact sheets, these field notes were completed as soon as possible after each interaction, so thoughts about the situation were as precise as possible. Field notes contained a brief description of the event, as well as reflections about connections to emerging themes, concerns that might have been raised, and relationships to other data.

Throughout the year, a second set of field notes in the form of a summarizing analytic journal was also maintained. These notes were more 'stream-of-conscience' in nature, and consisted of general reactions, inferences, emerging thoughts and questions, and perceptions of what was happening at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Also included were on-going reflections about the process of data collection and analysis. An example of field notes from this study can be found in Appendix I.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in qualitative research is one that is ongoing, recursive, and flexible. The goal is to integrate and synthesize the emerging themes, seek additional clarification to further support or challenge the findings, and eventually distill meaning from the data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). There are many different

views about the proper way to undertake this process. Some believe analysis should be extremely systematic and rigid (e.g., Anderson, 1998). Others recommend a much less structured approach. For example, Wolcott (1994) suggested that the researcher just "Tell the story. Then tell how that happened to be the way you told it." (p. 16).

The guidelines for data analysis suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (1998) were used for this study. Their recommendations, perhaps best characterized as representing a compromise between extremely structured and completely unsystematic approaches, involve strategies for analysis while in the field, as well as after data collection has been completed. The following is a description of the process used for data analysis in this study. It should be noted, however, this linear description of analysis simplifies what was actually a continually recursive and responsive process as data were collected, considered, and interpreted.

The first data collected for this study involved the initial interviews with the teachers who were expected to comprise the second grade CAP team. After these interviews were completed and transcribed, they were read through once, to help establish a totality of the participants' expectations and perceptions of the CAP. During a second reading of the transcripts, preliminary themes relating to the initial research questions were noted. These themes served as the basis to develop the initial coding categories that were then used as additional data were collected.

Throughout the study, the data codes went through multiple iterations, being refined and modified as necessary. Categories with minimal data were collapsed or eliminated, and others were created when there seemed sufficient information to support a new code. Each code that was developed was considered in relation to the guiding

research questions, and operationalized with a clear definition of what data would and would not fit into that particular category. As codes were revised, all previously coded data were then reviewed and re-coded to reflect any modifications that had been made. Much of the data were multiply coded. For example, comments about how a student's progress in the Wilson Reading Program was being measured appropriately fit into both the 'early-intervention' and the 'data' categories. The list of the initial data themes can be found in Appendix J and the final data codes and categories can be found in Appendix K.

Coding and management of the data in this study was facilitated by the use of QSR NVivo 2.0, a computer program used with qualitative research. Using this software, the majority of data (transcripts, contact summary sheets, field notes, and students' educational histories) were able to be entered into a word processor, and then uploaded into the program and continuously coded throughout the study. The permanent products and artifacts collected throughout the year were maintained separately, coded by hand, and then re-incorporated into the computer generated coding reports.

Once data collection was complete and all data had been coded using the final coding categories, it was then reviewed by the same retired educator who had checked the transcripts for accuracy. During this review, her task was to use the opearationalized definitions of the final codes and ensure that I had not overlooked the assignment of a code to any piece of data. She did not analyze the data or remove codes, but rather indicate if she believed something should be included into a particular category. Because of the frequency of multiple codes, this review of the coded data seemed especially important. Her review yielded five instances where data (i.e., phrases in transcripts) fit

into a category it had not been assigned were found, reviewed, and incorporated, as appropriate.

As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), visual devices were also used throughout the process of data analysis to help understand how evolving codes related to one another and to the research questions. And, although the complexity of the experience did not allow for the generation of one 'neat picture' or diagram of implementation at Pleasant Valley, maintaining multiple diagrams helped distill the themes and conclusions from the data.

Reliability and Validity

In this section, a discussion of reliability and validity is offered. First, the unique characteristics of reliability and validity within the context of qualitative research are discussed. Then, the strategies used to enhance the reliability and validity in this study are reviewed.

Qualitative reliability. Reliability and validity have unique interpretations in a qualitative study. According to Isaac and Michael (1997), reliability and validity with qualitative research are somewhat similar to what is seen with quantitative research, but the constructs need to be slightly adjusted to reflect the philosophy behind naturalistic inquiry. For example, in quantitative research, reliability refers to the knowledge that results are consistent, accurate, and predictable. In qualitative research, it is better thought of as 'dependability.' The researcher needs to ask, 'within reason, are the findings consistent with similar studies?'.

As themes emerged from this research, the search for this consistency was a guiding principle. When findings appeared divergent to what had been previously

discovered, additional data were sought to further clarify what was found and explain the differences. For example, the second grade teachers consistently suggested that the interventions and strategies developed through the CAP should be done by someone other than themselves. This 'out-sourcing' for support seemed antithetical to the philosophy guiding prereferral problem solving and the goals of the CAP, as it is described in the district's literature. Thus, their perceptions of, and realities about, how CAP interventions should be implemented were further explored.

Similarly, as data began to suggest a theme or point towards a conclusion, negative evidence (data contradicting the emerging theory) was actively sought. This included scrutinizing the data that had already been collected as well as seeking new data. For example, the staff at Pleasant Valley directly attributed the change in implementation of the CAP at their school to the reduction in support for the program at the district level. To pursue this theme further and search for negative evidence, additional data from professionals at the district level and other schools were collected.

Qualitative validity. Internal validity can be operationalized as 'credibility;' asking whether the findings are believable and convincing (Isaac & Michael, 1997). In this study, the use of direct observations facilitated the credibility of the conclusions being drawn. As detailed in Chapters Four and Five, the actual processes, dialogue, and outcomes of the second grade CAP meetings were not always accurately reflected on the CAP log form. What teachers said and what they did were not always identical. Thus, had this study only included indirect sources of data (e.g., interviews, reviews of records and artifacts), the model of implementation developed would have been significantly different than what evolved using direct observations. Additionally, the inclusion of rich,

thick descriptions and direct quotations are intentionally provided where ever possible to support the conclusions drawn from the data. This allows the reader to independently evaluate their credibility.

Rather than external validity meaning generalization, as is often seen in quantitative research, 'transferability' is a more appropriate concept with qualitative research because the goal is to suggest a heuristic, or working hypothesis, about a particular setting (Donmoyer, 1990). Elaborating on this idea, Schofield (1990) commented, "the goal is to describe a specific group in fine detail and to explain the patterns that exist, certainly not to discover general laws of human behavior" (p. 202). The purpose of this study was to offer a model of how a prereferral problem solving team functions at an elementary school; highlighting the benefits and challenges of implementation and the meaning that participation in the process has for teachers. The conclusions drawn from the data are not meant to suggest this is how it happens at every school, but rather to offer a comprehensive sense of 'what is' within the unique context at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. This, then, helps suggest what might be, or should be.

Strategies Used to Enhance Reliability and Validity in this Study

Pugach (2001) offered several suggestions to improve reliability, validity, and the general quality of qualitative research. These included: prolonged engagement, persistent observations, triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks, and providing thick descriptions. Additionally, Wolcott (1990) added the basic tenets that qualitative researcher should talk little, but listen a lot and record

accurately, and as soon as possible. All of these suggestions were incorporated into the design of this study and served as guiding principles throughout the year.

Prolonged engagement. Relating to prolonged engagement, this study was initially designed to be conducted between August and January. During that time, it was expected that the second grade CAP team would have multiple meetings and progress related to students who were discussed during these meetings could be tracked. However, when January came, there seemed to be more questions than answers about the experience of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary. Consequently, permission was sought to continue data collection at the school through the end of the year so a more accurate and comprehensive model could be developed. This proved to be a very beneficial decision, as much was learned between January and June.

Persistent observation. Evidence of persistent observation is perhaps best illustrated by the feedback from staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary. By mid-fall, many staff members had made joking comments such as, “We should give you an office here”; reflecting the substantial amount of time I was spending at the school. Additionally, when the second grade CAP team was not meeting as regularly as originally anticipated, I contacted Ms. Baden (by phone as well as in person) so frequently that she finally wrote “Call Tanya for CAP” on a bright piece of construction paper and posted it on her computer; hoping this might keep me from pestering her quite so frequently.

Triangulation of sources. As described, this study was informed by multiple data sources which represented a multiplicity of personal perspectives (interviews), objective observations of the events and reviews of permanent products, artifacts, and student records, and field notes. It was through synthesis and analysis of these varied research

strategies that the themes and conclusions of this study evolved. The benefit of this triangulation was that data (which could be interpreted as subjective in nature) was held up against other data to check for credibility and validity.

Peer debriefing. Three different avenues of peer debriefing were used in this study. The first involved professional colleagues at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Throughout the year, I maintained a constant dialogue with those directly involved with the CAP at Pleasant Valley (e.g., the principal, school psychologist, special education teachers, teachers at all grade levels) about what appeared to be emerging themes. In presenting my thoughts, the staff at the school was consistently receptive and willing to discuss their perspectives and opinions, irrespective of whether they agreed with my thesis. This dialogue, I believe, resulted from the high levels of comfort and trust that resulted from our previously established relationships and their belief that I was genuinely committed to painting an accurate picture of the school's experience with the CAP.

Many provided feedback about whether they agreed with my interpretations, or whether they thought it was "not quite right". In the later case, I would then ask for further clarification about their perceptions and understandings and subsequently seek additional data to follow up on that idea. For example, after the second CAP meeting, I explained to the principal that I was getting the impression that very few interventions recommended through the CAP involved the general education teacher. She said that she did not necessarily agree with that characterization, and then elaborated how she felt some of the suggestions (such as gathering more assessment data) were preliminary steps which would lead to intervention by the classroom teacher.

Professional colleagues within the same school district, but who were not associated with Pleasant Valley or the study, also served as sounding boards for my emerging interpretations of the data. These professionals were frequently able to provide an outside perspective about the events that might be occurring at Pleasant Valley. They were not in a position to provide specific information about the school's experiences, but rather gave a more generic impression and evaluation of the information I relayed. For example, in a conversation with a supervisor of another field office, I shared that I was concerned about whether the district level administrators understood how their actions were being perceived by the teachers and staff at the school. She concurred, and elaborated that at a recent task force meeting that very issue was acknowledged.

Conversely, when I discussed concerns about the CAP trainings not being well received by teachers within the school, another school psychologist countered that the special educator from her school who attended the trainings believed they were quite effective. Again, my position within the school district afforded me the luxury of being able to have these informal conversations with colleagues. The benefit was that the feedback inspired and guided the collection of additional data to inform the developing model.

Finally, peer debriefing was also accomplished through regularly scheduled meetings that occurred with an expert in the field of qualitative analysis. Throughout the process of data collection, data management, and data analysis, I relayed my thoughts about logical next steps, organization of the data, and validity of emerging themes and ideas. He provided feedback and direction reviewing transcripts, coding samples, and

potential ideas for presentation of the findings of this study. This mentoring proved invaluable.

Negative case analysis. As described, negative case analyses were consistently used throughout the study. When data were suggesting the emergence or modification of a particular theme, negative evidence was actively sought to support or contradict the original idea, such that the depth and breadth of understanding was constantly expanding as additional evidence was incorporated. The addition of interviews and written responses from individuals at other schools are examples of how the search for negative analysis changed the methodology of the study. Specifically, the themes that were emerging from Pleasant Valley Elementary School appeared so divergent from the experiences of the previous year, it was necessary to systematically investigate the validity of what was being seen in relation to the experiences of other schools within the district.

Member checks. Member checks involve sharing the themes and conclusions with the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This study involved the use of formal and informal member checks. Those of a more informal nature occurred regularly throughout the year as data were collected. Emerging themes were offered to the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary at nearly every interaction. Because implementation of the CAP at the school was different than most had anticipated, these conversations occurred quite naturally. The professionals at the school frequently and spontaneously talked about their experiences and perceptions, which provided a platform for me to then offer reflections about what I observed and potential hypotheses related to the reasons why. As an example, after the leadership team meeting with Mr. Kennedy, I had the

opportunity to elicit feedback with a group of teachers and specialists. I offered my thoughts about the experience and was able verify that others had similar perceptions that his message was not well received by the school's staff.

Formal member checks were also conducted with the members of the second grade CAP team. Specifically, at the conclusion of each CAP meeting, all the team members completed their meeting response probes and then we discussed emerging themes. I predicated these discussions with the explanation that my goal was to gain an accurate understanding of the team's experiences, and clarified that participants did not need to reach consensus, because there could easily be multiple interpretations about the same events. Rather, I wanted to ensure that all viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences were accurately represented. I used an outline containing a number of open-ended statements to start the conversation, and then encouraged feedback and discussion. Participants' thoughts and reactions were then incorporated into my field notes. The following dialogue after the CAP meeting on January 15th illustrates how members' help clarify my understanding of the developing themes.

> Tanya Schmidt: Let me toss this out, and see what you think. Are most of the strategies recommended through the CAP predominantly aimed accessing another body or another service?
>
> Ms. Little: Yes
>
> Tanya Schmidt: So, like, you have already exhausted what you can do inside the classroom, and this isn't a forum to say, these are what I've tried, what else can I do in the classroom? It's more, "Okay, this kid needs something else above and beyond?"

Ms. Baden: That's the way I feel about it.

Ms. McHenry: But sometimes we did that and accessed that. Sometimes it was a strategy, like we need to talk to these parents. Sometimes it was we need to set up a mentor for this child. It wasn't all the same. Sometimes it was that we need to do this assessment because we have questions about this. So, I think it was a variety of things

Mr. White: Yeah. Some of the things were some informal stuff so that we could develop an intervention. Like before you do drill sandwich, you have to do the phonemic awareness, I mean the high frequency words, so you know what goes in the sandwich.

Tanya Schmidt: That makes sense. There just did not seem to be a whole lot of…..

Ms. Baden: And I'm telling you, that most of these kids, at this point in January- I've done all my ta-do's and ta-da's.

I had originally planned to conduct a final collective member check with all the members of the second grade CAP team. However, because the teachers fervently and repeatedly expressed feeling extremely overwhelmed and stressed for time, requesting that the group re-convene did not seem respectful. Instead, at the conclusion of the final interview with each second grade teachers, I offered my thoughts and reflections on the year and sought individual feedback through that forum.

Feedback was essentially consistent among the three teachers, and suggested general agreement with the conclusions drawn from the data. For example, Ms. Sullivan said, "Wow, you did a great job figuring all of this out!" The only thesis which drew

some discussion was the assertion about priorities. All three teachers specifically clarified that they did place priority on the ideas related to the CAP, but took exception with the expectation that it was reasonable for them to assume primary responsibility for the process. This theme is further discussed in Chapters Five and Seven, but is cited here as evidence that the teachers were actively participating in the member check process.

Thick descriptions. The final recommendation by Pugach (2001) was to provide thick descriptions of data. 'Thick' can perhaps best be interpreted to mean extensive or thorough. Data from this study is presented using such renditions. Wherever possible, multiple sources are used to describe the same experience, phenomena, or perspective and descriptions based on field notes and contact sheets are incorporated to help illuminate the context of the school so the readers can draw their own informed conclusions. This invitation for active participation by the reader also helps reduce the potential that the researcher's bias impacted the accuracy of the conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Talk little. According to Wolcott (1990), it is vital that the researcher talk little, but listen a lot. I approached each interaction at Pleasant Valley with the belief that those I came into contact with had a wealth of experience and information to offer me as opposed to the converse suggesting I have much for them. Guided by that principle, I did exactly what was suggested and allowed others to shape, direct, and dominate the conversation. Evidence of this can be found in the interview transcripts, where the majority of text is the interviewee.

Record immediately and accurately. Wolcott (1990) also recommended that the researcher record data as soon as possible, and as accurately as possible. My goal

throughout the year was to complete the summary contact sheet and any appropriate field notes before leaving the school. Not only did this allow for maximum recollection of the details and nuances, but remaining in the context of the school while writing seemed to provide an additional layer of authenticity. There were a couple of instances where I was not able to immediately write, however even in those situations all notes were completed that evening.

This chapter described the qualitative research methodology used in this study. The benefits of using modified analytic induction were explained, and the guiding research questions were discussed. A brief description of the selection process used to identify Pleasant Valley Elementary School and the second grade CAP team was then offered. Researcher roles and biases, procedures for site entry, relevant ethical considerations, research strategies, and data analysis procedures were all reviewed. Finally, a description of reliability and validity in the qualitative tradition, and in the context of this study was presented.

In Chapter Four, the study's participants are introduced. Then, a description of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School is offered. A comparison of CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year reveals that there were many differences in grade level team procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School compares with the district's guidelines for the process.

In Chapter Five, a description of how the CAP impacted students and school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years is provided. Also described, are school professionals' perceptions of

participation in the CAP during 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Specifically presented are the relationships between participation and: general education instruction, early intervention support, collection and use of data, utilization of documentation, professional collaboration and roles, and special education.

In Chapter Six, the role and influence of administrative forces on the CAP are discussed. First, a review of how the principal impacted CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School is offered. Next, a similar discussion is provided about how district, state, and federal policies and decisions impacted the CAP. Within each review, the similarities and differences related to administrative forces during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year are presented. Then, the experiences and perceptions of school professionals at the other CAP elementary schools are discussed. Finally, the impact of administrative forces on CAP implementation at these schools is described.

In Chapter Seven, findings related to each of the study's guiding research questions are summarized. Based on a synthesis of those findings, the primary themes that emerged from the study are discussed and situated within the context of the literature base related to prereferral problem solving. Then, the limitations of this study are described and the implications for research and practice are presented.

Chapter 4: CAP Implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

This chapter focuses on the way that the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) was implemented at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. The first section of the chapter contains a description of the participants in this study. The second section contains an overview of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. In the third section of the chapter, a comparison of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years is offered. Specifically described the differences that were found during this study related to: team composition, meeting participants, frequency of meetings, meeting organization and structure, implementation of the problem solving steps, the collection and use of data, referred students, and student experiences.

The final section of the chapter compares CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School with the district's published guidelines. Data presented in this chapter corresponds with the guiding research questions related to CAP implementation, the nature and severity of referral concerns, and students' experiences.

An Introduction to the Participants

This section presents a description of the participants in this study. The primary participants included members of the second grade CAP team, as well as other professionals involved with the CAP, at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Additional participants included student services staff from other CAP elementary schools in the same district, the district's CAP facilitators, and the district's CAP supervisor. Appendix L contains an outline of the study participants.

The Second Grade CAP Team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

As explained later in this chapter, team composition at the school changed during the 2003-2004 school year, such that Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan became the only members of the second grade CAP team. Originally, based on implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley were expected to include all the general education teachers of a grade level and a CAP coach who was assigned to each team by the principal, Ms. McHenry. This was true when the school year began, so at that point, the second grade team consisted of five members: Kay Baden, Jacqueline Shoemaker, Gail Sullivan, Susan Pollack, and Derrick White.

Kay Baden. Kay Baden was the second grade team leader. In this position, Ms. Baden was responsible for scheduling the grade's meetings and events and she served as their representative on the building Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT made management decisions for the school and included team leaders from each grade level, specialists in the building (e.g., staff development, counselor), and the principal. At the time of this study, Ms. Baden had been a general education teacher for over twenty years, with the last nine being at Pleasant Valley. During her career, she taught kindergarten and third grade, but had been teaching second grade for the past five years. The 2003-2004 school year was her first to serve as team leader. Ms. Baden indicated she had no college coursework related to special education.

Other staff members at Pleasant Valley spoke highly of Ms. Baden, initially describing her as a very experienced and skilled teacher who had a "current" philosophy of education. This was interpreted to mean she endorsed academically rigorous standards,

but also understood the need to differentiate and accommodate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Ms. Baden had an assertive personality and was never hesitant to express her opinion.

Based on her participation with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Baden was described by her colleagues as a "definite supporter" of the philosophy and implementation of the process at Pleasant Valley. However, as the 2003-2004 school year progressed, Ms. Baden expressed increasing concerns about the CAP because of all the other demands on classroom teachers. Over the course of the year, other staff members amended their descriptions of Ms. Baden to include "overwhelmed" and "stressed."

Jacqueline Shoemaker. Ms. Shoemaker had also been teaching for over twenty years, with more than ten being in first grade at Pleasant Valley. The 2003-2004 school year was her first year teaching second grade. Ms. Shoemaker was a very pleasant, mild mannered woman, who was clearly dedicated to her work and genuinely cared about her students. However, when interacting with adults, she often appeared to lack self-confidence, as evidenced by frequent hesitations before answering a question and predicating statements with caveats such as "I'm not quite sure, but I think..." or "I'm certainly not an expert, so you might want to also check with someone else." Ms. Shoemaker said she had not taken any special education college coursework.

Others on the staff described Ms. Shoemaker as having the benefit of experience, but not necessarily being familiar or comfortable with some of the more recent trends in education (e.g., using data to make instructional decisions). She was, however, viewed as cooperative, and open to suggestions and ideas when they were given to her. Regarding

the CAP, she was described as being a passive supporter who needed coaching and external structure to help her successfully participate.

Gail Sullivan. Gail Sullivan had also been teaching for more than twenty years, with the majority being in first grade at Pleasant Valley Elementary. She was moved to second grade for the 2003-2004 school year. Among the staff and community, Ms. Sullivan appeared to be the most 'beloved' teacher, and was frequently described as extremely nurturing and patient. Many students were specifically assigned to Ms. Sullivan's classroom when they needed extra kindness and positive feedback. Similar to Ms. Shoemaker, Ms. Sullivan was frequently described as a very experienced teacher who emphasized developmentally appropriate tasks and emotional growth. Ms. Sullivan had never taken any special education college coursework.

The 2003-2004 school year was an evaluation year for Ms. Sullivan and dissonance between her philosophy and the district's rigorous curricular expectations proved to be stressful for her and resulted in considerable tension between her and the principal. Ms. Sullivan was described as being a proponent of the CAP because she always tried to assure success for each student in her class. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Sullivan referred more students to the grade level CAP team than any other teacher in the building. She indicated this was because she had a large number of students who were struggling with classroom academic standards. Others in the building also believed that she had a tendency to be overly concerned when every child did not experience complete success in all areas.

Susan Pollock. Susan Pollock had been teaching for six years with the last four as a general education teacher at the second grade level at Pleasant Valley. Ms. Pollock was

a very confident, self-assured woman who never hesitated to offer her opinion. During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. Pollock was assigned to teach a combined first and second grade class. The students placed in this class were identified as independent learners who were at or above grade level in both reading and math.

Ms. Pollock completed her Master's degree in special education in May of 2004, although all of her school-based experiences were in the general education classroom. She explained, however, that because she had students who experienced learning and behavioral problems in her classroom each year, she developed a high level of expertise working with students who experienced difficulty in the classroom. She believed that she actually served as a special education teacher well before beginning her graduate work. Consequently, she explained, she "co-taught with [her]self".

To most, Ms. Pollock was considered a second grade teacher and was expected to participate in second grade meetings and events, although her classroom had a combination of first and second graders. During the fall, she voiced concern about this expectation and indicated she considered herself "a team of one." As is discussed further later in this chapter, Ms. Pollock never attended a grade level CAP meeting during the 2003-2004 school year.

Derrick White. Derrick White was one of two special education teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and was the CAP coach assigned to the second grade team. Mr. White had been a special education teacher for eighteen years and worked in a variety of settings including resource rooms, a self-contained class for students with severe disabilities, and a residential school for students with emotional disturbance. Mr.

White had been at Pleasant Valley for six years and was instrumental in transitioning the school's special education program from using a resource room to an inclusive model.

Perceptions of Mr. White at Pleasant Valley appeared sharply bifurcated. Some staff members espoused a very positive view of his passionate advocacy for students and his instructional creativity. Others expressed concerns about his ability to effectively collaborate. Ms. McHenry, the principal, characterized him as being an exceptional teacher who was highly skilled at working with students and their families.

Mr. White was one of the strongest proponents of the CAP at Pleasant Valley and at one point joked he should change his name to Charles Anthony Peterson so his initials could be C.A.P.. He believed the problem solving process facilitated the development and implementation of interventions in the general education classroom, which in turn, promoted inclusion at the school. Mr. White was designated as the CAP coordinator for the school during the 2003-2004 school year.

Other School Professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

Donna McHenry. Donna McHenry had been principal of Pleasant Valley Elementary School for eight years. Prior to this, she was a general education teacher for more than fifteen years. The staff at Pleasant Valley appeared to have mixed feelings and reactions toward Ms. McHenry and her style of leadership. Some (including many of the specialists) felt she was an excellent principal who allowed for autonomy, yet unconditionally supported her staff. Others, however, believed that she equivocated and made decisions to appease parents without considering the implications for teachers. Ms. McHenry acknowledged this mixed perception, but explained that much of the teachers' animosity was due to anger about district expectations. Irrespective of how she was

perceived, the impact and influence of Ms. McHenry's overt requests as well as her more subtle suggestions were evident throughout this study.

During the year, Ms. McHenry voiced significant frustration with district administrators and policies. On numerous occasions she described how she was overwhelmed by the pressure placed on her to increase the school's test scores. She also indicated that she was genuinely exhausted, with the 2003-2004 school year being the first time she no longer enjoyed her job.

Ms. McHenry had a complex perception of the CAP process during the 2003-2004 school year. She expressed an absolute and unambiguous belief in the CAP's philosophical goal to offer support and service to students based on need, rather than eligibility for special education. However, she also emphatically repeated that implementing the CAP was not realistic without support from the district because of the many demands placed on teachers. As Ms. McHenry attempted to reconcile what she called the "philosophy versus reality debate", she adopted the mantra, "We are doing the best we can, at this school, for this year." All CAP-related decisions and modifications during the 2003-2004 school year were found to be infused with that theme.

Kristen Little. Kristen Little was the other full-time special education teacher at Pleasant Valley and had been the CAP coach for the fourth grade team during the 2002-2003 school year. She had taught special education for 14 years, with the last seven being at Pleasant Valley. Ms. Little was a proponent of the school's inclusion model, and believed that implementation of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year helped promote that philosophy and increased collaboration among the staff. During the 2003-2004 school year, however, Ms. Little expressed the belief that the staff at Pleasant

Valley were extremely overwhelmed and stressed. She believed this, in turn, created animosity and resentment between special and general education teachers and compromised implementation of the CAP.

Melanie Nichols. Melanie Nichols had been the counselor at Pleasant Valley Elementary School for six years. She was the CAP coach for the fifth grade team during the 2002-2003 school year. Others on the staff consistently praised her skills with students and her ability to help teachers vent their frustrations. Ms. Nichols gave birth to her first child in late April of 2003 and was on maternity leave through the end of the 2002-2003 school year. She returned to work on a full-time basis in September of 2003, but switched to half-time in January. Although her decision was certainly understood and respected, many at Pleasant Valley expressed that it was a significant loss for the school.

Ms. Nichols was one of the original staff members who supported piloting the CAP at Pleasant Valley. Citing the school's experience with the process during 2002-2003, she believed the benefits of the process included providing early intervention services to students, increasing collaboration among the staff, and improving teachers' use of data to document student progress. She indicated that if it were possible, she would attend every CAP meeting at each grade level because she felt she had much to offer and gain from active participation.

Beth Kane. Beth Kane was the speech language pathologist at Pleasant Valley. She had been employed by the district for 22 years, and had worked at Pleasant Valley for the past seven. During the 2002-2003 school year, she was the third grade CAP coach. During the 2003-2004 school year, she served as the school's representative to the

teacher's union. She was viewed as being very skilled, organized, and effective at her job. On at least three occasions during this study, she was also described as "overly rigid". Ms. Kane indicated that while she supported inclusion, she believed many students needed a more self-contained setting with specialists to be successful. Regarding the CAP, she thought the program had potential benefits, but also expressed concerns about implementation, including the lack of financial compensation for the additional time it required.

Patricia Kelly. Patricia Kelly was the staff development specialist at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Prior to assuming this role, she had been a second grade teacher for more than ten years at Pleasant Valley. She was highly respected by the staff and viewed as a highly skilled and very creative teacher. Her official job responsibilities included providing professional development for teachers, supporting implementation of the district's curriculum, and coordinating testing at the school. Unofficially, she was also the liaison between the staff and Ms. McHenry and she frequently appeared to be the calm and objective voice of reason who was able to help others compromise on difficult issues.

Ms. Kelly expressed genuine support for the CAP process and frequently commented on the benefits she experienced when she was a second grade teacher during the 2002-2003 school year. She described the CAP as her "life-line of support" for working with challenging students. On many occasions, Ms. Kelly expressed disappointment with implementation of the CAP during the 2003-2004, compared to what she experienced the prior school year.

Sandra Ziegler. Ms. Ziegler was hired as a full-time special education teacher at Pleasant Valley in the summer of 2001. However, this position was eliminated by the district during the summer of 2003. Because Ms. Ziegler wanted to remain at Pleasant Valley, she agreed to take a half-time position working with students learning English as a second language. In her original position as a special education teacher, she provided inclusive and small-group support to kindergarten and first grade students. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Ziegler was the CAP coach for the combined kindergarten / first grade team, and she articulated many benefits she saw for both students and teachers. However, after her special education position was eliminated, her outlook on the process changed and she actively distanced herself from any involvement with the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year.

Colleen Baldwin. Colleen Baldwin was the school psychologist assigned to Pleasant Valley Elementary School, the middle school, and the high school in the same feeder pattern. She was a psychologist in the district for over twenty years, with the majority of those spent in the Pleasant Valley cluster. Dr. Baldwin was an articulate and well-respected member of Pleasant Valley, and many staff members clearly viewed her as an expert.

Dr. Baldwin was one of the psychologists who initially called for the district to reform the EMT process and adopt a more effective prereferral process. She enthusiastically believed in the philosophy of the CAP and noted how Pleasant Valley had significantly reduced inappropriate referrals for special education by providing effective early intervention support during the 2002-2003 school year. She also believed that the data collected and used with the CAP was far superior to that which came from a

traditional psychological assessment battery. During the 2003-3004 school year, Dr. Baldwin's steadfast endorsement of the CAP caused some tension between her and some of the staff, as many felt she did not understand the difficulties associated with implementation.

District CAP Personnel

Four professionals involved with the CAP at the district level also participated in this study. Mark Kennedy was the district's supervisor of psychological services and served as the coordinator of the CAP. Mr. Kennedy was selected by the Superintendent to develop, coordinate, and evaluate a prereferral problem solving process in accordance with the district's partnership with the Office of Civil Rights. To assist him, three school psychologists (Brian Tetlow, Maureen Smith, and Billy Miller) were hired as CAP facilitators and assigned to schools implementing the process. The facilitators all declined a request to be interviewed, indicating they did not have time in their schedule. However, each provided written responses to interview questions.

Billy Miller was the CAP facilitator assigned to Pleasant Valley Elementary School, although his role and influence appeared to be minimal. During the 2003-2004 school year, he was at the school twice to meet with the principal and once to attend an ILT meeting. Dr. Miller indicated he had a good working relationship with the staff and principal at Pleasant Valley. This characterization, however, contrasted with that offered by the staff who questioned whether he understood the day to day realities within a school. The suggestions and information offered by Dr. Miller were viewed as being impractical and frequently ignored.

Professionals at Other CAP Schools

Data sources for this study were expanded to include the perceptions of student services personnel at other elementary schools within the same district also implementing the CAP. Specifically, four school psychologists representing six elementary schools participated. Carla Dillon, Marla Post, and Sally Palmer were interviewed and Cammile Cove provided written responses to the interview questions. Four pupil personnel workers representing eight elementary schools participated. Sarah Karz, Jasmine D'Amico, and Rochelle Gost were all interviewed and Dominique Doe provided written responses to the interview questions. All of these professionals philosophically supported the CAP and cited many potential benefits from the process. However, they also each expressed concerns about implementation and the level of district support for the process. The descriptions they offered also suggested considerable variability in how the CAP operated among schools within the same district.

This section contained a description of the participants in this study. They included the members of the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, district CAP personnel, and professionals at other CAP schools in the same district. As mentioned, a reference guide that outlines the study's participants is located in Appendix L.

The next section contains an overview of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Descriptions provided in the section are intended to offer a reference for the more detailed elaborations that are found in subsequent sections of this chapter, as well as in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. First, a description of implementation during the 2002-2003 school year is

provided. This timeline represents the framework guided development of an initial model of implementation for the 2003-2004 school year. Then, a timeline of the primary events related to the second grade CAP team, and overall implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2003-2004 school year is presented.

Overview of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

CAP Implementation During 2002-2003

Although Ms. McHenry originally agreed to pilot the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2001-2002 school year, teams did not begin to meet regularly until the fall of 2002. Beginning that year, when teachers had concerns about students, they were expected to make a referral to their grade level CAP team for collaborative problem solving. Each team consisted of all general education teachers in the grade and a CAP coach assigned by Ms. McHenry. Ms. McHenry and Dr. Baldwin attended nearly every meeting during the 2002-2003 school year, and Ms. Little and Mr. White were also frequently present. Each team met twice a month for two hours during the instructional school day. This was possible because Ms. McHenry allocated all of her school improvement money to pay for substitutes to cover the teachers' classes during their CAP time.

Teachers referred students to the grade level CAP team by completing the first CAP form (Referral, Problem Identification, and Student Profile). In some grades, teachers independently gathered and recorded the information and in others it was collaboratively done by the teacher and the special education teacher or the teacher and the coach. Meetings were highly structured and involved the participants sequentially progressing through the problem solving stages with each student. Teachers consistently

brought data and work samples to the CAP meetings to support a referral. Interventions plans were developed, monitored, and evaluated by the team. When a student repeatedly failed to make progress, the case was referred to the building level CAP team for further problem solving with parents and additional specialists. If the building level CAP team felt it was appropriate, screening for special education services was then considered.

Many teachers and specialists at Pleasant Valley characterized the CAP during 2002-2003 as being successful for teachers and students, especially by the end of the year after each grade level team had collaboratively problem solved with a number of referrals. Teachers described how participation in the CAP increased their vigilance with intervention integrity and data collection because they "needed to be on top of it" and present the information about students' progress at subsequent meetings. They also frequently mentioned how the CAP increased collaboration among all staff in the building.

The staff at Pleasant Valley credited the CAP with producing significant improvements in student achievement. Dr. Baldwin explained that many students who would have otherwise been referred for special education, made "identifiable, concrete progress" because problem solving by the grade level CAP teams led to targeted classroom interventions and small group support. Ms. McHenry believed the process resulted in "more service and less coding which was exactly the direction the school wanted to go." However, others expressed concerns about some aspects of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year. These included dissatisfaction with the complexity of the CAP referral form, the burden of preparing sub plans every two weeks, and concerns

that the process postponed or prevented a student from receiving special education coding.

CAP Events During 2003-2004

Summer. During the summer of 2003, Ms. McHenry was informed by district administrators that Pleasant Valley Elementary's special education allocation was reduced to be commensurate with the number of students identified as requiring special education services in the school. During the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, the school had three special education teachers and two and a half special educational paraprofessionals. For the 2003-2004 school year, the school was allocated two special education teachers and two paraprofessionals.

All principals in the district were also informed that there would no longer be funding to support school improvement plans. At Pleasant Valley, this was the money used to pay for substitute teachers during the grade level CAP meetings. Ms. McHenry described this elimination as "peculiar" because school improvement plans had previously been one of the Superintendent's priorities. She said no official explanation for this change was offered, but she speculated that it was due to misuse of these discretionary funds in some schools.

Given the reduction in support from the district, Ms. McHenry concluded it would be impossible to implement the CAP as it had been done during 2002-2003. Based on that assessment, she modified the procedures for the upcoming year. Grade level teams were still expected meet twice a month, however meetings were held after the instructional school day because substitute coverage was no longer provided.

August – September. Ms. McHenry verbally communicated this expectation during a staff meeting on the day teachers returned to work in August, specifying that grade level CAP teams were required to meet after school the first Monday of every month, but could choose their second date. All teachers received a written outline that specified the expected structure for grade level meetings remained the same as the prior year.

In the beginning of September, Mr. White, in conjunction with Ms. McHenry, wrote a letter to the Special Education Staffing Committee, the Supervisor of Special Education, the Associate Superintendent, Mr. Kennedy, and Dr. Miller requesting reconsideration of the reduction in Pleasant Valley's special education staffing allocation. Mr. White highlighted the success of the CAP during the 2002-2003 and predicted that eliminating the positions would be detrimental to future progress. He emphasized how the CAP aligned with the district's 'Success for Every Student' plan and specifically quoted two district administrators who publicly stated the CAP was being implemented to comply with the Office of Civil Rights partnership. He also noted that repeated assurance was given to the school that they would not be penalized for reducing the number of students identified as eligible for special education services by implementing the CAP. Mr. White and Ms. McHenry indicated they never received an acknowledgement or response to their letter.

October – November. On October 27th, the building level CAP team met to discuss the CAP and other issues causing tension and stress among the staff at Pleasant Valley. Ms. McHenry had an outline of topics to be discussed which included concerns teachers had voiced about the lack of special education support for students. Mr. White

and Ms. Little insisted that the real nexus of the frustration was that teachers unrealistically expected the same level of special education support as they received the prior year, despite the reduction in staffing.

Mr. White and Ms. Little also expressed concern about their roles as grade level CAP coaches, noting that teachers were expecting them to complete the CAP forms, collect data, and provide interventions to students because they were viewed as experts. The fact that none of the grade-level CAP teams had yet held a meeting was mentioned, but not extensively discussed, after Ms. McHenry said "I can't make them do it." Ms. McHenry indicated that she would specifically address issues related to the CAP and special education services at the next staff meeting. She also placed a second copy of the CAP procedures (originally distributed at the beginning of the year) in every staff members' mail box the following morning.

On October 29th, Ms. Little and Mr. White met with Ms. McHenry to share a flow-chart Ms. Little developed to help teachers better understand how grade level CAP teams, the building level CAP team, and special education meetings fit together. At this meeting, Ms. Little and Mr. White reiterated their concerns about grade level teams being overly dependent on coaches.

Ms. McHenry added a few details to the flow-chart and presented a typed copy to the building level CAP team on November 4th. She reviewed each step with the group and explained that she removed the coaches from all the grade level CAP teams. Instead, the staff members who had previously been coaches (e.g., special education teachers, counselor, reading specialist) were available for consultation if the team demonstrated they were unable to successfully address a student's concerns. Ms. McHenry solicited

input from the group, but there was minimal discussion about the chart or the elimination of grade level coaches. However, great concern was expressed regarding how the information was to be shared with the rest of the staff. It was decided that Ms. McHenry would share the chart at the next staff meeting.

A staff meeting devoted entirely to the CAP at Pleasant Valley was held on November 11th. Ms. McHenry explained that modifications had been made to the CAP based on staff feedback and then used the flow-chart to outline the new expectations. She reiterated that grade level teams were expected to meet twice a month to problem solve about students not making "acceptable progress." She concluded the meeting by emphasizing that the elimination of the special education positions necessitated a corresponding reduction in early intervention support and special education services for the 2002-2003 school year.

Following Ms. McHenry's presentation, teachers vehemently expressed frustration about finding time to hold grade level CAP meetings because of all the other expectations placed on them. They also questioned the roles and responsibilities of special education and general education teachers. Ms. McHenry listened to and acknowledged their concerns and reiterated that, given the circumstances, "... you should do the best you can for this year, at this school."

December - January. The second grade teachers scheduled a CAP meeting for December 8th. However, that morning Ms. Baden indicated the meeting was cancelled because "No one had any kids to CAP." The team did not identify an alternate date, and instead said they would schedule a meeting "as needed."

On December 18th, Dr. Miller came to Pleasant Valley for a meeting with Ms. McHenry because he "wanted to find out how the CAP was going at his favorite school." Because Mr. White happened to be in the main office when Dr. Miller arrived, Ms. McHenry invited him to join the conversation. Dr. Miller began the meeting with some benign questions (e.g., "So how are things this year?"). This frustrated Ms. McHenry because she expected an acknowledgement of the difficulties the school was experiencing with implementation. She lamented how the district's reductions in special education staff "decimated" the school's ability to provide early intervention support and the loss of money for substitute teachers meant grade level teams were not meeting consistently. Mr. White echoed those concerns and explained that he was concerned about intervention integrity and the lack of data collection being used to document progress.

In response, Dr. Miller said the district had just been awarded a six million dollar grant and some of that money would be used to support the CAP. When Ms. McHenry asked how that would translate into support for Pleasant Valley, Dr. Miller did not provide any specific information, but said he would look into providing training for teachers. He then passed out copies of what he described to be new "user-friendly" CAP forms. Ms. McHenry reviewed them, but indicated the school had already modified the forms on their own.

The second grade CAP team scheduled a meeting for December 22nd. However, on December 18th, Ms. Baden said that Ms. McHenry had just announced a mandatory staff meeting on the 22nd, so the team would not meet. An alternate date was not scheduled at that time.

On the morning of January 6th, Ms. Baden said the second grade team decided they would have a CAP meeting that afternoon because the weekly calendar distributed by Ms. McHenry indicated they were supposed to do so. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 3:15 p.m. in Ms. Baden's classroom, but actually started at 3:35 p.m. after Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan arrived. Ms. Sullivan left at 4:40 p.m. because she had a prior commitment, but Ms. Baden and Ms. Shoemaker discussed students until 5:10 p.m.. The three teachers raised concerns about fifteen students during this meeting.

After reviewing the summary log from that meeting, Ms. McHenry scheduled another meeting for January 15th and requested that Ms. Little and Mr. White also attend. This meeting began at 3:20 p.m. and ended at 4:45 p.m.. The team discussed nine students.

February – March. On February 10th, a meeting was held between Dr. Miller, Ms. McHenry, Mr. White, and Dr. Baldwin. Dr. Miller had contacted Dr. Baldwin (who subsequently invited the others to join) to further discuss the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary. Because Dr. Miller did not have agenda, Ms. McHenry took the opportunity to reiterate her concerns about the detrimental impact of the reductions in staffing and funding. Dr. Miller reassured her that, "Things are changing. Remember, I promised you they would." He said he was going to be a member of the Special Education Strategic Task Force in the district and would use that forum to advocate for the school.

He also brought a research article about curriculum based assessment and recommended they try it at Pleasant Valley because it worked really well at another elementary school. Before leaving, he distributed multiple handouts (e.g. a sample CAP meeting agenda, a script from a prereferral process used in New York, an outline of

participant roles, a description of communication skills, and guiding questions to be used by coaches). Dr. Baldwin suggested their time would be better spent identifying how to revive the CAP and achieve outcomes similar to those seen during 2002-2003. It was decided that an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meeting would be held to talk about the status of the CAP at Pleasant Valley and plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

The ILT meeting was held on February 10th from 3:15 p.m. to 4:50 p.m. In attendance were all of the team leaders, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Kane, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nichols, Mr. White, Ms. Little, and Dr. Baldwin. Mr. Kennedy and Dr. Miller also attended at Dr. Baldwin's request. Ms. McHenry began the meeting by briefly reviewing the 2002-2003 CAP process and highlighting the benefits it had for teachers and students. She planned to have the group brainstorm a list of challenges currently impeding the CAP and then identify which factors were in their control and factors were out of their control. However, almost immediately the structure of the meeting transformed into a less-structured, frequently animated, discussion among the staff and Mr. Kennedy. Teachers expressed extreme frustration with the lack of release time for CAP meetings, difficulty accessing support for students in a timely manner, curricular inflexibility, and a lack of training for the CAP.

Participants also described unprecedented levels of tension and a general lack of communication among staff members, much of which they attributed to the reduction in special education staffing. When Mr. Kennedy asked what was being done to promote success with the CAP, he was informed that record numbers of students were being referred for special education screening so the positions would be reinstated. Ms. Little explained, "We know what to do now. We need to code them all." Mr. Kennedy

informed the ILT that he would have the associate superintendent visit the school to hear their concerns. After the meeting, Mr. Kennedy, Ms. McHenry, and Dr. Baldwin acknowledged the staffs' need to vent their frustrations and decided another, more structured, ILT meeting should be scheduled to plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

On March 1st, Ms. Baden indicated that the second grade teachers decided to hold a CAP meeting that afternoon. The meeting was attended by Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan and lasted from 3:15 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.. Progress with the nine students discussed during the meeting on January 15th was reviewed and concerns about two other students were raised.

The follow up ILT meeting was held on March 16th from 9:00-11:00 a.m.. In attendance were all of the team leaders, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Kane, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nichols, Ms. Little, and Mr. White. Ms. McHenry began the meeting by distributing an agenda titled 'CAP: The good, the bad, and the possibilities.' At the bottom it asked "Do we have conformity or commitment?" The first item on the agenda was to review the process used during 2003-2004 and discuss "Why so much negative talk about CAP?".

At this meeting, the team discussed the following issues: concerns about timelines to get support for students, limited options for students who were repeatedly discussed at CAP meetings but not progressing, forms that were too complex, ambiguity in the roles of special and general education teachers, confusion over multiple changes to the CAP process, and a lack of training for teachers. The outcome was that Ms. McHenry would investigate training options and the group would continue to pursue creative ways to provide additional support to students.

April – June. There were no major 'events' related to the CAP which occurred at Pleasant Valley after the ILT meeting on March 16th. However, data were collected through informal conversations, follow-up interviews, permanent product reviews, and observations until the end of the school year.

This section provided an overview of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. The information presented is intended as a reference for subsequent discussions about events, themes, and implications.

The next section of this chapter contains a comparison between CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year. Specifically described are the similarities and differences related to: team composition, meeting participants, frequency of meetings, meeting organization and structure, implementation of the problem solving steps, the collection and use of data, referred students, and student experiences. For each topic, the school's experiences during the 2002-2003 school year are presented, and followed by a description of the experiences during the 2003-2004 school year.

Multiple data sources helped inform the description of implementation in the next section, including the interviews conducted with teachers and other staff members at Pleasant Valley and the district's CAP coordinator, observations of the second grade CAP meetings, on-going observations and informal conversations at the school, review of student records and permanent products, and field notes. The goal of this section is to develop an objective picture of actual implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven contain further elaboration, interpretation, and implications related to the data.

Comparison of CAP Implementation During 2002-2003 and 2003-2004

Team Composition

2002-2003. During the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley consisted of all the general education teachers at that grade level and a CAP coach assigned by Ms. McHenry. During the 2002-2003 school year, the second grade teachers included Ms. Kelly (who was the team leader), Ms. Baden, and Ms. Pollock. The second grade coach was Mr. White. As best they could recall, all four team members attended each grade level meeting. The only exception was if someone happened to be out of the building on a day that the grade level CAP team met. However, Ms. Kelly indicated that such absences occurred rarely, if ever. Membership and attendance at meetings at other grade levels mirrored that of the second grade.

2003-2004. When school began in the fall of 2003, the expectation for grade level team membership and meeting participation remained the same as it was the prior year. All general education teachers within a particular grade and the CAP coach were expected to attend all the meetings throughout the year. Thus, the second grade team would have been Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, Ms. Sullivan, Ms. Pollock, and Mr. White. However, such a team never materialized for two reasons. The first was that Ms. Pollock chose not to participate in any CAP meetings, despite the fact that she was considered by Ms. McHenry and the other teachers to be a member of the second grade team. Whenever there was a grade-based event, Ms. Pollock and her class accompanied the second grade (e.g., field trips, assemblies). However, in September, Ms. Pollock

explained that she did not intend on referring any students to the CAP team because her class "was really high." She further explained:

> When it comes to [the second grade] CAP meetings, I have nothing to say about their kids. I can't contribute to anything, because I don't know them and I don't have them. So, I'd just sit there and be grading papers.

Ms. Pollock's absence , nor the implications of her choice not to attend, were never discussed by the team or McHenry.

The second factor that impacted team composition involved a change in the expectation for inclusion of coaches on grade level CAP teams. At the staff meeting in August, Ms. McHenry indicated that CAP teams would each have an assigned coach. With the exception of the first grade team that had been coached by Ms. Ziegler (who was no longer a full time staff member), coach assignments at each grade level remained the same as they were the prior year. However, as is discussed further in Chapter Six, based on feedback she received from Mr. White and Ms. Little, Ms. McHenry decided that coaches should no longer be used with the grade level teams.

Since none of the grade level CAP teams had met prior to this announcement in November, coaches were never members of grade level CAP teams during the 2003-2004 school year at Pleasant Valley. Consequently, because Ms. Pollock never participated in a CAP meeting during 2003-2004 and grade level teams did not have coaches, the second grade CAP team actually consisted of Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan.

Meeting Participants

2002-2003. During the 2002-2003 school year at Pleasant Valley, additional staff members frequently joined the grade level CAP meetings. Ms. McHenry, Dr. Baldwin

and Ms. Nichols (prior to going on maternity leave) attended nearly every meeting at every grade level. When asked whether this was in response to a specific request, Dr. Baldwin explained that they initially joined the meetings to support the teams and help them learn the problem solving process. However, because they were such active participants and the feedback they received from teachers suggested that their attendance and commitment to the process was genuinely appreciated, they continued to attend as often as possible throughout the year.

Additionally, if a team member (or the team as a whole) felt that other school professionals could offer additional information about the student or facilitate the problem solving process, they were also invited. Most frequently asked were the special education teachers, the reading specialist, the speech pathologist, and the other general education teachers who had previously taught a referred student. Consequently, CAP meetings at Pleasant Valley during 2002-2003 typically involved at least seven participants.

2003-2004. In contrast, grade level CAP meetings during the 2003-2004 school year were attended almost exclusively by general education teachers. This pattern was observed at the second grade CAP meetings held on January 6th and March 1st where Ms. Baden, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Shoemaker were the only participants. However, in response to the log form that Ms. Baden submitted from the CAP meeting on January 6th, Ms. McHenry scheduled and attended a follow up CAP meeting with the second grade teachers on January 15th. At her request, Mr. White and Ms. Little also participated.

Attendance at grade level CAP meetings for the other grades in the building was very similar to that observed with second grade, where the majority of meetings involved

only general education teachers. The only staff members who participated in grade level CAP meetings during the 2003-2004 school year were Ms. Little who attended one kindergarten and one third grade meeting and Dr. Baldwin who attended one fourth grade meeting.

Frequency of Meetings

2002-2003. Significant differences were found in the frequency of grade level CAP meetings held at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Throughout the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams consistently met for two hours, twice a month on a pre-determined schedule. For example, the second grade team met on the first and third Monday of each month from 9-11 a.m.. Given that pattern, each team met approximately 15-20 times between September and June. Maintaining this schedule was possible because Ms. McHenry used all the school improvement plan money (approximately $7,000) to pay substitute teachers to cover the general educators' classes while they attended CAP meetings. In some cases, when multiple teachers or other staff members in the building participated in a grade level meeting, paraprofessionals in the building were also used to provide coverage.

2003-2004. In contrast, grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School met less frequently and less consistently during the 2003-2004 school year. Between September and June, the second grade teachers held three CAP meetings. Similarly, the first grade team met twice, the kindergarten, fourth, and fifth grade teams each met three times, and the third grade team met four times over the course of the year.

The infrequency of grade level team meetings during 2003-2004 not only differed from what occurred during the 2002-2003 school year, but also contrasted with the initial expectations outlined by Ms. McHenry at the August staff meeting. At that time, Ms. McHenry informed the staff that because the school improvement funding had been eliminated by the district, grade level CAP meetings needed to occur after school, rather than during instructional time. She specified that all grade level teams were to meet at least twice a month, with one meeting occurring on the first Monday of every month, and the second on any other afternoon the team selected. Although not explicitly stated, Ms. McHenry offered examples which implied the meeting schedule was to be consistent throughout the year (e.g., the first Monday and every third Wednesday at 3:15 p.m.). At the end of the staff meeting, Ms. McHenry also indicated that grade level CAP teams should meet at least one time during the month of September to "baseline" their classes and "red flag any students who jump out."

Beginning in September, the bi-weekly school calendar that Ms. McHenry distributed to the staff always listed "3:15 p.m.- Grade Level CAP meetings" on the first Monday of every month. She also made periodic announcements using the schools' public address system reminding teachers about the expectation that CAP meetings occur at least twice a month. The third grade team was the first at Pleasant Valley to hold a grade level CAP meeting when they met on November 24th. In the beginning of February, Ms. McHenry requested that each team leader submit a list of dates for the grade level CAP meetings through the end of the year. The third, fourth and fifth grade teams provided her with schedules, however none of those teams adhered to what was submitted.

Meeting Organization and Structure

2002-2003. The organization and structure of grade level CAP meetings at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2003-2004 school year differed significantly from those held during the 2002-2003 school year. In 2002-2003, teachers submitted initial CAP referrals by completing the first CAP form and giving it to the grade level coach. An agenda for each meeting was developed by the CAP coach at each grade level based on a synthesis of new referrals and on-going cases. The coach typically distributed an agenda to participants prior to the meeting, although it was noted that for a few meetings, it was distributed as team members congregated. At most grade levels, the coach was also responsible for bringing the cumulative and confidential folders of the students being discussed at that meeting. However, at least one team modified this procedure and the referring teachers assumed this responsibility.

During the 2002-2003 school year, specific roles were determined at the beginning of every meeting (i.e., note taker, process observer, facilitator, and time keeper). The exception to this was the kindergarten/first grade team, where a year-long rotating schedule of roles was developed. Next, teachers estimated the amount of time they thought would be necessary for each student on the agenda and time allocations were determined. New referrals were typically assigned thirty minutes and follow-up cases were given fifteen minutes, unless the teacher felt the time should be adjusted because the discussion was anticipated to be especially complex or concise. The facilitator then guided the team's discussion about each student, using a reference sheet of salient questions to be asked during each of the four problem solving steps.

As appropriate, the district's CAP forms for problem analysis and intervention planning and monitoring were completed. Throughout the meeting, the note taker recorded the key discussion points and the logistics of any interventions (e.g., student goals, strategies to be used, who was responsible, when progress was to be reviewed) on a log form and then reviewed that information at the end of the meeting. To conclude the meeting, the process observer offered his or her assessment of the discussion and others added their perspectives and made suggestions for improvement with future meetings. These procedures were reported to be generally consistent across all the grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year.

2003-2004. Observations of the second grade CAP meetings and descriptions provided by teachers and staff at Pleasant Valley about procedures used at other grade levels, revealed significant differences in the structure of grade level meetings held during the 2003-2004 school year. These included: the use of referral forms, schedules, and agendas, utilization of student records, meeting roles, and pre-determined time allocations.

Whereas the district's CAP referral form was completed by the teacher and then given to the team's coach in 2002-2003, referrals and schedules were handled much less formally during 2003-2004. At some grade levels, each teacher identified the names of students they wanted to discuss at the beginning of the meeting and then a list was compiled and each case was discussed sequentially. Other teams, including second grade, did not initially generate a list of students, but instead discussed cases as teachers mentioned specific students throughout the meeting.

During the second grade CAP meeting held on January 6th, concerns about fifteen students were posed at some point during the meeting. However, actual discussion only occurred for nine of the fifteen students. During the January 15th CAP meeting, Ms. McHenry used the January 6th meeting log form to structure the discussion. Consequently, the seven students who were mentioned on January 6th (but not discussed or recorded) were also not discussed on January 15th. A similar situation was observed during the meeting on March 1st, where concerns about two new students were briefly mentioned, but problem solving never occurred.

A contrast in the accessibility and utilization of student records by grade level CAP teams in 2002-2003 compared with 2003-2004 was also found. Whereas meeting participants indicated student records were frequently used in CAP meetings during the 2002-2003 school year, they were not consistently referenced during the 2003-2004 school year. Student folders were not initially brought to any of the second grade CAP meetings, although Ms. Shoemaker left the first meeting briefly to retrieve a confidential file from the main office after questions were raised about whether a referred student had math goals on her IEP. During the CAP meeting on January 15th, an overt decision not to use records was apparent when Ms. Baden asked if she should go get student folders and Ms. McHenry said “No. Let’s just talk about the services.”

The four meeting roles were not designated for the 2003-2004 second grade CAP meetings as they had been during the 2002-2003 school year. However, both Ms. Baden and Ms. McHenry emerged as the people who structured and controlled the meeting. On January 6th and March 1st, Ms. Baden asked the majority of questions and offered her opinion about what should occur for each of the students. The other two teachers

participated and shared their thoughts, but Ms. Baden clearly had the final say about procedures and decisions. Musing about the level of control she was exercising, Ms. Baden said, "I feel like the dictator at the table". Immediately following that statement, she had the team discuss another student by saying "Okay, let me find another paper. Okay, next." During these two meetings, Ms. Baden also served as the note taker, recording information about each student on the CAP meeting summary log.

In the CAP meeting on January 15th, all participants contributed to the discussion, but Ms. McHenry directed the conversation and exercised final approval over decisions that were made. For example, when she reviewed the notes taken during the meeting on January 6th, Ms. McHenry said:

> Okay, you've got down here, conference with the parent. I think that's a good idea. I think we need to sit down and lay out what we see and ask them, work with us here, because this woman is just as disorganized as she can be. She can not get these kids to school on time. . . I think there's little or no follow through at home for school.

The second grade teachers then questioned whether calling the parent might be a better alternative and Ms. Shoemaker specifically expressed concerns about a meeting when she said, "Well, I'm a little nervous about it." However, Ms. McHenry remained steadfast and ended the discussion by saying, "We need to haul her butt in here. I'm going to put it on for the 13th."

During the 2003-2004 second grade CAP meetings, time limits were not specified as was routinely done the prior year. Instead, the person who led the discussion in each meeting (Ms. McHenry or Ms. Baden) appeared to decide when the team should move to

the next case. In some instances this occurred after an intervention had been identified. In others, it resulted from concern about the length of time already spent discussing a student in conjunction with the number of remaining referrals for that day. For example, approximately half-way through the second CAP meeting, Ms. McHenry told the team, "Let's wrap this one up, it's already four o'clock and we have five more kids to go." With that prompt, the team determined the teacher would "continue to monitor" the student and the next referral was reviewed. Fifteen minutes later, Ms. McHenry said, "Okay guys, you've gotta keep going" and the team moved to the next student without identifying any interventions.

In a few cases, there appeared to be certain concerns that were just not pursued. An example of this is illustrated in dialogue from the March 1st CAP meeting when Ms. Shoemaker reported that a student had mastered only 26 of the 54 expected objectives on the district's math test.

> Ms. Shoemaker: But she can regroup and she's good on her basic facts and she seems to be doing really well on regrouping. But other things. . .
>
> Ms. Baden: Yeah, those other things. But we're going to just leave it alone.
>
> Ms. Shoemaker: So we're just going to monitor her?
>
> Ms. Baden: Uh huh. Continue to monitor.

Ms. Baden then read the next name on the log form and there was no further discussion about the first student's math progress.

Implementation of the Problem Solving Steps

2002-2003. Differences were found in the way grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary school implemented the four problem solving steps during meetings

held in 2002-2003 compared with those held in 2003-2004. During the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams specifically used the four problem solving steps to guide the discussion of each student. At each meeting, the facilitator used a reference sheet to ensure that key elements of each step were addressed. With a new case, Step One involved the referring teacher reviewing the information recorded on the CAP Referral form. The facilitator then moved the team into Step Two and used a reference sheet of essential questions to guide the discussion about what factors might have contributed to or caused the student's difficulty.

Based on that discussion, the team then engaged in Step Three and developed an intervention plan. With an initial referral, the team usually decided on at least one intervention strategy. However, in some cases, additional data was collected and development of an intervention plan was delayed until the team could consider that information. Intervention plans documented student goals, strategies implemented, responsible party, and progress review date. At subsequent CAP meetings the team then monitored and evaluated each student's plan (Step Four), until the concerns were adequately addressed or the case was referred to the building level CAP team for additional problem solving and possible consideration for special education services.

2003-2004. During the 2003-2004 school year, student concerns were briefly described and possible strategies recommended, but the formality and structure used during the 2002-2003 school year was absent. The CAP meetings on January 6th and March 1st consistently lacked adherence to the problem solving steps. Instead of systematically reviewing the information recorded on the CAP Referral form and then engaging in problem analysis as was done the prior year, each teacher introduced a new

case with a brief narrative description followed by their opinion of what she felt should happen for the student. For example, on January 6th, Ms. Shoemaker presented a referral this way:

> I have another one, Simone Olean. She's about a twelve and some days are better than others. Sometimes she can't even read a little simple word like 'my', but other times she does great. Her work habits are pretty good, she's quiet. I think she also needs to be part of that small group. With the one on one, or more one on one, she'd definitely do well. She didn't receive any this year because of the lack of...

Ms. Baden then finished her sentence and confirmed the decision when she said, "Right-because of our cuts in staffing. Okay, so as an action, we're going to refer her to the skills group."

Similarly, Ms. Baden introduced a student she wanted to discuss this way:

> So that only leaves Mr. Mark. He's an eight. He guesses, he's very distracting and I'm not sure that he always gets his meds. Sometimes he doesn't want to try because I think it's gotten to the point now where he's embarrassed because he was retained once. I think he needs, I think I need to get him further. He's already been EMT'd. So, I think I'm going to request another EMT because mom wants one too. He was getting three times a week support last year, and he's not getting anything this year, so I'm going to request him for the skills group and also request an EMT.

During the CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little, and Mr. White asked questions that helped expand the problem solving discussion for each of the

students who were discussed by the three second grade teachers during their first CAP meeting. For example, on January 6th, Ms. Sullivan gave the following description of a bi-lingual student:

> He can do the basics. He can add and subtract, and he can do basic work. But on the math assessments for the district that we're given, he's at the low end of it. I think a lot of it is, you know, I go over the directions, but he still has trouble then explaining, you know, where you have to explain things. And also when he reads, he reads the way he talks. And that's, you know, they don't always say s's or ed's or that kind of thing on words.

Based on that description, Ms. Baden recommended and recorded "Test through ESOL to find out primary language" as the Action Item on the meeting log form.

At the meeting on January 15th, Ms. McHenry explained that language dominance testing was not appropriate because it was a process used solely to determine what language should be used to assess a student for special education eligibility. Mr. White, Ms. Little, and Ms. McHenry then asked Ms. Sullivan a series of questions about the student's difficulties (e.g., "Do you get language when he has to tell a story about what he wants to write about, so he's making it up himself, but it's not language on demand?; He can't repeat back to you what you just said, but he understands it?"). Based on that discussion, the team decided to ask the speech language pathologist to informally assess the student's auditory memory and receptive language skills.

The discussion about each student during the CAP meeting on January 15th was more comprehensive than that which occurred on January 6th and March 1st. However, the problem solving process observed on January 15th was less structured than what was

described as occurring during the 2002-2003 school year. Moreover, structure and formality were purposefully avoided. For example, at the beginning of the meeting on January 15th, Mr. White asked Ms. McHenry if he should give everyone a copy of the reference sheet for the problem solving steps and essential questions. She responded, "No, were not going to get them out. We're going to just discuss and make decisions."

At the end of the meeting, the team reflected on their discussion and elaborated on their choice not to follow the structure that was used during the CAP meetings in 2002-2003. Ms. Baden said, "You know what, I can't do that this year." Ms. McHenry then added, "Until the system gives us the time and the staffing to do it, they can take a leap. We're going to do it the best way we can. Talk about kids and make plans and that's it." Ms. Baden concluded:

> And this works better. Tell them to shove their forms. If we have to go back to those little forms and the way we were taught that this was supposed to be done, I'm done with it. No kids are going to get Capped.

Implementation of the problem solving steps by other grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley was described to be similar to that observed with the second grade team. Teachers had a somewhat generic discussion related to the teacher's concern that involved some basic questions, but did not evidence the breadth or depth that was seen with the problem solving steps during the 2002-2003 school year.

Data

2002-2003. Differences were also seen in the kind of data used, the amount of data used, and the way data was used by the second grade CAP team during the 2003-2004 school year compared to that during 2002-2003. During the 2002-2003 school year,

multiple sources of data were used to establish a student's level of performance at the time of referral, as well as their response to intervention(s). Specifically, report card grades, standardized test results, and the teacher's assessment of phonological awareness skills, fluency, word recognition, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, written language, spelling, oral expression and general knowledge skills were all recorded on the CAP form when an initial referral was made. Additionally, information about any relevant behavioral or medical circumstances was documented. When they presented a referral, the teachers summarized the data from the referral form and supplemented it with salient work samples.

In some cases, prior to referring the student to the CAP team, the teachers consulted with another staff member in the building and he or she collected data to help understand why a student was experiencing difficulty. Then, if a referral eventually was made, this was also shared. In other cases, after a teacher presented an initial referral the team indicated a need for additional data to understand the concern(s), and identified what assessments needed to be done and who was responsible. The information was then shared two weeks later at the next CAP meeting.

During the 2002-2003 school year, after multiple sources of data were used to establish a student's level of performance at the time of referral and hypothesized about why a student was experiencing difficulty, data were also used to guide the teams' recommendations for intervention(s) and monitor student progress. For example, a set of CAP forms completed by the first grade team in 2002 showed that the team recommended a targeted strategy called the "Drill Sandwich" for a student who had adequate phonological awareness skills, but difficulty with automaticity of high

frequency words. To ensure the student was learning exactly the words he needed to, additional assessments were done to identify exactly which high frequency words he was, and was not, familiar with. The unknown words were then specifically targeted in the intervention.

Since the team had data showing the student knew eight out of 35 words, they set a series of short term goals to help him reach the milestone of knowing all 35. The first week he was to learn three new words, and the second another three. When he exceeded the initial goal, expectations were adjusted accordingly. In a period of eight weeks, the teacher collected data showing that the student mastered all 35 of the targeted kindergarten words, so a subsequent intervention plan was developed to help him learn the first grade words. Periodically, the teacher re-assessed the student's retention of the newly learned kindergarten words, and when he did not automatically recognize one, it was reinforced.

2003-2004. During the 2003-2004 school year, the amount of data collected, the variety of data sources selected, and the way data was used by the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley differed from what was done in 2002-2003. For example, during 2002-2003, a comprehensive educational, behavioral, medical, and familial history was compiled on the CAP Referral form and presented to the team. In contrast, data from prior years was never considered during the second grade meetings held during 2003-2004. However, Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan did offer narrative recollections about some students. Since they both were first grade teachers the prior year, they offered descriptions like the following:

> Last year I had him for reading and last year he was below grade level, but he was really starting to pick up at the end of the year. He was still below grade level, but he was motivated.

During the three CAP meetings observed as part of this study, when quantitative student data was presented, the most commonly referenced metrics were a student's reading level or math unit test score. Teachers collected this data for all students in their class at predetermined times during the year as part of the district's mandated curriculum. During the CAP meetings, the teachers sometimes had a precise evaluation of student performance using this data (e.g., "He's a fourteen, just fresh today.") and at other times it was approximated (e.g., "She's a two, maybe. I mean it hasn't progressed.", "I have her reading with a group of threes, but she could be reading with a group of fours, maybe", "I think he's about a two"). When a child's specific reading level was not known, descriptions such as "really low," "he's just making it," and "not as far below as these others we're talking about" were offered. Behavioral descriptions were characterized with terms like "oodles" and "sometimes".

Consistently, during all three second grade CAP meetings, when any of the teachers were asked additional questions about a student's academic or behavioral performance, the response was narrative and did not contain any quantitative data. For example, when Mr. White asked Ms. Baden to elaborate about a student's work habits, she said:

> He has a little 'tude and he won't do his work. The other day he definitely didn't have his medication. I said, "Put that book down right now," because it was like

> already the third time I asked him, and he sat right there and read another sentence. He's oppositional.

Similarly, during the March 1st CAP meeting, Ms. Baden asked Ms. Shoemaker about a student's progress. She replied:

> You know, we see him making some progress academically and he's usually motivated. But, you know, he's below grade level in reading and math he's maybe grade level. Math is more of a strength for him. He likes math a lot. He needs more practice with subtraction with regrouping, but he's doing better. But at the low end.

Work samples were never used during the second grade CAP meetings. And, although additional assessments were recommended for one student during the meeting on January 15th, they were never completed so the data was never considered by the team.

Differences were also noted in how data was used to recommend an intervention for a student being discussed during the grade level CAP meeting. Whereas in 2002-2003, there was strategic alignment between the students' specific needs and the strategy recommended, this was never seen during second grade CAP meetings on January 6th or March 1st. For example, on January 6th, although the information presented about students suggested they had differing needs (e.g., basic math skills, memory concerns, reading difficulties, attention issues), the unilateral decision was to refer each to the skills group. No additional recommendations about strategies to be used in the skills group or in the general education classroom were made.

During the CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little, and Mr. White attempted to refine the recommendations made by the second grade teachers on

January 6th. They asked questions to help the team refine their understanding of each student's needs and then strategically selecting an intervention. However, the teachers were not able to provide quantitative data in response to any of the questions. For example, Ms. McHenry asked Ms. Sullivan the following questions about a student who was reported to be "well below grade level" and had been recommended for the skills group during the meeting on January 6th:

> When you're reading with her, when you're reading with her in the small group, think of those five things that are part of a good reader. If you had to pick one, which do you think is impeding her progress the most. . . Does she just need to read more to increase her fluency? Does she not understand what she's read? Can she not sound out words? Does she not have a good site word vocabulary?

Ms. Sullivan did not have the data to be able to answer these questions, but guessed that it was a combination of factors. Based on the descriptions Ms. Sullivan gave, Mr. White recommended a strategy called 'Pocket Words,' guessing that automaticity with high frequency words was probably one area of difficulty for the student. Ms. McHenry also encouraged her to assess the student to find out which of the district's "Word-Wall" words were familiar to student, so the intervention could specifically target those that still needed to be mastered.

Compared with the 2002-2003 school year, the second grade CAP team differed significantly in how they used data to monitor student progress and measure student outcomes. None of the recommendations from the CAP meeting on January 6th or March 1st directly targeted student performance, but rather involved 'Action Items' for one of the teachers (e.g., "Talk to Ms. McHenry, can she get more services?", "Call home, touch

base with mom", "Refer to skill group", "Has he been to the doctor?", "Request building CAP"). Student progress was described in a manner similar to what was seen when the teacher initially presented the referral concerns, giving a student's reading level or math assessment score in combination with a narrative about performance. Academic or behavioral goals were never established for any student and progress towards goals was never discussed.

During the January 15th CAP meeting, three recommendations were made that could have subsequently involved data collection. However, none of these opportunities actually resulted in student progress being monitored or outcomes being evaluated. The first involved a special education instructional assistant working with a small group of students (one of whom was being discussed at the CAP meeting) to build their basic math skills. In the discussion about that intervention, Mr. White asked, "Now, maybe I'm just being anal, but should we be collecting data to see whether this intervention is working or not?" He then suggested using a first grade math placement test for that purpose. Ms. Baden commented, "That's a good idea, like a baseline" and the rest of the team agreed.

However, the placement test was never given and specific goals were never established. When the student's progress was reviewed on March 1st, Ms. Shoemaker reported that the instructional assistant worked with the student at least twice a week, but that the student only passed two of the 54 objectives on the last math assessment. Ms. Sullivan explained, "The computation is very hard for her. She did a little better with geometry, but, you know, computation is really hard for her." Based on that information, Ms. Baden concluded "Okay, so she's good to go. I mean we've got as much services as we probably can for her" and then began discussing the next student.

The second example of where data potentially could have been used to monitor progress and measure outcomes followed a similar pattern. The team recommended that a fifth grade mentor be used to help a student improve her fluency with high frequency words with a technique called the "Drill Sandwich." Data about the student's sight word vocabulary were not available at the time of the meeting, but Mr. White remarked that he would "test her and get the supplies from the deli." This assessment was never done and the recommended intervention never took place. When the student's progress was reviewed on March 1st, concerns about tardiness and a lack of parental support were mentioned, but there was no discussion about her reading level or academic performance.

The final intervention recommended during the January 15th meeting involved Ms. Shoemaker collaborating with Ms. Nichols to create and use a chart to monitor a student's reading progress. On March 1st, however, Ms. Sullivan reported:

> She's improving in her, she's making progress, uh huh. She's a 1.2, maybe a 2.1. I saw Ms. Nichols about making a progress chart, but with her schedule changing, I didn't follow up with that. I can always make a progress chart for her.

A chart was not made for this student during the 2003-2004 school year.

Referred Students

2002-2003. A review of aggregated documentation and data for all students who were referred to grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year was not part of this study. However, descriptions provided by the teachers and staff, combined with documentation of students who were discussed by the second grade teachers and had previously been referred in first grade, offered an overview of the referrals made that year.

Ms. McHenry estimated that 100 (out of 485) students were referred to grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary for problem solving during the 2002-2003 school year. At each grade level, referred students were experiencing academic, behavioral, or social difficulties. The combined kindergarten / first grade CAP team and the second grade CAP team referred significantly more students than the third, fourth, or fifth grade teams. Mr. White explained that this was because in the early grades, teachers were especially cognizant of the need to intervene as soon as a student evidenced difficulties with the acquisition of phonological awareness skills, reading fluency, or reading comprehension abilities.

Based on their experiences with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, staff members at Pleasant Valley expressed differing perceptions about the relationship between the nature of a student's difficulties and the success of the CAP. Mr. White believed the CAP was most successful in addressing students' academic skill deficits, because team-recommended interventions using structured, small-group remedial instruction (e.g., the Wilson Reading Program) had proved extremely successful. Conversely, Ms. Little, Ms. Nichols, and Dr. Baldwin believed the CAP was more effective when the referral concerns were non-academic. Explaining this perspective, Ms. Little said:

> I think [the CAP] is more beneficial with behavioral issues, for teachers anyways, because they get ideas they can try, and usually when they try something, it'll work; even if it's just for a week. Then they start seeing the benefits of doing this. With academic stuff, it can be a long and arduous process. You do one thing at a time because you have to see what works and if a kid is not reading, you want

> it fixed instantaneously. You don't want to try it for two marking periods or whatever.

During her interview in September, Ms. Pollock reinforced Ms. Little's assessment of teachers' desire for immediacy when she described her frustration with the CAP during 2002-2003. She recalled:

> I remember with this one child who not progressing with his reading levels and the only suggestion that was made was for him to increase his high frequency words. They said, "Continue to do flash cards, because the last time he knew 44 words and now he knows 57 words." And I kept saying, "But he can't read. I don't care that, you know, you want me to keep doing the Drill Sandwich, or whatever it is. That's not the issue. You're only working on identifying words. You know, what about the writing component? What about the reading component? You're just looking at a word goal, you're not looking at any other goals for him."

Reflecting on their experiences during 2002-2003, none of the three teachers, Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, nor Ms. Sullivan, expressed a strong opinion about the CAP being preferable for a specific kind of difficulty. Instead, all three teachers indicated that, throughout the school year, they referred students to their grade level CAP team whenever they were not making academic progress or were not displaying skills (academic or behavioral) commensurate with their peers. Ms. Baden summarized this philosophy when she said, "I used it for issues all across the board. If a kid stuck out, and I didn't know what to do, they got referred."

2003-2004. During the 2003-2004 school year, one of the most salient issues for Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan was their perception that an inordinate number of students needed to be referred to the CAP because they were not able to meet the district's academic expectations. In other words, although the majority of referrals made by the second grade teachers were academic in nature, this was not because they believed that the CAP was ineffective with behavioral difficulties. Rather, it resulted from the fact that they found many students were unable to meet the district's standards in reading and math.

During the second grade CAP meetings at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, the teachers mentioned 17 students for whom they had concerns. For the purpose of this section on referred students, each of the 17 students who were at least mentioned during a meeting are considered to be 'referred,' as this indicated one of the teachers sought help in meeting that student's perceived needs. As described, the amount of time spent discussing each student during CAP meetings varied significantly. In some instances, a teacher mentioned a student's name, but further discussion did not occur regarding the concerns or an intervention. In other cases, a student's needs and possible interventions were considered for more than 25 minutes.

Throughout the course of the year, Ms. Baden referred two students, Ms. Shoemaker five, and Ms. Sullivan referred ten, for a total of 17 students. For 14 of these 17 students, the referring teacher identified academic concerns. Seven were experiencing difficulty in reading, two in math, and three students were described as struggling in reading, math, and written language. Ms. Sullivan mentioned the names of two other students who were experiencing academic difficulty, but did not elaborate on the specific

nature of her concerns. Four of the fourteen students who were referred for academic reasons were also described as having difficulty sustaining attention and focus in the classroom. For three of the 17 students, the teacher's primary concern was behavioral (i.e., inattention and excessive activity).

Nine of the 17 students discussed by the second grade teachers had been previously referred to the first grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2002-2003 school year. Four of the 17 referred students had already been classified as having a speech and language disability and received direct instruction from Ms. Kane for one hour each week. One of these four students also received nine hours of special education services. One of the 17 students had a 504 Plan for attentional concerns, and two of the 17 students received supplemental English as a Second Language (ESOL) instruction. A consistent relationship was not found between a prior referral to a CAP team and eligibility for special education services, 504 accommodations, or ESOL services.

A review of the available data suggested that teachers' assessment of the referred students' academic difficulties were relatively valid. For example, at the time of referral, all ten students described with reading difficulties, or reading difficulties in combination with other concerns, were at least two quarters below the district's reading standard. Four students were two quarters below, two were three quarters below, three were one year below, and one student was one and a half years below the standard. Standardized test scores from the spring of 2004, combined with report card information, supported the reading level data and provided additional evidence that confirmed the reading difficulties of the referred students.

However, it also appeared that the second grade teachers did not consistently describe the totality of the students' difficulties when they referred them to the CAP team. For example, one student who was referred solely for math concerns, was also at least one year below the district's expectation in reading. Report card and standardized test data also suggested that at least three students referred for reading difficulties were also experiencing difficulties in math. Of the three second grade students referred for behavioral concerns, two were meeting the district's grade level expectations in both math and reading. The other student, however, appeared to be experiencing significant difficulties in math, although Ms. Sullivan did not mention this when she presented the referral to the CAP team.

A review of the available data for all of the second grade students at Pleasant Valley also indicated there were at least seven additional students who were experiencing difficulties in reading, but were not referred to the CAP team. Specifically, by the end of the year, three non-referred students were one year below the district's reading standard, two students were five quarters below, and two other students were a year and a half below. There was no evidence that any non-referred students were significantly below the math standard.

In summary, the students referred by the second grade teachers at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year for academic reasons were, in fact, not meeting the district's grade level expectations. If anything, teachers under-identified students' needs; some of the referred students' difficulties exceeded those articulated during the CAP meetings and there were additional students who were not referred, but also evidenced difficulties in reading.

Student Experiences

2002-2003. Mr. Kennedy indicated that the ultimate goal of the CAP is that a teacher's referral for problem solving will directly, and positively, impact the referred student's experiences and achievement. Descriptions provided by the staff at Pleasant Valley and available CAP documentation, suggested that during the 2002-2003 school year, this goal was achieved. Nearly every referral to a grade level CAP team lead to a direct intervention for the student. In some instances, the students were not aware of the intervention (e.g., a classroom observation was done and then minor accommodations were made by the general education teacher). In other cases, interventions lead to significant changes in the student's experience at school (e.g., supplemental instruction provided by another staff member in the building). As previously described, the data maintained by the grade level CAP teams as well as descriptions provided by the teachers and other staff members at Pleasant Valley consistently suggested that the interventions lead to significant academic and behavioral improvements for many referred students.

2003-2004. Conversely, during the 2003-2004 school year the experiences of the second grade CAP team offered a very different pattern wherein a referral to the CAP team had little or no impact on students' experiences. This seemed to have occurred for two reasons. First, the majority of recommendations made during the CAP meetings involved adult "Action Items" which never translated into the development of an intervention plan. Second, the few direct interventions which were recommended during the CAP meetings were never actually implemented.

As previously described, the most common recommendation made during all three of the second grade CAP meetings involved an "Action Item" where one of the

teachers was to contact a student's parent(s) or another professional in the building. While none of these "Action Items" were intended to directly impact students' experiences, it was implied through the meeting dialogue that the information learned as a result of the "Action Item" was to be used to develop an intervention plan at the team's next CAP meeting. With six of the referred students, an intervention plan was never subsequently developed because the initial "Action Item" was not completed. For example, during the CAP meeting on March 1st, Ms. Baden indicated she would consult with Dr. Baldwin to discuss appropriate strategies for a student who was having difficulty maintaining attention in the classroom. However, in June, Dr. Baldwin indicated she had not heard from Ms. Baden regarding these, or any other, concerns related to second grade students.

In other instances, the teacher completed the "Action Item," but the necessary follow up did not occur. For example, as a result of the January 6th CAP meeting, Ms. Shoemaker called a student's mother to find out if she had discussed the student's attentional concerns with their family pediatrician. At that time, the student's mother indicated she had not yet taken her son to the doctor, but planned to do so in the near future. However, no additional follow-up or discussion regarding that visit or subsequent classroom interventions related to the student's needs in the classroom occurred for the remainder of the year. Ms. Shoemaker also planned to speak with the student's reading teacher to gather more information about his performance in her classroom, but never did so.

As a result of a recommendation made during the January 15th CAP meeting, Mr. White asked Ms. Kane to informally assess a student's language skills. However, Ms.

Kane did not feel that recommendation was appropriate, and no additional options were pursued. Similarly, during the March 1st CAP meeting, Ms. Sullivan verbosely described how she expended a considerable amount of time and energy locating one of the parents she was supposed to contact. She explained that she finally went to the store where the parent was employed to outline all of her concerns. However, after giving an extensively detailed report about this experience to the team, no intervention was identified or implemented.

During the 2003-2004 school year, there were three recommendations made during the second grade CAP team meetings which could have directly impacted students' experiences. However, none of three interventions were implemented. The first recommendation was made during the January 6th CAP meeting and involved the identification of eight students to participate in a remedial skills group they believed Ms. Kelly was going to offer. Ultimately, this group did not materialize because Ms. McHenry directed Ms. Kelly to prepare fourth and fifth graders for the upcoming state assessments. Thus, the eight second grade students did not receive the recommended intervention.

During the January 15th meeting, two interventions were recommended that could have impacted students' experiences in the classroom. With one, Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Nichols were to collaboratively develop a chart to help a student monitor her reading progress. For the other intervention, a fifth grade student was to tutor and mentor a second grade student. However, neither intervention was ultimately implemented.

As described, participation in the CAP by the second grade teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School had little, if any, impact on the referred students' experiences.

Given this lack of intervention, it is also not surprising that a review of available data suggested that referred students' did not evidence significant achievement gains over the course of the year. Of the ten students who were referred because of reading difficulties, or reading difficulties in combination with other difficulties, none of the students made enough progress to meet the district's grade level reading expectations in June.

Two students increased their rate of progress, but only by one-quarter's worth of growth (e.g., three quarters below in the fall, two quarters below in June). The other eight students did not maintain the expected rate of progress, so they were further below the grade level expectation in June than they were in September. Specifically, when compared to the grade level expectation at the end of the year, one student was one year below, three were five quarters below, three were one and a half years below, and one student was more than two years below the standard.

In summary, whereas a referral to the grade level CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year was described as positively impacting students' experiences and achievement, similar benefits were not apparent during the 2003-2004 school year. Instead, few interventions were recommended and those which were recommended were not implemented with integrity.

In the next section, CAP implementation procedures at Pleasant Valley Elementary School are compared with those outlined in the district's published CAP literature. Specifically highlighted are the similarities and differences noted between the practices at the school during the 2002-2003 school year and the district's guidelines, and those noted during the 2003-2004 school year.

Comparison with the District's Model

When asked to comment about implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley compared to the district's published model, Ms. McHenry explained:

> I think the district had a guideline. I think Mr. Kennedy put something together, but it was more grey than it was black and white, this document. . . But there were too many words in it. It needed to be paired down. But it was essentially what we were doing here. It wasn't far off.

That assessment was based on the school's experiences with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year. When asked the same question in May of 2004, Ms. McHenry offered a very different commentary and poignantly characterized implementation at Pleasant Valley as so "abysmal" that it was "bastardizing the process." Data from this study supported that assessment.

2002-2003. During the 2002-2003 school year, implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley involved all of the primary elements found in the district's model. The school used grade level CAP teams for initial problem solving and a building level CAP team for students who did not respond to interventions and were being considered for special education eligibility. Additionally, grade level coaches were used, meetings were structured, the four problem solving steps were followed, multiple sources of data were utilized, collaboration and involvement of other staff members was common, and strategically developed interventions plans were implemented and monitored. This translated into consistent and effective interventions that positively impacted students' experiences and achievement.

The few differences which were noted between implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley compared with the district's model (e.g., a few of the forms and reference guides published by the district were not consistently used at the school, progress data was not graphed with every intervention) were not perceived by Ms. McHenry, nor Mr. Kennedy to be significant. Reflecting on implementation at Pleasant Valley, Mr. Kennedy indicated that modifications the school made were very appropriate and had not compromised the overall fidelity of the process. Based on what he had observed during the 2002-2003 school year, he concluded that Pleasant Valley Elementary School exemplified what the district expected with CAP implementation.

2003-2004. During the 2003-2004 school year, grade-level CAP teams and the building level CAP team still existed at Pleasant Valley. However, the actual procedures followed and outcomes achieved differed significantly from the district's recommended model in many respects. For example, where as grade level coaches were an integral part of the district's CAP model, they were removed from all the teams at Pleasant Valley. Similarly, where the district encouraged extensive collaboration as part of the CAP process, the grade level teams at Pleasant Valley rarely involved anyone other than the general education teachers in meetings or subsequent interventions.

The district's expectations for frequent and structured CAP team meetings, adherence to the four problem solving steps, and use of the CAP forms were also not realized during the 2003-2004 school year at Pleasant Valley. And, although the district's model relied heavily on the collection, interpretation, and use of multiple sources of data throughout the CAP process, data played a minimal role in the CAP at

Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year. Finally, implementation of the CAP did not appear to significantly impact students' experiences or achievement.

This section contained a comparison between CAP implementation procedures at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and the implementation procedures that are outlined by the district. This comparison revealed that the procedures used at the school during the 2002-2003 school year were very similar to the district's expectations, but during the 2003-2004 school year they were significantly different from the expectations. Some of the most significant differences were: the absence of grade level coaches, the infrequent and unstructured nature of grade level meetings, a lack of adherence to the problem solving steps, the minimal use of documentation and data, and the minimal impact that participation had on students' experiences.

In Chapter Five, the impact of participation in the CAP is described and school professionals' perceptions of the process are presented. Specifically outlined is how participation impacted general education instruction, early intervention support, the collection and use of data, the use of documentation, collaboration and professional roles, and special education rates. For each of these areas, differences noted between participation during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school year are highlighted.

Chapter 5: Impact and Perceptions of the CAP at Pleasant Valley

In this chapter, the impact of participation in the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) at Pleasant Valley Elementary School is discussed. Embedded in this discussion is also information about school professionals' perceptions about the process. First, an overview of the impact of participation is offered. Then, the a more detailed discussion related to the impact of participation on general education instruction, early intervention support, the collection and use of data, the use of documentation, collaboration and professional roles, and special education rates is offered.

Within each category, the similarities and differences found between participation during the 2002-2003 school year and participation during the 2003-2004 school year are highlighted. Data presented in this chapter corresponds with the research questions related to CAP implementation, students' experiences, teacher behavior, and perceptions of the CAP.

Overview of the Impact and Perceptions Related to Participation in the CAP

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School offered predominantly positive recollections and descriptions about their previous experiences with the CAP. Specifically, professionals at the school described how participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year expanded the strategies teachers used in the classroom, facilitated access to early intervention support for students, improved data collection, increased collaboration among staff, and decreased the number of students referred for special education services. For example, Ms. Kelly offered the following reflection about the benefits she saw:

> Having experienced the whole EMT process for quite some time, I saw CAP as such a growth process. It was so much better than EMT for many reasons. For one, one of the biggest reasons was it no longer told the teacher, "Oh, we understand you have a problem child in your classroom, this is what we're going to do to fix it." Now it's, "Oh, tell us what you're thinking and we can tell you have thought about this, this is what we're thinking, and together as a team we're going to work on strategies to support this child." It's no longer the teacher saying "OK. I've hit this brick wall now it's your problem, fix it. Take it out of my room, fix it in my room, whatever you do, fix it." Now it's much more of a process the way it should be. . .It's really a team of professional educators putting their thoughts together and looking at the child as a whole, together.

Similarly, Ms. Pollock explained how she also believed the process was beneficial:

> CAP meetings were a time to just sit down and bring up kids you had concerns with. And so for that reason, it was a really good process because you were able to say, "Okay, I have this child who's reading on this level, you know, she hasn't make any movement or minimal amount of progress. I have concerns. These are the things I've tried, these are the strategies I've tried. And so we would all get together and brainstorm, you know, just good practices. Things that would work. Try this. Try implementing this. And call home and make a home connection and maybe see if they're supportive at home. This is what they can do at home to reinforce what we're doing in school." So it was a good way to get together and just brainstorm solutions to some problems. It was also a good way to make you accountable for documenting things. . . You know, you need to fill out a CAP

form with the issues and the levels. And you need to dig into the history and the health history, the academic history, and so you need to start doing your homework before you bring this child to the table.

Although the overwhelming assessment of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year was positive, some staff members did express a few concerns. Specifically mentioned were issues about the increased responsibilities assumed by general education teachers, the significant amount of time required for active participation, and the perception that students were being denied special education services. However, even with those caveats, the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary school generally endorsed the use of the CAP instead of the EMT because it resulted in better outcomes for both students and teachers.

In contrast to staff members' predominantly positive reflections about the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, perceptions of the process during the 2003-2004 school year were very different. Significant concerns were unanimously expressed regarding the benefit of participation for teachers and students. Overall reflections about the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year echoed the sentiments of Ms. Baden who described implementation of the CAP by the end of the 2002-2003 school year as a "beautiful working model." By the end of the 2003-2004 school year, perceptions more frequently reflected Dr. Baldwin's assessment that "... a lot of good work has been lost."

Data from this study indicated that participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years impacted school professionals and students in six main areas. These included: general education instruction, early intervention support, collection and use of data, maintenance of documentation,

collaboration and roles among school professionals, and special education referrals and services. However, the impact of, and perceptions about, participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years varied significantly. The relationships between participation, impact, and perceptions in each of the six areas are now discussed.

Impact of Participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

Relationship with General Education Instruction

Based on their experiences with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary school generally agreed that participation in the CAP influenced how general education teachers instructed and interacted with students. This directly reflected the district's goal, as described by Mr. Kennedy:

> Teachers are our interventionists. Largely our support staff are about 90% of the time are consultants with the teachers, they aren't directly involved with the kids. And the teacher has to feel comfortable that whatever changes we're asking them to provide in the classroom, they can do within the structure of their day. So, they will be the ones counting behavior if we ask them to do that. They'll be the ones reinforcing students, if it's a behavioral issue. They'll be the ones changing the instructional approach, if the approach needs to be different.

However, differences were found related to the impact of participation in the CAP during 2002-2003 compared to 2003-2004. In 2002-2003, many strategies were recommended during CAP meetings and described as being implemented with integrity by the general education teacher. However, a very different pattern emerged during 2003-2004, as general education interventions were rarely suggested, and none of those that were identified, were implemented with integrity.

Participation in 2002-2003. General education teachers in all grade levels at Pleasant Valley described how, when they referred a student to the CAP team during 2002-2003 school year, they fully expected that the intervention plan developed during the meeting would contain at least one or two classroom-based strategies. Sometimes it was a strategy the teacher learned at the time the CAP team was brainstorming possible interventions. When that happened, it was described as "adding to the teacher's bag of tricks." During her initial interview, Ms. Shoemaker cited learning new techniques as being one of the benefits of participation in the CAP. She explained:

> We would give recommendations to go over directions a second time with the child, or a third, or a fourth. Or, making sure we were working one to one with a certain area the child may be having difficulty in terms of breaking a job down so it is not so overwhelming. Or, you know, just getting ideas for different games for the child to reinforce something. . . With a child who was having trouble learning the word wall words, you know, someone brought up the idea of the sandwich technique. And I hadn't heard that before and that really helped. And you can use it for other children not just that one child. So sometimes you can get some good ideas that can be for other kids.

In addition to learning new techniques, teachers described how participation in the CAP during 2002-2003 also reminded them of strategies with which they were familiar, but had not tried with the referred student. Reflecting on this point, Ms Sullivan explained:

> We came back to our classrooms to try the information we collected from that meeting from all the teachers and used it by keeping data-whether it be tally

> marks, or writing notes. And I thought it was effective talking with other teachers who may have handled other situations very similar to this. And even just refreshing our memory. Because sometimes when you're in the middle of a situation, you don't remember everything and you get refreshed and you come in and you have a new look. . . Trying things, whether it be a contract, a treasure box, a sticker; whatever the CAP team recommended.

Even teachers who expressed great confidence in their own knowledge and skills described how they valued the recommendations made during the CAP meetings. It appeared that recommendations were viewed positively, not with skepticism or resentment, as a result of the collaborative tenor that characterized CAP discussions. When an idea was posed, teachers were encouraged to give feedback about the suggestion, not just passively agree to implement it. For example, Ms. Pollock, perhaps one of the most self-assured teachers at Pleasant Valley, explained how she welcomed others' ideas. She said:

> I was always like, "if you have an idea, throw it my way." Some things were helpful, and others I'd say "I've done that, I've done that, I've done that." Or, I'd ask, "How's that going to help?"

Dr. Baldwin and Ms. McHenry, who frequently participated in the 2002-2003 grade level CAP meetings concurred with the teachers' recollections that many strategies were learned and implemented by general education teachers, including Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Pollock. They indicated that there was some variation in teachers' ability to independently implement an intervention plan, but support was

provided to those who needed it either through direct involvement or consultation by one of the other CAP meeting participants.

Documentation from the 2002-2003 school year further supported staff members' perceptions that participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley led to interventions being implemented by general education teachers at all grade levels. Specifically, CAP forms provided evidence that teachers implemented academic strategies that targeted automaticity with high frequency words, phonological awareness skills, reading comprehension abilities, reading fluency rates, and understanding of mathematical concepts. They implemented behavioral strategies which included multiple forms of contracts and corresponding reinforcement(s), communication logs with parents, and other behavior management techniques (e.g., "Think Chair"). Additionally, they used classroom modifications such as repeating and rephrasing directions, adjusting the number of repetitions used to reinforce a concept, and accommodating homework assignments. The staff at Pleasant Valley credited these interventions with producing laudable achievement gains for many students during the 2002-2003 school year.

Participation in 2003-2004. Whereas participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year influenced the strategies and techniques used by general education teachers, this relationship was not observed during the 2003-2004 school year. Teachers no longer prioritized participation in the CAP, and being a member of the CAP team had little, if any, impact on their behavior in the general education classroom.

The second grade teachers raised concerns about fifteen students during the CAP meeting on January 6th. During their CAP meeting on March 1st, the progress of nine

students was reviewed and concerns about two additional students were raised. However, during these meetings, attended only by Ms. Sullivan, Ms. Baden, and Ms. Shoemaker, specific strategies for the general education classroom were never discussed. Consequently, none of the recommendations made during the January 6th, or the March 1st CAP meeting involved the second grade teachers implementing an academic or behavioral intervention.

Frequently during these meetings, one of the three teachers described strategies that had, thus far, proven ineffective, but the other teachers did not offer alternative ideas or suggestions as to what else might be tried to address the student's needs. Dialogue from the January 6th CAP meeting illustrates this phenomenon:

Ms. Baden: Okay, his reading level?

Ms. Sullivan: He's at a nine. I mean last semester he was at an eight and now we're at a nine.

Ms. Baden: From an eight to a nine, so that's a good rate of progress. But now you feel like he's stalling?

Ms. Sullivan: Right, I mean I still have them reading at an eight, but I'm testing them at nine.

Ms. Baden: How's his math?

Ms. Sullivan: He's just making it- and another thing is repeating directions two, three, four times, I have to.

Ms. Shoemaker: (reading from the notes Ms. Baden was taking) He's a four?

Ms. Sullivan: No. Reading level is nine.

Ms. Baden: Oh, I thought you said four.

Ms. Sullivan: Well, he was a nine, or an eight at the end of November. So I don't feel like. . .

Ms. Baden: Right. I put stalling. He's up from a four to a nine, and hasn't moved.

Ms. Sullivan: But we've only gone from like an eight to a nine since November, which is like six weeks.

Ms. Baden: What were you saying?

Ms. Sullivan: He needs directions repeated, like two or three times. Like for instance, if you say, "How do you spell read?" I say, "You need to tell me what the first two letters are." And then I go, "rrrrr-eeee" and he'll go "r- e." And then I say "The next letter we can't hear, so I'm going to have to tell you that one. It's 'a'. So what are the first three letters?" and he sounds the word out all over again "r-e-a.." And then I say, "What do you hear?" and we do 'd'. Then he goes back to the computer to write read, and he comes back and asks me how to spell read. So, you know, there's a short term memory thing, and I don't want to diagnose it because I'm not sure, but I don't know what else to do.

Ms. Baden: I put down your concerns

The teachers then discussed how they thought the student should have been retained and they questioned whether his parents were fluent in English. Ms. Baden concluded the discussion by asking "What do we want to do with him? What action do we want?" Ms. Sullivan said she would check whether he passed his hearing and vision tests and they recommended him to be part of Ms. Kelly's (anticipated) remedial skills group. Thus, despite the narrative offered by Ms. Sullivan about the nature and severity

of her concerns, no suggestions for classroom-based intervention strategies were offered. The status of the student's hearing and vision was never mentioned again and the skills group never materialized, so this student never benefited from the recommended interventions.

During the January 15th CAP meeting with Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little, and Mr. White, the nine students who were originally discussed by the team on January 6th were all reviewed. From this meeting, there was one intervention recommended that involved a second grade teacher. Specifically, Ms. Shoemaker was to collaborate with Ms. Nichols to develop a reading progress chart for a student the team believed was capable, but unmotivated. Ms. McHenry suggested the strategy, saying that she thought visually showing, "This is where you are. This is where you need to be," would challenge the student and hopefully increase her desire to be on grade level.

All participants in the meeting offered their thoughts about the intervention; Ms. Sullivan suggested using stars to show each reading level that was mastered and Ms. Baden added that having her color in a thermometer was another option. During the team's discussion and in her written reflection after the meeting, Ms. Shoemaker indicated she thought the strategy was appropriate, reasonable, and that it was likely to help. However, despite this positive prediction, Ms. Shoemaker never consulted with Ms. Nichols and the chart was never developed nor implemented.

In summary, participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year appeared to have a significant, positive impact on teacher behavior in the classroom because it lead to multiple academic or behavioral interventions being implemented to address the needs of students referred to the CAP team. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year,

participation appeared to have little, if any, impact on what the second grade teachers did in the classroom. During the CAP meetings, only one general education strategy was recommended and it was never implemented. This diminution appeared to result from lack of congruence between the teachers' expectations of the CAP based on their experiences during the 2002-2003 school year, a lack of relevant knowledge and skills, and their perception that independently implementing recommended interventions was unrealistic. *Relationship with Early Intervention Support*

One of the basic assumptions of the CAP is that instructional or behavioral support is provided based on students' identified needs, not their eligibility for special education services. During the 2002-2003 school year, interventions that were recommended by the CAP team and subsequently implemented by the classroom teacher successfully addressed the identified needs of referred students. However, for other referred students, the intensity or severity of their needs suggested that interventions by the general education teacher alone were not adequate or feasible. Because of this, additional support and service from others in the building was deemed necessary. The school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School termed this additional support either "early intervention support" or "early intervention services;" the two terms were used interchangeably.

Participation in 2002-2003. Unanimously, the staff at Pleasant Valley indicated that one of the benefits of participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year was the ability to access early intervention support for students. Ms. Kane summarized this perception:

> It was significant support, daily support, especially in the early grades which was amazing. I mean it was really great for those kids. Kids who would not have been where they were when then moved into the next grade. They would have been much further behind.

Based on her participation in nearly every grade level CAP meeting at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year, Dr. Baldwin concurred with Ms. Kane's assessment and genuinely marveled at how early intervention support translated into students making "identifiable and concrete progress" in ways she never experienced during her twenty-five years as a psychologist in the district.

Descriptions provided by the staff at Pleasant Valley and intervention plans from the 2002-2003 school year indicated that early intervention support was usually recommended in conjunction with other classroom based strategies. While a variety of formats were used to provide support for students, the team based their recommendations on the hypothesis that the best way to address a student's needs was to provide support in the general education classroom. For some students who were experiencing academic difficulty, however, CAP teams recommended that interventions be provided through the use of a small group format. Typically, the small group instruction was scheduled during the student's art, music, or physical education time; the student continued to receive primary instruction in the general education class, and supplemental instruction targeting specific skill deficits was provided during small group instruction.

According to Mr. White, small groups were used at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year to address concerns in math, reading, and written language with students at all grade levels. However, he indicated that the small

group format proved to be particularly effective for implementing a structured phonological awareness program (Wilson Reading) with emergent readers. During the 2002-2003 school year, there were 16 Wilson Reading groups at Pleasant Valley.

In other cases, when grade level CAP teams identified a group of students experiencing similar difficulties in the general education classroom, a small group was created to specifically address the needs of those students. With this model, students received instruction in the small group instead of in the general education classroom. During the 2002-2003 school year, this form of small group instruction was used to address the reading, written language, and math concerns of approximately 40 students at Pleasant Valley. Finally, additional support was provided to students through the co-teaching model that was used to deliver special education services at the school.

During the 2002-2003 school year, early intervention support recommended for academic concerns was predominantly provided by the special education teachers at Pleasant Valley. Ms. Ziegler worked primarily with the kindergarten, first, and second grade students, and Mr. White and Ms. Little supported students in third, fourth, and fifth grade. In some circumstances, based on the student's unique needs and the availability of staff in the building, the two special education paraprofessionals or the reading specialist also provided support recommended by grade level CAP teams. Where appropriate, early intervention support was also used to address students' behavioral or social needs. Dr. Baldwin described how this support typically involved herself or Ms. Nichols directly intervening with the classroom teacher or student. Then, as the teacher successfully implemented recommendations, their involvement was phased out.

Participation in 2003-2004. The early intervention services associated with the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year sharply contrasted with that provided during 2002-2003 and proved to have had a negative impact on teachers' perceptions of the CAP because they had come to expect that participation would allow them to access what was seen as necessary early intervention support for some referred students. Instead of being an integral component of the CAP, such support during the 2003-2004 school year became a coveted, yet elusive, commodity. Ms. McHenry captured the feeling of the staff when she explained that "teachers are desperate for help." This theme permeated all aspects of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary and was evident throughout the multiple data sources used in this study.

Anticipation of the significant impact that the reduction in special education staffing at Pleasant Valley would have on their ability to provide early intervention support was one of the reasons Mr. White and Ms. McHenry wrote a memo to the district administrators requesting reconsideration of their staff allocation. Citing the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, they wrote:

> The goal of (the CAP) is to create a model based on "prevention, early and accurate identification of learning and behavior problems, and aggressive intervention using research-based approaches." In this way, students "get help early when that help can be more effective." ...This shift in the model requires training and support which we had been able to provide because of the FY2003 Special Education staffing levels. Each of our special educators acted as a coach to help facilitate the CAP meetings for specific grade levels. That was one way that the valuable information on research based interventions could be shared.

> Additionally, because of the inclusion model, general education teachers and special education teachers are able to team-teach and co-teach, providing another avenue for sharing and modeling successful interventions. . . As part of our ongoing mission to provide early reading intervention using research-based strategies, our special education staff has been trained in the Wilson Reading Program and provided short-term and long-term support to students who had been identified with reading difficulties specifically in the areas that the Wilson program addresses. These students all came through the CAP and progress was reported back through the CAP. Our ability to continue providing the Wilson Reading Program this year has been seriously hindered because of the FY2004 staffing cuts.

In October, when it became evident that their staffing positions were not going to be reinstated, Mr. White indicated teachers were extremely frustrated because they felt students' needs were not being met. Dialogue among the second grade teachers during all three CAP meetings illustrated how vital they perceived additional support to be for students who were struggling. At the end of the meeting on January 6th, Ms. Baden summarized the teams' discussion and perceptions when she said:

> Well, I'm thinking, I'm going to do this. I'm going to talk to Ms. McHenry about all these kids and ask for help. Whether getting Mr. White's support or Ms. Little or some other support. What is the fastest way, fast track?

Each second grade teacher directly correlated additional help with student achievement. For example, when discussing a student who had been referred to the CAP team in first grade, Ms. Shoemaker told the others, "Last year he was below grade level

in reading, he received Wilson starting in March and it really helped him, I think. But then there hasn't been any this year." As the school year progressed, the sense of urgency for getting support increased among all three of the second grade teachers, as well as others at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. CAP team members continued to insist that many of the referred students needed early intervention support by recording this recommendation on the meeting summary logs, even though they knew such efforts were futile because Ms. McHenry had repeatedly said that additional support was not available because of the staffing reduction.

For example, in her written reflection of March 6th CAP meeting, Ms. Shoemaker indicated, "Outcomes are s-l-o-w. Too many 'let's monitor progress.' It's March!! I'm concerned about all of the students we've been discussing. What can happen in 3 months? What will happen next year?". On the side of the paper she wrote "Extra support" in bold letters and circled it.

Based on their experience with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, teachers expected that they would be able to access early intervention support for students if the CAP team felt it was appropriate. The realization that this was not an achievable goal during the 2003-2004 school year fostered frustration, anger, and disenchantment with the CAP; what was perceived as being perhaps the primary benefit of participation during 2002-2003 no longer existed. Irrespective of a staff member's position or grade level at Pleasant Valley, the progression from a positive to a negative perception of the CAP process due to the change in accessibility of early intervention support was observed. Many described how they devoted significant amounts of extra time and effort to problem solving during 2002-2003 because they endorsed the

philosophy of providing early intervention support to students without having to code with a disability.

However, as teachers found that participation in the CAP during 2003-2004 no longer enabled them to enlist the assistance of other school professionals, the priority given to participation in the CAP decreased dramatically. Many even expressed a desire to revert back to using the EMT model. For example, during the ILT meeting on February 26th Ms. Baden declaratively told Mr. Kennedy, "I just want EMT back. Because after I had done all my stuff, and unofficially talked to other people, I just filled out the form to get the support." This comment clearly distressed Dr. Baldwin who immediately added, "And the kid was tested and labeled."

However, a closer examination of what was motivating the teachers' call for EMT revealed that their ultimate goal was not necessarily to have students found eligible for special education services. Rather, it was to secure additional support from another adult in the building. Unanimously, teachers expressed feeling overwhelmed by the demands and expectations being placed on them, and in many instances, they indicated that they did not understand students' difficulties, nor did they have any additional ideas for possible classroom-based interventions. Consequently, they maintained that the only way to effectively address the needs of some students was with additional support; the only way to get additional support was to move towards special education classification. For example, during her final interview, Ms. Baden explained:

> I just know that I need support for some kids. I don't give a (care) what you call it or how I get there. I don't care if you call it CAP. I don't care if you call it Blue; but with some of these kids I feel like I could stand on my head and spit

> nickels and it won't matter. And I know some people would say that's a negative attitude, you don't think a child can learn. No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that I am spent. I have used all of my regular ed, special ed, every ed kind of trick and given them as much as I can give individually to one of 26. . . They're not really special ed kids, but they need one hour more a week or one teacher more a week than the average Joe. I have taught for so long and seen the students for so many years, I have a gut. And I know these kids backgrounds, I know their families, I know their relatives. I know what they get at home, and I know which ones, if I could just prop them up, they could do it. They could succeed. But they need the prop. And I can't prop with 26 and with 6 or 7 IEPs that are mostly unsupported.

In the fall of 2003, Mr. White predicted that CAP was "going to be a struggle this year. I don't think we're going to give up on it. But, I think it's going to be really painful all year." Mr. White's prediction about the frustration associated with implementation of the CAP proved accurate in large part because teachers' primary expectation that participation would provide access to early intervention support was not realized during the 2003-2004 school year.

Relationship with Data

Problem solving associated with the CAP relies heavily upon multiple sources of data to understand a student's needs, select appropriate interventions, monitor the student's progress and evaluate the efficacy of intervention plans developed by the team. Consequently, participation in the process should have logically increased the amount of data collected, the kinds of data collected, and the ways data were used to understand the

needs of referred students. During the 2002-2003 school year, this relationship was evident. However, during the 2003-2004 school year, it was not so apparent.

Participation in 2002-2003. Based on their experiences during the 2002-2003 school year, teachers and other professionals at Pleasant Valley indicated that the CAP impacted the collection and use of data with students. The descriptions provided by the second grade teachers as well as others at Pleasant Valley suggested that participation in the CAP increased the amount of data collected by classroom teachers. During grade level CAP meetings in 2002-2003, teachers were expected to present current data for any student they referred. During her initial interview in September, Ms. Sullivan explained how participation in the CAP impacted how she collected data in her classroom:

> I guess you became more structured in the types of things you were looking for. With the CAP, you know you were going back to the meeting, so you just made sure you were on top of it all the time. Not that you weren't when you were trying your own little methods, it was just that you knew you had to collect this data and you were responsible for that.

Other staff who participated in the CAP meetings during the 2002-2003 school year corroborated her recollection that data were consistently and frequently collected to better understand and monitor the concerns of referred students. For example, Ms. Palmer (Dr. Baldwin's intern during the 2002-2003) said that the teachers at Pleasant Valley were consistently prepared to present data about each student the team discussed. Based on her observations of nearly every grade level CAP team during 2002-2003, she recalled, "In a word, the CAP at Pleasant Valley could be described as consistent. You

knew that if for some reason there wasn't data available, even if it wasn't there, that teacher would be asked for it."

In addition to increasing the amount of data teachers were collecting in the classroom, participation in the CAP was also credited with expanding the data sources teachers used to understand students' concerns. During 2002-2003, general education teachers completed the district's CAP referral form when they wanted the team to discuss a student. This entailed compiling and recording an extensive amount of data, including the student's current performance levels, plus his or her educational, medical, behavioral, and familial history. And, although some teachers expressed concerns about the amount of time required to complete the referral form, nearly all agreed that the process was beneficial because it forced them to look through records, talk to others who worked with the student, and synthesize multiple sources of data.

Once the grade level CAP team developed an intervention plan and specific goals for a student, teachers indicated that they typically assumed primary responsibility for collecting data to measure progress using assessment techniques above and beyond those used with other students in the class. CAP forms completed by the first grade team documented data collection during the 2002-2003 school year. For example, forms filled out for a number of first and second grade students showed how the general education teachers conducted informal assessments to determine the extent of students' difficulties with letter name and letter sound identification skills. That data was then used to develop unique intervention plans for each student.

During implementation, the teachers assessed and graphed students' progress once a week. With one first grade student, the graphs documented his growth from ten

letter names and two letter sounds at the time of referral to mastering all names and sounds after ten weeks. The team then wrote a subsequent intervention plan targeting acquisition of kindergarten high frequency words and the teacher collected data in the same fashion. Similar examples were also found at other grade levels and with other academic (e.g., memorization of multiplication facts, acquisition of spelling words) and behavioral concerns.

None of the second grade teachers expressed specific concerns about the increased amount of data they were required to collect as a result of participating in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year. Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan were enthusiastic about new techniques they had learned to monitor progress (e.g., one-minute writing probes) and they found the information collected in the classroom as well as that gathered by other professionals in the building to be very helpful when planning instruction.

Ms. Pollock, however, did not agree with the perception that participation in the CAP was beneficial for understanding a student's needs. She indicated that on a number of occasions she wanted additional formal assessments completed so that she would have a better understanding of a student's strengths and weaknesses. Elaborating on this idea, she said:

> Academic testing, or what ever testing would fit, you know, what the concern was. But then, I mean, I have an issue with some of the testing we have here. I don't think we have a wide variety of testing. . . Like CTOPP is like the buzz test and there are like two or three tests that are used and that's it. . . I think we need

> to look into tests that will give us more information and I think just expand the bag of tricks that we have. Because I'm certified special ed, too.

Other professionals who participated in the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year increased their involvement with data collection. Frequently, the special education teachers, Dr. Baldwin, or Ms. Nichols would collect data to help the team further understand the nexus and severity of concerns about a referred student. For example, Ms. Ziegler recollected:

> If the teacher said, "Karen can't sit in her seat," then we'd say, "Okay let's do a time sample and see how much she's not in her seat and what else she's doing."
>
> So it kind of pin-pointed a little bit more about the problem and a solution.

Comparing their involvement with data collection as part of the CAP with what they did under the EMT process, the special education teachers and Dr. Baldwin reported that participation in the CAP translated into considerably more work because they were involved with more students. However, they also indicated that they viewed participation as beneficial because the data used as part of the CAP was directly relevant to intervention planning and more sensitive for documenting ideographic student progress.

Participation in 2003-2004. The degree to which participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary influenced the collection and use of data during the 2003-2004 school year contrasted sharply with the staff's experiences during 2002-2003. Whereas general education teachers and other professionals in the building collected data to help understand and clarify referral concerns and monitor student progress during 2002-2003, the second grade teachers neither collected nor used any additional data as part of the CAP beyond that which was required by the district for all students during

2003-2004. Consequently, the data considered by the team was not nearly as precise or ideographic (e.g., general reading level vs. student's mastery of high frequency words) and was collected much less frequently (e.g., every other month vs. weekly) than had been done in 2002-2003.

When asked about their perceptions of data and the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. Baden, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Shoemaker all indicated that it was unrealistic for them to collect additional data in conjunction with a CAP referral because their time was monopolized by other responsibilities. For example, in her written reflection after the CAP meeting on January 6th, Ms. Sullivan wrote:

> This meeting took the only planning time I have on that day. (Lunch half hour was spent listing the concerns for each student.) Our school day is so full and adding additional data collecting can become overwhelming for the large number of students we C.A.P. It's a catch 22- because the data is beneficial to the child and the teacher.

The second grade teachers elaborated on their views of data and assessment throughout the spring, and explained that one of the reasons they felt it was unrealistic to expect general education teachers to collect data for the CAP was because the district assessment requirements were increasing. However, the second grade teachers did not believe that the information gained from these district tests was helpful for understanding a specific student's weaknesses. This frustration was expressed by teachers at all grade levels at Pleasant Valley, even though the district's assessment requirements for various grade levels differed. Ms. Kane summarized her observation of the assessments in this way:

> [Teachers] are also now being mandated to, every two weeks, there's an assessment of some sort that has to be given and scored, and then this pretty little graph comes out. And so they're spending more time testing during the day than teaching. And every two weeks, is there a significant enough difference to test? That's questionable in my opinion, but it's mandated and we're now data driven.

The second grade teachers indicated that the only way additional assessments could be incorporated into the CAP process during the 2003-2004 school year, was if others in the building assumed that responsibility.

Where there was frequently collaboration among professionals in administering and interpreting assessments recommended by CAP teams in 2002-2003, this pattern was not observed at any grade level during 2003-2004. A potential opportunity for collaboration resulted from the January 15th CAP meeting, as the team recommended Ms. Kane informally assess a student's language and memory skills. However, Ms. Kane subsequently decided that the team's recommendation was not appropriate, thus the assessments were never completed.

Relationship with Documentation

Multiple CAP forms were created by the school district to document the actions and recommendations of grade-level teams and to monitor student progress. Specifically, there were forms to refer a student, to analyze why the student was experiencing difficulty, and to document and evaluate an intervention plan. The district's CAP forms can be found in Appendix A. At Pleasant Valley, an additional form summarizing the interventions for each student was developed and used during the 2002-2003 school year. Based on their experiences with the CAP during the two year period, teachers and other

professionals noted potential benefits of using the CAP documentation, but also expressed concerns that the paperwork was time consuming and labor intensive. During 2002-2003 these concerns did not seem to impede implementation of the CAP. During 2003-2004, minimal CAP documentation was completed, and teachers indicated that doing so was unrealistic.

Participation in 2002-2003. Based on their experiences during 2002-2003, many of the school professionals at Pleasant Valley indicated that the documentation used with the CAP was beneficial for a variety of reasons. The CAP referral form was described as helpful because it provided a framework that ensured a comprehensive picture of the student was developed. The other CAP forms (e.g., problem analysis, intervention development and evaluation) were seen as an effective way to identify who was responsible for different parts of the intervention, when the plan was to be reviewed, and how the student's progress would be evaluated. Additionally, the form developed by Ms. McHenry to help teams summarize their discussions and decisions related to each referred student was noted to be extremely helpful because it could be used as a quick reference (or "cheat sheet" as Ms. Nichols called it) to review the history and status of each student the team discussed.

A review of the available documentation from grade level CAP teams during the 2002-2003 school year showed that the forms were consistently maintained, and almost always completed in their entirety. For example, the following notes were made on the student summary sheet in October 2002 for a first grade student referred by Ms. Shoemaker:

> Concerns: 16 of 23 CAP letters, 16/23 lower case letters, Level 1 reading, 10/16 Concepts of Print, cannot initiate a sentence, difficulty with following directions, sequencing numbers, and spatial relations.
>
> Strengths: Draws pictures, can dictate a sentence, cooperative, listens attentively to stories, some support at home, works on alphabet at home.
>
> Action Items (person / people responsible also identified): Gather baseline data about current letters and numbers she knows- goal obtain 3 new letters and 2 new numbers by next mtg, contact mom- discuss homework and how to focus on learning letters, modify homework to encourage her to practice target numbers and letters.

Nearly all the staff at Pleasant Valley also commented on the cumulative benefit of CAP documentation while an intervention was being implemented and for articulation purposes from year to year. However, explanations of why the information was valuable reflected the personal interpretations and nuances of different professionals' responsibilities within the school. For Ms. Nichols, documentation was beneficial because it avoided teachers "re-inventing the wheel" every year and helped them understand students' situational concerns. This perspective mirrored how she conceptualized her role as an advocate for both teachers and students with the CAP. She explained:

> If you document which interventions are successful and which are not, which ones you see a change in behavior because of, then next year's teacher can start with that. It also helps the next years teachers learn information about families

and other tough stuff kids might be going through so they can be more sensitive if there's a lot going on with a child.

Both Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan indicated that CAP documentation was helpful for teachers to understand the student's concerns and to more accurately monitor his or her progress in response to an intervention. However, they also explained that the benefits of CAP documentation went beyond the referring teacher, believing the information would be valuable for future teachers either at Pleasant Valley or at another school if the student moved. Furthermore, they believed this potential benefit for others was reason enough to complete the forms, as long as they had time to do so. This perception closely aligned with the fact that both Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Sullivan were considered to be "team players" by Ms. McHenry and others at Pleasant Valley.

Based on their experiences during the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Little, Mr. White, and Dr. Baldwin viewed CAP documentation as being extremely beneficial. For these professionals, there was a direct correlation between use of the CAP forms and the fidelity of implementing problem solving steps during the grade level CAP meetings. Specifically, they felt the forms guided participants through each of the stages, prompted them to answer the salient questions related to understanding referral concerns, helped them specify academic or behavioral goals, and ensured that intervention plans were monitored.

Additionally, the documentation of student progress was viewed by Mr. White, Ms. Little, and Dr. Baldwin as extremely beneficial if a student was eventually screened for special education eligibility because it provided them with information that would then decide whether or not a student needed further assessments. All three of these

professionals endorsed using a student's response to intervention as a criteria for determining whether a student should ultimately qualify to receive special education services, and each believed that CAP documentation allowed them to reliably and validly review previous interventions and outcomes. Comparing the CAP forms with the documentation that accompanied the EMT process, Mr. White, Ms. Little and Dr. Baldwin all unequivocally believed a more comprehensive and accurate record was maintained in the CAP process.

Participation in 2003-2004. At the building staff meeting in August 2003, Ms. McHenry explained that her expectations related to CAP documentation remained the same as they had been during the 2002-2003 school year. Teachers were to complete the CAP referral form to begin the problem solving process, and the other forms (problem analysis, intervention planning, monitoring and evaluation) during the grade level meetings, as appropriate. At that time, she specifically acknowledged teachers' concerns that the paperwork was labor intensive, and suggested they collaborate with other professionals in the building to alleviate the burden. She concluded the discussion by reiterating the mantra that teachers should complete the paperwork the best they could, "...given the circumstances".

Almost immediately after the 2003-2004 school year began, completing the CAP forms became a contentious issue among the general education teachers at all grade levels. Unanimously, teachers indicated that they did not have the time to complete the CAP referral form. Additionally, these concerns were couched with the caveat that they were not even given time for CAP meetings. Some teachers directly and forcefully expressed their dissatisfaction.

For example, at the end of September, one of the fourth grade teachers wrote, “This paperwork is extremely time consuming. How can we streamline this documentation? Perhaps classroom teachers could be involved in the next edit?” in large, bold letters on a blank CAP referral form and left it on Ms. McHenry’s desk. Other professionals at Pleasant Valley did not express their concerns quite so bluntly, but instead dialogued with other staff members about their frustration, and then exhibited passive non-compliance, in that they simply never completed any of the forms.

By mid-October, it was clear that CAP documentation was no longer viewed to be helpful or beneficial by the second grade CAP team members. Instead, it was cited by all three teachers as being a significant impediment to the process. For example, Ms. Baden said:

> Well, we have some kids that we’d like to CAP. I’m not sure if my teammate who brought it up has even had time to fill in the forms because of the time constraints of our day this year. It’s very time consuming. Very confusing. You’re not really sure what to put on, where. A lot of, maybe, things that are repetitive. It takes a really, really, long time.

Ironically, while Ms. Baden was offering this explanation, Ms. McHenry came to her room and asked whether she had completed a mandatory one-page teacher report for a student who was being screened for special education the following morning. After Ms. McHenry left, Ms. Baden began filling out the form and commented, “See, I just can’t do all of this.”

During the staff meeting in November, Ms. McHenry modified her original expectations about CAP documentation. She cited the impact of the cuts in staffing and

money, and explained that because time and support for CAP was not able to be offered to teachers as it had been during 2002-2003, they were no longer required to complete the district's CAP referral form. Instead, she had developed a one-page form titled "Information gathered for the Initial Grade Level CAP Meeting." At the top, it indicated "Please use the cum, confidential, and health files to complete the following information and bring it to this meeting." As she distributed this new form to the staff, she explained that the new expectation was that teachers would gather the following information: primary language, number of school changes, previous concerns, previous interventions, informal and formal testing and results, medical information, family considerations, and attendance data.

Ms. McHenry further explained that she no longer expected the other district CAP forms to be completed during grade level meetings. Instead, they were to use a one-page sheet titled, "Grade Level CAP Discussion Form." This meeting log had five columns: Student, Discussion Summary, Action Items, Person(s) Responsible, and Follow Up Date. She indicated that the designated note taker at each meeting should record pertinent information on this form, keep a copy for the team, and submit a copy to her. After Ms. McHenry presented these new expectations to the staff, most teachers, including the second grade, appeared receptive to the modifications. They expressed appreciation that Ms. McHenry "heard" their complaints, and they indicated that the new forms seemed more reasonable and realistic.

However, although teachers did not evidence any significant resistance during the staff meeting, the referral form was not consistently used. None of the second grade teachers, or any of the other teachers at the school, ever mentioned or completed the new

referral form, nor did they indicate that Ms. McHenry ever asked to see a completed CAP referral during the 2003-2004 school year. Ms. McHenry, however, indicated in February that she was sure some teachers were utilizing the referral form, although she had not actually seen one that was completed. The meeting log was used more consistently by all the grade level teams at Pleasant Valley, and completed copies were submitted to Ms. McHenry following each meeting held during the year. Ms. Baden completed the form during the January 6th and March 1st meetings, but not on January 15th.

Although the meeting logs were completed with more consistency than was seen with any of the other CAP forms during the year, analysis of the second grade meeting transcripts revealed that this documentation was not always carefully or accurately maintained. In multiple instances, the information recorded on the meeting log was not an accurate reflection of the second grade teachers' dialogue and decisions. Specifically, student reading levels were recorded inaccurately and numerous recommendations that the team discussed were not listed on the form. In one case, information about a student who was discussed by the team for approximately 20 minutes was not recorded at all.

Along with specific inaccuracies that were found, the general precision and breadth and depth of what was recorded by Ms. Baden on the meeting summary log contrasted significantly with the documentation maintained during the 2002-2003 school year. For example, in the "Discussion Summary" column of the meeting log form, comments such as "inconsistent, trouble with language, stalling, trouble with reading, thick glasses, received Wilson last year, very chatty, below grade level, going to psychiatrist" were typical. Listed as 'Action Items' were "Can she get more services?

Call home, look at hearing/vision, speak w/ [Ms. McHenry] about next steps, has he been to the doctor? none at present, continue to monitor progress, contact mom, and building level CAP." Additionally, student names were spelled incorrectly and there was little adherence to the columned format.

Similar patterns were observed with forms completed by other grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley. They used descriptions such as "distracting the class, minimal progress issue, new student 0 background" in the "Discussion Summary" column. For "Action Items," phrases such as "collect data" and "work with more" were recorded. An exception to this pattern was found with the documentation from the first grade CAP team. Ms. Ziegler completed the team's meeting summary log on December 12th and the notes she recorded more closely resembled the documentation maintained by all teams during the 2002-2003 school year. For example, the notes she took for one student included:

> Discussion summary: 19/23 letter sounds, 25/25 high frequency words, 90% at level 4, getting resource support, poor application of word wall words in writing, needs 1 to 1 for task completion.
>
> Action Items: Daily contract, Conners'

The first grade team held two meetings during the 2003-2004 school year, with Ms. Ziegler attending the first but not the second. Notes from the second meeting are more comprehensive than what was recorded by other teams in the building, but they did not include data or details akin to what Ms. Ziegler noted on December 12th. When asked whether she thought there was a difference in the way she completed CAP documentation

compared with others in the building, Ms. Ziegler said, “If I’m going to do something, I’m going to do it well. I guess not everybody thinks that way.”

Throughout the 2003-2004 school year, CAP documentation remained a contentious issue at Pleasant Valley, with teachers at all grade levels frequently making negative and disparaging comments about the forms. For example, when she was unable to find any blank meeting summary log forms at the beginning of the CAP meeting on March 1st, Ms. Baden tore out a blank piece of paper and remarked, “I’ll just write in on here and I’m really sorry if the chief doesn’t like it.” Approximately one hour into the meeting, she had filled up the two log forms she found, which prompted her to remark, “Guess we’re done because we don’t have any more forms.”

When asked about the absence of notes from the CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. Baden indicated she saw no need to keep notes, because Ms. McHenry participated in the meeting. Thus, whereas she and other teachers had articulated benefits of maintaining accurate and comprehensive CAP documentation during the 2002-2003 school year, the second grade teachers did not express the same sentiments during the 2003-2004 school year. Instead, only minimal efforts were devoted to completing forms, with the only motivation being the mandate to submit them to Ms. McHenry.

Other professionals in the building also indicated they saw considerable differences in how CAP documentation was used and perceived during the 2003-2004 school year, compared with what they observed the prior year. However, where teachers expressed anger and resentment about the expectations for documentation during the 2003-2004 school year, the non-teaching professionals generally expressed disappointment at the implications. For example, Dr. Baldwin said:

> Well, some kids have been worked through the CAP. Actually the kids who had been brought through the CAP last year, are kids that I felt comfortable moving rapidly on, which goes to speak to the value of CAP. . . I knew what's been tried. I knew the interventions had been done with some integrity. I knew that if the kids still weren't making progress now after all those things had been done and documented, that it was appropriate to move forward. The kids that have come through this year's, quote-unquote CAP process, stuff looks a lot more sketchy. The data and documentation are not there.

Relationship with Collaboration and Roles Among Professionals

When asked about the benefits of the CAP, many of the teachers at Pleasant Valley offered a generic description about how participation increased collaboration among teachers and other professionals in the building. They also described how participation influenced the roles of special education teachers, general education teachers, and other professionals in the building. However, data from this study suggested that the perceptions about collaboration were complex and depended upon who was involved and what level of responsibility was assumed. The influence on professional roles was also multifarious. Additionally, significant differences were found in the level of impact that participation had on collaboration and roles during 2002-2003, as compared with 2003-2004.

Participation in 2002-2003. When teachers and other staff members at Pleasant Valley initially described their experiences with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, one of the unanimously cited benefits was an increase in collaboration among professionals throughout the school. Generic descriptions were offered, almost as if they

were pre-programmed answers. For example, a third grade teacher said, “The collaboration is good. I enjoy talking about kids and giving suggestions.” However, during the course of the year, it became evident that perceptions about the benefits of collaboration had certain contingencies related to who was involved and how much responsibility each person assumed.

At Pleasant Valley, “informal” collaboration among general education teachers was described as having commonly occurred among teachers in the building well before implementation of the CAP. Teachers at all grade levels explained that, irrespective of the CAP, they frequently shared perspectives about instructional or classroom management issues, student concerns, and other day to day challenges that arose. Sometimes teachers just dialogued, and other times they sought support or advice from one another. Because this collaboration and communication already existed at the school, teachers perceived the additive benefit and value of participation in the CAP to be the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals, such as the special education teachers, Dr. Baldwin, and Ms. Kane.

Ms. Kelly articulated the value she saw when working with other school professionals this way:

> As a teacher it just seemed as if we had so much support. . . I felt in the team, I could actually get help from another professional and I was learning so much. The special ed resource team in this building did teach me lots of strategies to put in my bag and quite a few interventions. I learned an awful lot about what interventions look like. How you collect data on interventions. How you have to

> focus an intervention. How specific it has to be. How you narrow it down. How you come up with a hypothesis. The training was excellent for me.

During the 2002-2003 school year, collaboration with other professionals occurred very frequently because Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Little, Mr. White, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Nichols, and Ms. Ziegler were integrally involved with the CAP and attended nearly every meeting. Consequently, teachers believed that participation in the process favorably impacted collaboration at the school. Similarly, the other professionals in the building who were involved with the CAP during 2002-2003 described how participation significantly increased their collaboration with each other and with the general education teachers in the building.

Unanimously, these opportunities were viewed positively. However, there was variation expressed about why collaboration was seen as beneficial. For example, Ms. Nichols referred to each participant in a meeting as a "resource," and indicated that she felt she added and gained knowledge from the collaboration that occurred through participation in the CAP. She explained the benefits she offered and received this way:

> I see it as trying to support the teachers when they're feeling frustrated with a child or when they're not sure how to work with a parent. A lot of times, I've already worked with the parents, especially in the upper grades, so I can support that. And I think over the years, you don't realize how many thing you know about a family. I can easily help out with the educational history form. Say, "Wow, you know two years ago there was a change in the family and this is what happened." So I think having that advantage of staying with the kids and knowing them from kindergarten, I can provide information and then also

> strategies. For me, even where it's a reading level, it's important for me to understand because I try to get into their classrooms twice a month and I need to know which children I can expect certain things, and which ones I can't. And which ones need extra accommodations, so I can plan appropriately for that.

Ms. Little, Ms. Ziegler, and Mr. White indicated that the increased level of collaboration also facilitated a change in their roles during the 2002-2003 school year. They explained how participation in the CAP promoted egalitarianism between special education teachers and general education teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary. They specifically noted that even though special education services were delivered with an inclusive model with co-teaching in every classroom, many teachers had never genuinely embraced shared ownership for all students until the CAP was implemented. Instead, many maintained the conviction that special education teachers should provide services to students with IEPs. Ms. Little sarcastically said that, prior to implementation of the CAP, the role of the special educator was to "Find them, test them, code them, and then fix them. Inclusion just meant we did the last part in the classroom rather than the resource room."

Implementation of and participation in the CAP by the general and special education teachers during the 2002-2003 school year was described as being the most significant factor that allowed these two groups of professionals to collaborate and subsequently helped to change the beliefs of many teachers. In September, Ms. Little explained:

> I am more parallel. I am more on-level. I'm not the specialist because I have been able to flip it back, "I'm not really sure," or "What do you think? What

> things have you tried with another child?", or "Do you realize you're already doing this and you don't even know you're doing it?" In that way, I've become more of a colleague.

Mr. White echoed that impression about the impact of collaboration in the CAP meetings, and explained how he also saw changes in his role extend to the classroom. He said:

> It's kind of made the line between regular educator and special educator, you know, it kind of dims that line because I have been able to be in the classroom with them. They see that there's stuff that I can learn from them as much as there's stuff that they can learn from me. And it's nice to be seen as just another teacher and not the special education teacher.

Both Dr. Baldwin and Ms. McHenry concurred with the assessment that prior to the 2002-2003 school year, many of the general education teachers had not embraced the idea of shared ownership for students. Ms. McHenry explained that the lingering resistance was not unexpected because the initial decision to transform their special education service delivery model was not well received by many of the staff members. To illustrate this point, Ms. McHenry described the scenario when an administrator from the district first introduced the concept of inclusion at Pleasant Valley. She recalled:

> She talked to the staff one afternoon and they basically fried her. And we couldn't, for a while, say the "I" word. Folks didn't say the "I" word, we just sort of did the "I" word. And then people realized that this isn't bad, and stuff kind of went in the back door.

She further explained that overtly, the school was inclusive. Co-teaching was used to provide special education services and the school rarely had to refer students for a

placement other than their home school. Philosophically, however, she felt that there was significant resistance among many of the general education teachers, and that participation in the CAP during 2002-2003 advanced the “We all own all children” belief well beyond what anything else was able to do.

Participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year also impacted collaboration and roles of other professionals at Pleasant Valley. Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Kane and others (e.g., the reading specialist, special education paraprofessionals) all described an increased level of involvement and communication with general education teachers. Whereas these non-teaching professionals were viewed as being tangential to and removed from, instruction prior to implementation of the CAP, participation in the process promoted their direct involvement with students. They participated in grade level CAP meetings, helped with assessments and data collection, and directly or indirectly implemented recommended academic and behavioral interventions. Even though this increased involvement translated into a corresponding increase in their work load, all the non-teaching professionals involved with the CAP viewed participation in the process as beneficial for them and for the students.

Participation in 2003-2004. The consistently positive descriptions about collaboration expressed by the staff at Pleasant Valley based on their experiences during the 2002-2003 school year were not evident during the 2003-2004 school year. Instead, teachers described participation in the CAP less favorably. Their explanations also illuminated how the benefits of collaboration were contingent upon the involvement of other professionals in the building. Similarly, the positive impact that participation in the CAP had on roles within the building was also diminished during 2003-2004.

Because teachers valued collaboration when it involved other professionals in the building, the changes in grade level CAP team composition during the 2003-2004 school year had a significant impact on their perceptions about the benefit of participation. Without the opportunity to dialogue with, and gain input from, others (i.e., the special education teachers, Ms. McHenry, Dr. Baldwin, and Ms. Nichols) teachers expressed much less satisfaction with the outcomes for referred students. Because the second grade teachers participated in CAP meetings with and without other professionals during the 2003-2004 school year, they had a unique opportunity to experience, and then reflect on, collaboration among themselves and with others in the building.

All three second grade teachers strongly indicated that they viewed the January 15th CAP meeting as a more effective use of their time and resulting in better outcomes because Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little and Mr. White attended the meeting. Ms. Baden summarized this perception using an aquatic metaphor. She said that a teacher working alone is "...like a fish out of water." When the general education teachers collaborated with each other, it was, "...like putting the fish in the fish bowl, but none of us knew how to swim." She explained that during the January 6th meeting, "We were like, okay, we put the water in the bowl and now we're all in there going now what?" (at which point she made a fish face as if she were against the edge of the glass). She concluded that when the team expanded and collaboration occurred among other professionals in the building on January 15th, "It was like we all learned how to swim."

The collaboration which occurred during the January 15th CAP meeting was also described positively by the special education teachers. Reflecting on the meeting, Ms. Little wrote: "I thought the CAP mtg. went <u>very</u> well. . . It was a 'give and take,' a

professional, respectful, collaborative effort!" This was an interesting perspective because it contradicted previous actions when Ms. Little and Mr. White lobbied heavily to not coach grade level CAP teams during the 2003-2004 school year.

During subsequent discussions, Ms. Little reiterated that she genuinely appreciated and valued the collaboration that occurred among all the participants at the January 15th meeting. She specifically noted how she wished "every grade level was as good as second grade." Over the course of the year, it became apparent that the special education teachers' beliefs about the benefits of collaboration were somewhat conditional and contingent upon the general education teachers' behavior. Specifically, when Mr. White or Ms. Little felt that the general education teachers were over-reliant on them and not accepting responsibility and ownership for all children, they did not view collaboration positively. On the other hand, when they perceived a genuine attitude and accompanying behaviors that suggested equal participation in the CAP as well as subsequent classroom interactions, collaboration was celebrated and encouraged.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the special education teachers described a feeling of shared ownership and inclusive roles and responsibilities between themselves and the general education teachers. However, during 2003-2004, there was a breakdown of communication among general and special education teachers and a regression to the bifurcated roles and beliefs that existed prior to implementation of the CAP. Stress and resentment among the staff were described as being at "unprecedented high levels," especially between general education and special education teachers. During the ILT meeting on February 26th, Ms. Little explained:

> There's like no communication in the building and there's so much tension. It just hasn't felt right all year because we're all so saturated. Special ed isn't talking to regular ed, and it's like everyone is just circling the wagons, doing our own thing trying to protect ourselves.

The CAP was frequently cited by general education teachers, special education teachers, and Ms. McHenry as contributing to the negative tone in the building. However, with probing, staff members revealed some of the nuances and intricacies about their resentment and anger. Rather than rejecting the philosophy of the CAP, their concerns resulted from perceived inequity about the roles and responsibilities related to students who were experiencing difficulties in the classroom. Ms. Little first hinted at this at the end of October when she described what she had experienced with the CAP referral form. She said:

> Some teachers write the kids name down and then look at me and expect me to fill in the rest. Or, since I did not know how to "do the folders," which I'm not sure exactly what that means, they want me to go and look at all the ed history. If I enable them by doing it, they'll keep asking me to do it.

When asked what response was elicited when she did not automatically comply with the request for her to fill out the referral form, she explained:

> Well, it's a mixed bag. Some teachers act like they didn't really know they were supposed to do it. Other people just go and talk about me behind my back and say that I don't want to do anything. And then some of them will say, "Okay, will you show me, like, where do you get this information from?" So there's like three different categories.

In March, Ms. Kelly eloquently described this perception about the impact of nebulous roles of general and special education teachers at Pleasant Valley:

> I think the missing link for me and the thing I haven't been able to gel in my own mind is what this [the CAP being implemented after the reductions in staff] does for the special ed people in the building. I don't think their roles have been clearly defined for them and I think that they're constantly fighting the expectations of the teachers in a building that has inclusion because they feel that they should be at their beck and call all the time. Any time they need a support person, they should be there. But there has to be a way of filtering them into the whole CAP and inclusion process even after the cuts. I don't know the answer to that. I don't know quite how to do that, but it's gone back to being divided and too often I hear that, "Oh, special ed is different and special ed is not this and special ed is this, special ed is not this, special ed is this." Until we figure it all out, we're always going to come up against that wall of "What do you do all day?"

Concern about the change in, and lack of, understanding about the roles of the special education teachers was expressed by general education teachers at all grade levels at Pleasant Valley. Whereas they articulated the value of collaboration in CAP when it also facilitated getting extra support from the special education teachers during 2002-2003, such an opinion was not voiced during 2003-2004 school year. Instead, teachers described feeling unsupported, isolated, and over-burdened. Specifically, they felt responsible and accountable for the success of coded and non-coded students in their classroom, but did not feel the special education teachers were assuming any role in that

pursuit. Additionally, they did not place any credence in the notion that participation in the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year would impact or alleviate these concerns.

That sentiment about collaboration, roles, and responsibilities was expressed by teachers at all grades levels. What varied was the intensity of how they expressed this frustration. Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan all indicated they felt overwhelmed and frustrated by not being able to access support for students. However, they concurrently acknowledged that the special education teachers were probably also overwhelmed. Others expressed their concerns more vehemently and assigned personal blame on Mr. White and Ms. Little. For example, Ms. Pollock said:

> [The special education teachers] get an awful lot of time off for paperwork. They get an awful lot of time to do lots of things where they don't service kids. And, they don't have to get substitutes to service kids. So they lose a lot of time. I think Mr. White puts out fires with kids and he's like the one-to-one person with certain kids and that takes away from his other responsibilities. I don't think they meet with their kids consistently. I think they need to plug into classrooms a lot more and we are an inclusion school. I think they waste a lot of their time.

Others, such as Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Kane, and Ms. Nichols, who had favorably described changes in their roles during the 2002-2003 school year, expressed very different sentiments about their experiences during the 2003-2004 school year. The removal of the grade level CAP coaches meant that many of these staff members no longer actively participated in the process. Instead, they served only as members of the building level CAP team, a role akin to what they described with the EMT process.

Dr. Baldwin explained that during the 2003-2004 school year, the building level CAP team was used primarily for special education eligibility screenings. Consequently, participants served as "gate-keepers" who determined whether or not a child should be identified as having a disability. Thus, she concluded that the increased level of involvement and welcomed role changes experienced during the 2002-2003 school year were essentially eradicated during 2003-2004. Dr. Baldwin and Ms. Nichols, in particular, expressed significant disappointment with the implications of this deterioration. In November, Dr. Baldwin explained her perception this way:

> Last year, I personally dealt with a lot more kids, but at a much sooner point in the difficulties. So, if the break isn't so severe, then the repair is much easier. And that's not where we are now. By the time I'm hearing these kids' names, I'm hearing many fewer names, but they are at a much further point along the continuum of "We need these kids evaluated." As for my own perspective, I feel much less able to give them any new information from the kind of assessments I would do.

Relationship with Special Education Rates

In accordance with the partnership agreement between the school district and the Office of Civil Rights, one of the predominant goals for developing and implementing the CAP was to reduce the overall number of students referred and found eligible for special education services. During the 2002-2003 school year, implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley was credited with achieving that goal. Consequently, many staff members expressed either direct or indirect support for the CAP because participation

allowed students to receive support and services without having to go through the process of special education eligibility determination.

However, when the reduction in coded students was seen as having caused the elimination of special education positions at the school, perceptions about the CAP changed dramatically. Accompanying this change in attitude was revitalized motivation to identify students as being eligible for special education. The rate reductions achieved during the 2002-2003 school year were not achieved during the 2003-2004 school year.

Participation in 2002-2003. Implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year was celebrated because it lead to an immediate and dramatic reduction in the number of students who were coded as being eligible for special education services. Perhaps because it was a quantifiable benefit, this reduction was the primary theme espoused by both Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Miller. Publicly and privately, they hailed Pleasant Valley's "CAP outcome data" (i.e., the reduction in special education rates) as being "fabulous."

As described in Chapter Four, there is some discrepancy between the CAP data that is published by the district and the recollections of the staff at Pleasant Valley. According to the district's data, 41 students were referred to grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year. Thirty-nine of the referrals were noted to be "successfully resolved." Two cases were referred to the building level CAP team, and neither of those was considered to be "successfully resolved." Two students were noted to have been referred for special education screening, but neither was found eligible. It is not clear from the district's report whether these two students were the same ones who were also referred to the building CAP team.

In contrast, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little, and Mr., White reported that approximately 100 students were referred to grade level CAP teams during the 2002-2003 school year at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. At least 20 of the 100 cases were subsequently considered by the building level CAP team. During the 2002-2003 school year, they reported that two students were found to be eligible for special education services.

Unfortunately, neither the district nor school personnel were able to provide reliable data to verify how many students at Pleasant Valley were found eligible for special education services prior to implementation of the CAP. However, Mr. White, Ms. Little, Ms. McHenry and Dr. Baldwin estimated that between ten and 15 students were coded in any given year when the school used the EMT and the traditional special education referral process. Consequently, the data from 2002-2003, although approximate, supported the conclusion that there was a significant reduction in the number of students found eligible for special education services during the 2002-2003 school year at Pleasant Valley. This reduction was described by Ms. McHenry and others at the school with phrases such as “slashing the rates,” and was directly attributed to implementation of the CAP.

For many at Pleasant Valley, this reduction in the number of coded students was perceived to be, in and of itself, a tremendous benefit of the CAP. The non-teaching professionals in particular, frequently articulated that one of the primary goals for initially implementing the CAP was to provide appropriate instruction and intervention for students, regardless of whether they were eligible to receive special education services. For example, during the spring of 2003, Ms. McHenry, frequently and proudly proclaimed that students at Pleasant Valley received support “...based on need, not code.”

Where as Ms. McHenry, Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Nichols, and the special education teachers at Pleasant Valley expressed unconditional support for participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year because it reduced special education rates, general education teachers expressed mixed thoughts about this relationship. Some teachers indicated that participation in the CAP was beneficial because fewer students were labeled with a disability. For example, Ms. Baden acknowledged that before the CAP was implemented, perhaps teachers were "overdoing" the number of students they referred.

However, taken in isolation, averting the necessity for special education coding did not carry much significance for general education teachers. What they valued about participation in the CAP was the ability to access support for students who were struggling in the classroom. Thus, when early intervention support was easily obtained through the CAP, teachers viewed the process as effective because it directly led to that tangible benefit of support. Avoiding a special education code was more of a secondary benefit. For example, when asked about the relationship between the CAP and referring a student for a special education screening, Ms. Shoemaker said, "I don't know. I guess the CAP process is trying to make sure that enough interventions are done on the classroom level before you code them, or whatever." Ms. Sullivan's perception was that CAP led to trying:

> . . . mega things before you get into special ed. . . We have this process because we want to try everything before they get to third grade. . . So I guess CAP only works as long as we don't have to do a lot of identification. I guess when you get to third grade, all we've done in CAP pulls it together for the third grade teachers.

For at least three staff members at Pleasant Valley, the reduction in the number of students found eligible during the 2002-2003 school year was directly associated with the CAP, but this outcome was not viewed as unilaterally beneficial. Instead, implementation of the CAP was seen as a barrier to securing what was perceived as obligatory special education services for students. Illustrating this perspective, Ms. Pollock said:

> I think a lot of the kids that we brought up for the CAP process, we had serious concerns about these kids. These weren't kids that were just reading a couple levels below. I mean these were serious, you know, very genuine. . . You get very frustrated, I mean in terms of testing, making those kinds of recommendations. We have to get that approved by somebody else and sometimes, a lot of times, we were just told the child is too young, or let's wait or we'll see what happens during CAP. . . So it's almost like the whole CAP process was nothing, because you have to go through everything again once you get to a screening.

Ms. Kane voiced similar concerns and dissatisfaction with the CAP because participation in the process meant "kids took so long to receive a code." She further explained that the process not only impeded students from receiving necessary special education services, but it also fostered frustration among teachers. She explained:

> They are upset that they start in September and nothing happens until June. And when they have a seriously learning disabled kid, that's frustrating for them because they are charged with keeping this kid on grade level. And yet, they know they can't. And without an IEP, they're still charged with that kid, and they

feel, “In September I could have told you that this kid, what is impacting this kid, does not make it possible for him or her to be here.”

Participation in 2003-2004. Whereas special education rates were significantly reduced at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, those reductions were not maintained during the 2003-2004 school year. Dr. Baldwin indicated that she administered significantly more psychological assessments during the 2003-2004 school year, than she had during any prior year at the school. Specifically, she assessed more than 25 students between October 2003 and May 2004, where as she assessed five students during the 2002-2003 school year, and approximately 15 during the years prior to CAP implementation. Of the students she assessed, 17 were found eligible to receive special education services.

Of the 17 students, four were second graders. One student was classified as having autism, one student was classified as having a speech and language disability, and two students were classified as having specific learning disabilities. None of these four students were among the 17 students referred to the CAP team, nor were they among the seven non-referred students who were not meeting the district’s grade level standards.

Throughout the year, the special education teachers and Ms. McHenry explained that their goal was to increase the number of students who were classified as eligible to receive special education services at Pleasant Valley because of the staffing reduction. Mr. Kennedy maintained that the staffing decision “had nothing to do with CAP.” The entire staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, however, directly associated the reduction in coded students that was achieved through participation in the CAP during

2002-2003, with the loss of the special education teaching and instructional assistant positions.

For example, in May of 2004, Ms. McHenry received a memo from the district administrators which outlined that staffing allocations for the 2004-2005 school year would use the same formula that was used during 2003-2004 and resulted in the elimination of the special education positions. After reviewing the memo, she explained:

> Allocation is based on, it's number of coded kids. Your staffing is based on your SEDS (the district's computer program) and the only kids they would take on the SEDS are IEP kids. No 504's, no supported kids, no nothing. Only IEP kids. So in essence, your staffing is based on the number of coded kids you have.

Receiving this information clearly disappointed and frustrated Ms. McHenry. Until this point, she had hoped that the staffing cuts would only be in effect during the 2003-2004 school year. The memo, however, was what she described as a "...bitter dose of reality".

Although the connection between the CAP, reductions in special education rates, and the loss of staff positions was unilaterally drawn by the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary, the connotations of this relationship varied somewhat among professionals at the school. Some expressed disappointed that the district was not adequately supporting implementation of the CAP. Others were overtly angry because they viewed the district's actions as being intentionally punitive. For example, Dr. Baldwin was extremely saddened by the lost opportunity to maintain the reductions in special education rates that were achieved during the 2002-2003 school year. In November, she explained how the school was handling the situation:

> I just got a list of about 15 or 18 kids they want evaluated before the end of the year so that they can re-build their special ed numbers so they can get their positions re-instated. It's so sad, 15 or 18 kids.

Others, such as Ms. McHenry, Mr. White, Ms. Little, and a few of the general education teachers expressed disappointment, but were also very angry. For this group of professionals, irrespective of whether they philosophically endorsed the CAP, they saw no option other than to increase the number of students coded as eligible to receive special education services so that number would be reflected on the database that was used for district staffing allocations. Illustrating this perspective, in January Ms. McHenry explained:

> The worst part is that this year, I won't have the staff, no matter what. So even if we code, it'll only help for next year. I'd rather code no one, but we need staff to service based on need. And right now, that's not the game that's being played in this town.

So, although the expectation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School was that teachers should refer students who were experiencing difficulty to grade level CAP teams, there was also a competing and conflicting desire to increase the number of students who were eligible for special education services in 2003-2004.

This dissonance led to confusion and frustration related to the purpose and utility of the CAP at Pleasant Valley. For the teachers who saw the benefit of participation being the ability to access early intervention support (as they experienced during the 2002-2003 school year), the value of participation during 2003-2004 was diminished because such support was no longer available. For those who valued the ability to

provide service and support to students without a disability code, they felt penalized for doing what they believed was in the best interest of students during the 2002-2003 school year. Additionally, they expressed that providing services based on a code was better than providing no service as all, so there was motivation to increase the number of coded students at the school in order to have the staffing and support for students reinstated.

Consequently, during the 2003-2004 school year, teachers and other staff members demonstrated an increased desire to avert or circumnavigate the CAP process. For example, on at least four occasions, teachers strategically encouraged parents to directly request a special education screening. When this occurred, the school was legally obligated to hold a meeting, and the teacher did not have to show that the grade level CAP team had attempted to address the student's needs before referring it on to the building level CAP team, where special education would then be discussed. Illustrating this scenario was a letter which revealed what Ms. McHenry described as "a little too much information." In this instance, the mother of a first grade student requested a screening and wrote:

> [My son's teacher] has recently informed me that he is having a lot of problems in reading. He is not on the level that he should be on and he really needs some extra help. She said that we should get a specialist in to improve his skills, but that it won't happen unless I request...

It did not appear that any of the second grade teachers actively encouraged parents to avoid the CAP in this manner. However, Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan did consistently and frequently express a sense of urgency and desperation about gaining additional support for their students. Many times during the year, they

referenced how they needed to find the “fast track” and “quickest way” to secure additional help. They also indicated that they honestly did not care whether this was accomplished with early intervention support through the CAP or through the special education evaluation and classification process.

For those staff members who originally expressed concern about the CAP blocking access to necessary special education services for some students, the reduction in staffing intensified their animosity towards the CAP. During informal conversations and during structured school-wide events, many espoused an “I could have predicted this was going to happen” tone and cited how, just as they predicted, students who received support during 2002-2003 through the CAP were neglected because they had not been labeled as officially eligible for special education. For example, in April Ms. Pollock reiterated concerns she originally expressed during her initial interview in September:

> We wanted to make sure that this kid was going to have support put into place for when he or she went into third grade. You know, we had a lot of second grade support and knowing that our budget is being cut. . . these are the kids we knew were pretty much going to fall flat on their face if they didn’t get that kind of support.

Rather than responding with anger, other staff members at Pleasant Valley appeared disenfranchised by the reductions in special education positions. Because of this, they actively distanced themselves from the CAP. For example, Ms. Ziegler reflected on her role in the process during the 2002-2003 school year, and explained how she was internally motivated to actively participate in all aspects of the CAP because she

believed in providing early intervention support to all students who were experiencing difficulties:

> I felt support in the building. And I tried my hardest to be that support to the classroom teachers. That's just my style. Everybody has a different style, and I saw that that was my responsibility. Promoting the process, getting the paperwork done, servicing the kids. I believed in it all.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, Ms Ziegler expressed no interest in being a part of the CAP at Pleasant Valley. In October, her distance from the process could be inferred from her answer to a question about the similarities and differences in the CAP procedures during the two years:

> Again, I'm no longer in special ed. I think the CAP meetings come every other Monday during team time after school. I have no idea. I'm only a part time person. I have no idea if there is follow through, or if children are being referred.

Ms. Ziegler attended one grade level CAP meeting in December because the first grade teachers specifically requested she join them to offer insight about a student. However, when asked to reflect on that meeting, she expressed significant distrust in the process, indicating she only attended because she was asked to do so and "It's the process we've been told we have to follow."

In this chapter, the impact of the CAP for school professionals and students at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years was discussed. Specifically, relationships in six areas were described: general education instruction, early intervention support, collection and use of data, maintenance of documentation, collaboration and roles among school professionals, and special

education. Throughout the discussion, comparisons between the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years were highlighted.

Specifically, the benefits and positive perceptions that were noted to have occurred during the 2002-2003 school year were not evidenced during the 2003-2004 school year. CAP team recommendations no longer targeted the general education classroom, early intervention support was no longer provided, collaboration among school professionals diminished, and egalitarian roles were not maintained. Additionally, the special education rate reductions achieved through CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year were not maintained during 2003-2004.

In Chapter Six, the role and influence of administrative forces on the CAP are discussed. First, a review of how the principal impacted CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School is offered. Next, a similar discussion is provided about how district, state, and federal policies and decisions impacted the CAP. Within each review, the similarities and differences related to administrative forces during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year are presented. Then, the experiences and perceptions of school professionals at the other CAP elementary schools are discussed. Finally, the impact of administrative forces on CAP implementation at these schools is described.

Chapter 6: Administrative Forces and Experiences at Other Schools

In this chapter, the role and influence of administrative forces on the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) are discussed. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first focuses on the experience at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and the second focuses on the experiences at twelve other CAP elementary schools within the district's same field office region. As described in Chapter Three, data sources were expanded mid-way through the study to explore the experiences of these other schools and compare them with those at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2003-2004 school year.

In the first section of this chapter, a description of Ms. McHenry's role with the CAP during the 2002-2003 and the 2003-2004 school years is given. Next, a discussion of her influence on the CAP during the two years is offered. Then, a description of the impact that district policies and decisions (i.e., staffing allocations and financial resources) had on the CAP at Pleasant Valley is provided. Finally, a review of the influence that state and federal decisions and policies had on the CAP at Pleasant Valley is offered. While some data related to the role and impact of administrative forces at Pleasant Valley were indirectly presented in Chapters Four and Five, the information is synthesized and reviewed in this chapter.

In the second section of this chapter, the experiences of the twelve other elementary schools implementing the CAP are outlined. First, CAP implementation procedures are reviewed and compared to those used at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Next, a description of school professionals' perceptions of the CAP is provided.

Finally, the factors that were described as most significantly impacting CAP implementation at the other elementary schools are discussed.

Data presented in this chapter corresponds with the research questions related to the role and influence of administrative forces at Pleasant Valley and the CAP experiences of other elementary schools.

Administrative Forces at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

Role of the Principal

This section describes Ms. McHenry's role in the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. During 2002-2003, Ms. McHenry consistently demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment for the CAP and was intimately involved in all aspects of implementation. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year she evidenced less commitment to implementation and she was significantly less involved in the process than the previous year.

Role of the Principal 2002-2003

Commitment. Ms. McHenry voluntarily piloted the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School with the expectation that it would facilitate teachers' ability to identify and understand students' unique needs and allow students access to necessary academic and behavioral early intervention support. Additionally, she was motivated to successfully implement the CAP because she believed it would help solidify the school's inclusive philosophy and promote collaboration among staff members. For these reasons, she viewed the CAP as a significant improvement over the EMT process. During his interview, Mr. Kennedy praised Ms. McHenry's initial enthusiasm and reflected on her commitment:

> Ms. McHenry. . . was one of our first advocates and recognized how difficult [implementing the CAP] was going to be for her staff because of the paradigm shift. . . people have to accept a whole new way of doing things, a new structure in their day. There has to be a willingness to trust and engage in conversations with each other that are sometimes hard. But with that up front, Ms. McHenry restructured her day so there would be time for her teachers to have that dialogue.

Ms. McHenry used all of her school improvement money to pay for substitute teachers so that each general education teacher could participate in grade level CAP meetings two times a month. She also required the special education teachers and special education paraprofessionals to assume an active role with the CAP as grade level coaches and interventionists. Other school professionals were also designated as grade level coaches, and encouraged to collaboratively participate in the CAP in a variety of ways throughout the year. In May of 2003, Ms. McHenry explained that she devoted all the school improvement money and insisted on staff members' active involvement because she sought to "pro-actively" avert the passionate teacher resistance that emerged after inclusion was introduced at the school. She explained:

> Absolutely everything that would promote success had to be done so that [teachers] would buy into the process. I knew if they saw it work, and they didn't think it was overly burdensome, they'd own it. If they thought it was too much work, and watched it flounder, it would have never taken off.

Direct involvement. Ms. McHenry's commitment to successful implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley also motivated her to personally assume a direct and active role in the process. This began during the summer of 2002, when she attended the

district's two-day CAP training workshop with Ms. Little, Mr. White, Dr. Baldwin, and Ms. Nichols. That summer, she also organized a CAP binder to maintain all the grade level documentation and created a bulletin board in the conference room that highlighted the goals and steps of the CAP. During the teachers' professional development days in August, Ms. McHenry used one full morning to provide an overview of the CAP and explain her expectations related to each staff member's role and responsibility with the process during the 2002-2003 school year.

When the grade level CAP teams convened in September, Ms. McHenry attended nearly every meeting, being absent only when she was required to attend an off-site administrative function. During these grade level meetings, Ms. McHenry said that she frequently served as the facilitator. In this capacity, she was described as having guided the teams through the problem solving steps, having asked salient questions, having insisted on the use of data, having ensured that documentation was correctly maintained, and vigilantly having monitored the progress of each referred student. She jokingly explained:

> I didn't exactly want to do this, but if I didn't take on that role, we would have sat there all day. At the beginning of every meeting, I'd ask, "Who wants to be the time keeper, the note taker, the process observer, and the facilitator?" Getting volunteers for the other jobs was easy, but when you asked about the facilitator, everyone immediately stared at their shoes and did everything they could to not be noticed.

Ms. McHenry believed this reticence resulted from participants' lack of knowledge and confidence with the CAP. This, she explained, was understandable

because the majority of the staff members at Pleasant Valley had not participated in any CAP training beyond the introduction she provided during their professional development days in August. She readily acknowledged this lack of staff preparation, and consequently, felt obligated to provide guidance, direction, and modeling to each grade level team in an effort to promote teacher buy-in and successful student outcomes.

According to Ms. McHenry, as the 2002-2003 school year progressed, the grade level CAP coaches assumed an increased amount of the organizational responsibility for their teams and other team members gained confidence with the meeting roles and processes. Consequently, she indicated that her role evolved to where she was a passive observer. Dr. Baldwin, however, did not entirely concur with Ms. McHenry's assessment of teams' independence. Rather, she believed that Ms. McHenry maintained a significant amount of control during grade level CAP meetings throughout the 2002-2003 school year. Ms. Palmer corroborated Dr. Baldwin's recollection with her own description of Ms. McHenry's role:

> [Ms. McHenry] was very invested in the process and she attended every single meeting. . . And, you know, I think she was the strongest asset at that school for the process. She took over a lot, but, I mean, we did begin to rotate it a little by June.

Role of the Principal 2003-2004

Whereas Ms. McHenry actively participated in various aspects of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, she assumed a very different role during 2003-2004. Specifically, she was minimally involved with the grade level CAP teams, and she no longer evidenced a desire to creatively allocate resources, nor did she consistently

express enthusiasm or commitment for the process. This change appeared to be symptomatic of her response to the district's reduction in Pleasant Valley's special education staff allocation and the elimination of the school improvement funding. A chronology of Ms. McHenry's role during the school year is presented next.

August-October. During the summer of 2003, Ms. McHenry was informed that the district reduced the school's special education staffing allocation by one and a half positions and unilaterally eliminated the school improvement funding. Because the special education teacher and paraprofessional positions were used to provide the early intervention support recommended during grade level CAP meetings, and the school improvement money paid for substitutes freeing teachers to attend these meetings, the district's decisions directly impacted implementation of the CAP. In response to these two district decisions, Ms. McHenry appeared to have had two choices, if her staff was to continue use of the CAP.

First, she could have replicated the school's 2002-2003 implementation procedures during the 2003-2004 school year. Doing so, however, would have required reconfiguring staff assignments to provide early intervention services. Additionally, it would have required either restructuring the instructional schedule to allow grade level CAP meetings to occur during the day, or requiring teachers to use their planning time for grade level meetings. Her other choice was to modify the school's CAP procedures.

As previously described, Ms. McHenry chose the latter option. She explained that, given her options, she did not believe it was feasible for grade level teams to meet during the instructional school day. Thus, she required grade level CAP meetings be held after school. She also did not believe that any staff member at Pleasant Valley could take

on the additional responsibilities associated with early intervention. Consequently, she did not designate anyone to provide such support. During their professional development days in August of 2003, Ms. McHenry explained these modified CAP procedures to the entire staff. Specifically, she indicated that the changes were necessitated by the district's decision to reduce their special education staffing allocation and the decision to eliminate the funding used for substitute teachers.

Ms. McHenry specifically stated that, "…despite this lack of support...," Pleasant Valley would continue to use the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year because the process aligned with the school's commitment to provide early intervention support and an inclusive environment for all students. She also indicated that the CAP would soon be mandated at all elementary schools, so it was in their best interest to make necessary modifications and continue using the process "...on their own terms."

Staff members who attended both the half-day CAP workshop in August of 2002 and the meeting about expectations for 2003-2004 indicated that Ms. McHenry's format was similar during both years; she described the rationale for implementation, outlined her expectations for participation, and gave a handout that reinforced the school's procedures. An important difference, however, was that after this initial meeting related to the CAP, Ms. McHenry did not attend grade level CAP meetings as she had in the fall of 2002. Instead, during September and October, Ms. McHenry dialogued with the members of the building level CAP team about implementation procedures and concerns as they were brought to her attention.

November-December. In the beginning of November, Ms. McHenry honored Ms. Little and Mr. White's request to remove them (and other school professionals) from

serving as grade level CAP coaches. In response to teachers' complaints about being overwhelmed by the expectations and time constraints for participation in the CAP, in addition to their other responsibilities, Ms. McHenry also reduced the CAP documentation requirements. She independently created a one-page referral form that required teachers to gather significantly less information about students' educational histories. She also developed a meeting log which contained five columns: student, discussion summary, action items, person(s) responsible, and follow up date. These were the only forms the teams were required to use for the remainder of the school year.

Ms. McHenry devoted Pleasant Valley's November staff meeting entirely to the CAP. Using that forum, she acknowledged what she characterized as "ballooning complaints" with the process, and continued to posit that teachers' stress resulted from the district's decreased level of support. When at least five staff members were openly disrespectful (e.g., exasperatingly rolled their eyes, made snide, disparaging remarks), Ms. McHenry pleaded with them to, "Please try and get beyond the negativity and listen to how we've tried to adapt this." She went on to explain that the potential outcomes of the CAP were aligned with the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act, because the process was "...a way to make sure we're doing all we can for every kid to help them meet the standards."

During the meeting, Ms. McHenry outlined her new expectations related to documentation and grade level coaches. She specifically highlighted how, for the remainder of the year, team leaders were required to submit completed meeting logs to her following each of their grade level CAP meetings. She explained that the log information would help her better understand and address students' needs at each grade

level. Privately, however, she indicated that the purpose of the meeting log was to heighten teachers' sense of accountability, because she hoped this, in turn, would motivate grade level teams to meet more consistently.

On numerous occasions during the fall, Ms. McHenry reminded staff members that grade level CAP teams were expected to meet after school on the first Monday of every month, and one additional afternoon during the month. She did this by making periodic announcements over the P.A. system and by specifically noting "Grade level CAP meetings" in bold letters by the first Monday of every month on the school's internal calendar.

January. Receipt of the second grade's January 6th meeting log initiated Ms. McHenry's first, and only, direct participation with a grade level CAP team during the 2003-2004 school year. She explained that, because many of the recorded "Action Items" directly involved her (e.g., "talk [to] McHenry- can she get more services?", "Speak w/ McHenry about next step," "Baden talk to McHenry- ASAP"), she requested the team reconvene. Additionally, she invited Ms. Little and Mr. White to the meeting because she believed that many of the teachers' concerns and students' needs related to special education or early intervention issues and services.

During that follow-up CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. McHenry appeared to intuitively assume the lead role; as the teachers congregated, they looked towards her and she immediately structured the discussion. She reviewed her purpose for calling the meeting and stated that they would sequentially discuss each of the students listed on the January 6th meeting log. She also clarified that they were not going to use student folders, the problem solving guide sheet, nor any other formal CAP procedures. For the

duration of the meeting, Ms. McHenry was the person who most frequently asked salient and clarifying questions and proposed interventions which were ultimately recommended as "Action Item(s)" for each student. Although Ms. McHenry led this meeting, all of the participants did contribute to the discussion.

After the meeting, each of the teachers indicated that Ms. McHenry's role in the January 15th meeting was very similar to what they experienced during the grade level meetings held in 2002-2003. However, they also said that her noticeable lack of adherence to the formal CAP procedures (i.e., assigning of roles, using student folders, following the specific problem solving steps) was exactly the opposite of what she endorsed and required during the 2002-2003 school year. Poignantly illustrating this contrast was Mr. White's comment that, "Last year [Ms. McHenry] was the procedural guru and enforcer all in one. After this meeting, I'm wondering who that woman is, and what they've done with my principal?"

February – June. Between February and June, Ms. McHenry periodically reiterated that grade level CAP teams were required to meet at least twice a month. In the beginning of February, she also requested that each team leader provide her with a list of their CAP meeting dates for the remainder of the school year. In response to Dr. Baldwin's suggestion, Ms. McHenry organized an ILT meeting with Mr. Kennedy on February 26th, and a follow-up ILT meeting on March 16th. During the year, she also maintained a notebook of all the submitted meeting logs. However, unlike the 2002-2003 school year, she did not return any forms with comments for the teachers to address.

Summary. Ms. McHenry assumed a very direct and active role in the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year. She promoted the

goals of the process, required active staff participation, creatively structured the school's schedule and resources, and consistently attended grade level meetings. Her motivation for this active involvement appeared to be her personal belief in the philosophy of the CAP, her commitment to ensure high levels of implementation integrity throughout the school, and her belief that successful implementation was an achievable goal because of the available resources.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry evidenced minimal direct involvement with the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. This significant change appeared to result from the sense of disenfranchisement she experienced after the district reduced the school's special education staffing and eliminated the school improvement funding. In response to these changes, Ms. McHenry modified some of the CAP procedures before the school year began, and made additional modifications in the fall. In all cases, these modifications increased the discrepancy between the school's implementation procedures and the district's guidelines.

Throughout the year, she was intermittently involved with the CAP; she attended one grade level meeting, dialogued with building level CAP members, and occasionally corresponded with the district CAP personnel. However, she did not actively, nor enthusiastically, facilitate implementation as she had during the 2002-2003 school year. The influence that Ms. McHenry had on CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years is described next.

Influence of the Principal 2002-2003

Descriptions offered by the school professionals at Pleasant Valley, permanent products, and Ms. McHenry's own recollections, suggested that the principal at Pleasant

Valley had a significant influence on the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year. Specifically, her ubiquitous promotion of the process and her high level of participation influenced others' enthusiasm for the CAP, adherence to CAP procedures, and the functioning of grade level CAP teams.

Enthusiasm. Unanimously, the teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley recalled that, throughout the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry continually articulated the benefits that participation in the CAP brought for both teachers and students. Her enthusiasm created an environment which developed and amplified others' endorsement of implementation. For example, Mr. White recalled how Ms. McHenry's optimism was contagious:

> Some of us were supporters from the get-go. We believed in inclusion, and so we believed in the CAP, too. For those who, maybe, didn't exactly understand what it was at first, she sort of swept them up. And before long, they were, too, like, going around championing how the CAP worked in the interest of all the kids.

Frequently, recollections about the influence of Ms. McHenry's positive attitude were combined with descriptions of how her high level of participation also promoted implementation success. For example, when asked about her attendance at the training during the summer of 2002, Ms. McHenry discounted the notion that her participation represented anything out of the ordinary. However, Mr. White, Ms. Little, and Ms. Nichols each emphasized how she was one of the only principals in attendance. To them, it reinforced their belief that Ms. McHenry was enthusiastically committed to the success of the process at Pleasant Valley. Ms. Little explained, "I guess it sort of said, 'Hey, we're all in this together, from the top right on down.'"

Procedures. Ms. McHenry's commitment and direct participation with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year appeared to have also facilitated adherence to the CAP procedures at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Illustrating this were teachers' frequent references about being accountable to attend each CAP meeting, collect multiple sources of data, consistently implement CAP team recommendations, and accurately complete and maintain all CAP documentation. A few teachers expressed resentment at what they perceived to be an "unnecessarily authoritative" mandate related to participation. For example, when asked whether she felt that implementation of the CAP was adequately supported at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, one fourth grade teacher replied:

> When you use the word support, I'd say you'd have to be using it kind of loosely because it's kind of like we were just told, "You're going to do this." Bingo, bottom line, there's no choice. So, do we feel support? Only, if that's considered support.

However, even those who did not voluntarily support the CAP did adhere to the school's CAP procedures.

CAP documentation provided additional evidence that Ms. McHenry's high level of participation influenced the process during the 2002-2003 school year. For example, on a referral form, where a first grade teacher noted "Started at Level 2," Ms. McHenry wrote, "Sept?" and required the teacher to provide additional details. Where the teacher noted "New student to our school, seems as though many pieces are missing- gaps," Ms. McHenry wrote, "In what? What gaps- how do you know?", and instructed the teacher to clarify her concerns and provide work samples. On another form, a teacher failed to

initially indicate the referred student's reading level. In response, Ms. McHenry highlighted the box in yellow, circled it with a red marker, and wrote a question mark next to the blank area.

When asked about these scenarios, Ms. Baden explained that, after a referral form was submitted to the grade level coach, Ms. McHenry personally reviewed almost all CAP documentation. Then, where she had questions or concerns, she made notes, returned it to the teacher, and expected him or her to address each of the comments. The result of this, Ms. Baden recalled, was that "We learned really fast that you better do things right the first time, unless you wanted to see them again."

Team functioning. The nature of Ms. McHenry's participation during the grade level meetings also appeared to have influenced the functioning of grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year. Mr. Little, Ms. White, and Ms. Nichols all indicated that by assuming the role of facilitator, Ms. McHenry directed and guided team discussions. Specifically, they said she provided the scaffolding that enabled participants to clearly delineate a student's specific strengths and needs, set realistic goals, and identify appropriate interventions. Dr. Baldwin elaborated on that idea, and explained that Ms. McHenry also focused teams on each of the problem solving steps and asked strategic questions. She explained:

> The teachers didn't necessarily have the objectivity to ask questions like, "Have you thought about...?, Have you tried...?, This has worked before with X, do you think it might help...?" Because they're involved with the kid every day, they can't back off and take a forest, instead of a trees approach. She helped do that for them.

Although Ms. McHenry's participation in grade level CAP meetings was seen as having positively influenced implementation of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, both Dr. Baldwin and Ms. Kelly articulated how they also observed some unintended, and potentially negative, consequences. Specifically, they believed that by maintaining a high level of control, Ms. McHenry impacted participants' skill acquisition and development as facilitators. This, they believed, may have ultimately impacted team functioning. Commenting on how she saw the grade level CAP teams plateau, Dr. Baldwin explained, "[Ms. McHenry's] insistence on being the facilitator in every one of those meetings inhibited the growth of the individual teams. . . They didn't feel like they could move at all, or make a decision, unless she was there."

Influence of the Principal 2003-2004

During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry was actively involved with the CAP and was described as a steadfast and enthusiastic supporter. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, she appeared to struggle with a sense of dissonance related to the process. On one hand, she philosophically believed in the CAP, and she continued to purport the need for teachers to systematically identify and understand the complex needs of their students so they could provide appropriate support. However, Ms. McHenry also perceived the districts' funding and staffing reduction to be punitive and a repudiation of all the time and effort that she and her staff had expended to achieve successful CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year. Consequently, her enthusiasm waned, her level of direct involvement and procedural enforcement decreased, and she was much less willing to creatively allocate resources to support implementation at Pleasant Valley. The influence of each of these factors is now described.

Enthusiasm. On numerous occasions, Ms. McHenry passionately articulated her frustration with the fact that school was "...really getting there with CAP and then we had the rug pulled out from under us." Additionally, throughout the year, she described the CAP as an "unfunded mandate." In February, Ms. Kelly reflected on the implication of Ms. McHenry's attitude change:

> [Ms. McHenry]'s biggest stumbling block is not being able to get herself out of this rut that they put us all in, which means she can't get any of us out. She's philosophically there. When you talk with her, she's very there. She's a bright woman, she knows what's best for kids, and she's on top of things. But that almost makes it even more bitter for her. She needs to be able to get to where she can say to teachers, "Okay, fine, that's a given. I understand where you're coming from. Yes it is hard, yes, yes, yes. But now, what can we do with this and this and this? Stop admiring the problem. Let's move over here to what we can do now."

Ms. McHenry's attitude towards the CAP was described as having significantly and positively influenced CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year. During the 2003-2004 school year, her significant influence continued. However, instead of the positive impact resulting from the enthusiastic contagion described by Mr. White during the 2002-2003 school year, the diminished expectations embedded in Ms. McHenry's discussions about the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year had a negative impact. Her negative, almost defeatist, attitude was adopted by many of the staff, such that teachers at all grade levels also started to

lament how the district had erected “insurmountable barriers” that prevented successful implementation.

For example, in her written reflection after the March 1st CAP meeting, Ms. Sullivan wrote, “Due to lack of money from the district, this means lack of support for those children who need it the most, which means we talk and write for 9 months and progress isn’t ever made.” Similarly, during her final interview Ms. Baden explained:

> We had a beautiful working model last year, and then we had the rug pulled out from under us and it felt like a slap in the face. It felt like being told that all that you all did was not a good idea and not worth anything.

Most teachers would not have been independently privy to the specific information related to district decisions. However, staff members frequent “parroting” of Ms. McHenry’s verbalizations further emphasized how her diminished enthusiasm and negative perceptions were internalized by others at the school.

Direct involvement. During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry’s minimal level of direct involvement appeared to have influenced grade level team functioning and overall adherence to CAP implementation procedures at Pleasant Valley. When asked about the significant change in her role with the grade level teams, Ms. McHenry indicated that her integral participation during the 2002-2003 school year resulted from what she saw as the necessity to teach and model the CAP procedures. However, she also said that she never intended to sustain that level of involvement. She explained, “It’s like you’d see with a bird. You need to give the bird wings, teach them how to use those wings, and then they need to fly.” Ms. McHenry never acknowledged a potential or

actual influence of her diminished level of enthusiasm, nor her diminished level of direct involvement.

Comparisons among the second grade CAP meetings on January 6th, January 15th, and March 1st offered some insight about Ms. McHenry's influence on grade level CAP team processes. Specifically, when the general education teachers met by themselves, students' specific needs were not identified, there was little use of data, and recommended interventions were dominated by generic adult 'Action Items.' During the January 6th meeting, Ms. McHenry asked questions that allowed the teachers to more precisely identify students' strengths as well as their specific skill deficits and recommended interventions which targeted students' unique needs.

Additionally, the second grade teachers each described the meeting with Ms. McHenry and the special education teachers more positively than they did those meetings that involved only the three general education teachers. Ms. McHenry also indicated the January 15th CAP meeting was a success. For example, in her written reflection, when asked to respond to the question, "Do you feel this meeting was an effective use of your time?", she wrote, "Absolutely!", and also commented, "This meeting went very smoothly and many student needs were addressed. Teachers are beginning to accept ownership for all students, and trust that there is support for them to make good decisions."

Others (e.g., Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Little, Mr. White, Ms. Nichols, and Ms. Kelly) concurred with the assessment that Ms. McHenry's participation in the grade level meetings had significantly influenced team functioning. However, it was not clear whether Ms. McHenry's participation, as well as the participation of other staff members,

influenced team functioning because teachers did not have the necessary skills, or because her presence heightened their sense of accountability and increased their motivation to engage in productive problem solving.

Procedural enforcement. During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry's lack of enforcement of the school's CAP procedures also appeared to influence implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary. By the beginning of October, it became evident that McHenry's initial expectations were not being met. In August, she specified that CAP teams needed to meet at least once during the month of September to "baseline" their classes and "red flag any students who jump out." Yet, this did not occur at any grade level. At the end of October, when asked whether grade level CAP teams had started to meet, Ms. McHenry replied, "Some are." This, however, was not true. The first CAP meeting at Pleasant Valley occurred when the third grade team convened November 24th.

At various times during the remainder of the school year, Ms. McHenry acknowledged staff members' lack of compliance with the majority of her CAP-related expectations. On multiple occasions, although she reminded the staff about their responsibilities, this did not change their behavior. For example, in the beginning of November, she asked team leaders to submit a statement that identified their second monthly meeting date. She explained, "I give them once a month, on Mondays, to meet and they are to come up with another time each month. Like the second Tuesday, or the third Wednesday."

On November 20th, when asked about whether the teams had complied with her request, she quietly laughed and said, "No. I don't have any of those back yet."

Similarly, in the beginning of February, Ms. McHenry requested each team leader submit a list of their CAP meeting dates through the remainder of the year. In response, only the third, fourth, and fifth grade team leaders provided such a schedule, however none of these teams ultimately met on their designated dates.

In the fall, when asked about the fact that grade level CAP teams were not meeting, Ms. McHenry's most common reply was, "I can't make them do it." As the year progressed, however, her articulated rationale for not enforcing adherence to the CAP procedures became more sophisticated, and expanded to reflect her perception that teachers were overwhelmed with a plethora of other responsibilities during the 2003-2004 school year. She alluded to this theme during the November staff meeting when she apologetically said, "I have to ask you to do these things. You need to document all you've done to help, and then sleep well at night."

In December, Ms. McHenry provided additional insight when she offered a possible explanation as to why the second grade CAP team had not met:

> The teachers think it's important, it's just that they can't do it all because of all the other things that are using their time. What they're being asked to do is outrageous. They just can't do it.

This was a theme she reiterated on multiple occasions through the remainder of the year.

Along with Ms. McHenry's perception that teachers were overwhelmed with their daily responsibilities, it appeared that her decision to not actively enforce adherence to the CAP procedures may have also resulted from her own stress level. During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry frequently lamented the pressure she felt to improve the school's standardized test scores, the lack of time she had to adequately perform all of her

duties (e.g., comprehensive teacher observations, gifted and talented program development, vertical articulation with other schools in the cluster), and the emotional turmoil she experienced because of increasingly contentious parent interactions. These stressors, combined with her skeptical view about the potential for successful CAP implementation, may have contributed to her diminished efforts related to enforcing adherence to the CAP procedures.

Allocation of resources. Ms. McHenry's decisions about how to allocate Pleasant Valley's monetary and personnel resources appeared to be another factor that influenced CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year. After the district reduced the school's special education allocation and eliminated the school improvement funding, Ms. McHenry repeatedly expressed the belief that CAP implementation was only possible if the grade level teams met after school. Additionally, she indicated that it was no longer feasible to provide early intervention support, as was done during the 2002-2003 school year.

In September, she explained, "We needed to make some fast, S.O.S. decisions. We understood how this should work, because we were doing it last year. And, we're just reducing it down this year." When asked to predict the impact of these changes, she indicated:

> I have no idea what will happen, but I hope you understand my motives. I want this to work, but this is the reality of this year. I want the CAP done with integrity, but it has to be grounded in reality.

As described, the requirement that grade level CAP teams meet after school proved to be a highly contentious issue throughout the 2003-2004 school year at Pleasant

Valley. During her initial interview, Ms. Shoemaker described some beneficial aspects of the CAP, but simultaneously offered a prediction based on the new meeting time:

> You did learn a lot about the child, and it was good to talk with the team and get ideas. But, at the same time, it took a lot of time. And last year we had time provided for that, and this year I don't think we are. I think it's going to be a factor, you know, in how much we can get done. So, I'll have to wait and see.

Ms. Shoemaker's sentiment about not having "time provided" was echoed by teachers at all grade levels, throughout the year. Ms. Baden's response to the opening question in her second interview illustrated the perceived salience:

> Tanya Schmidt: Perhaps start by reflecting on what you think CAP was, and wasn't this year.
>
> Ms. Baden: The number one problem was the time element. We still need to come up with a way to make it more time effective, where teachers are given the time to get together during the day. Without that, it doesn't happen.

Thus, Ms. McHenry's rescheduling grade level CAP meeting times from during, to after, the instruction school day in 2003-2004 appeared to have significantly impacted the frequency of meetings throughout the year.

When the district reduced Pleasant Valley's special education staff allocation, Ms. McHenry vehemently expressed the belief that she was unable to re-assign the early intervention responsibilities associated with the eliminated position to others in the building. Her explanation, which was reiterated by both Ms. Little and Mr. White, was that the two remaining special education teachers had extremely large case loads, thus, no time to provide services to students who did not qualify for special education services.

As a result, the school did not offer early intervention support to students during the 2003-2004 school year, unless they were formally identified as needing special education services. As described in Chapter Five, the removal of access to early intervention support proved to have a dramatic, negative impact on teachers' perceptions of the benefits of participation, and referred students' experiences and outcomes.

In summary, during the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry's enthusiasm and consistently high level of direct involvement was described as having positively influenced CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Her attitude engendered support among school professionals and her commitment to encourage (and when necessary, enforce) implementation integrity resulted in unilateral participation. Her participation in grade level CAP meetings ensured that team members adhered to the problem solving steps, implemented recommended interventions with integrity, appropriately collected and used multiple sources of data, and consistently monitored student progress.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry exerted a different influence on the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Her enthusiasm and direct involvement waned and she struggled with a personal sense of dissonance between her philosophical belief in the CAP and her perception that the district's actions repudiated the schools' efforts. She also expressed that she was under a significant amount of stress. She opined that with the reduction in district support for funding and staff, successful CAP implementation was impossible, especially in the context of teachers increased responsibilities and other stressors. She decreased her involvement with the grade level CAP teams, modified the school's implementation procedures and forms, did not allocate

internal resources to neutralize the district's actions, and did not actively enforce adherence to the CAP procedures. In combination, these factors appeared to have ultimately contributed to the significant, negative changes noted with implementation procedures, teachers' perceptions, and student experiences. Next, the influence of district decisions and policies is described.

Influence of District Decisions and Policies

This section focuses on the influence that district decisions and policies had on the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Specifically, decisions and policies related to staff allocations and financial resources are reviewed because, throughout the course of this study, school professionals at Pleasant Valley specifically described how they believed inadequate staffing and funding were the two most salient factors that impacted the CAP. Citing their divergent experiences with participation in 2003-2004, compared with 2002-2003, teachers at all grade levels repeatedly insisted that district decisions and policies made it impossible to successfully implement the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year.

Staffing allocations. As described in Chapters Four and Five, most school professionals at Pleasant Valley characterized CAP participation during the 2002-2003 school year as being beneficial because it promoted collaboration among professionals, provided access to early intervention support, reduced special education referral and eligibility rates, and led to academic and behavioral improvements with many of the referred students. Additionally, multiple sources of data suggested that implementation integrity was extremely high during the 2002-2003 school year, even among staff members who did not voluntarily endorse the CAP.

The school professionals at Pleasant Valley attributed this success to the staffing allocation which allowed the school to maintain three special education teachers. That level of staffing reduced each teacher's case load, which, in turn, allowed him or her to be actively involved with the grade level CAP teams and provide team-recommended early intervention support to students. According to Ms. McHenry, the third full time special education position was authorized during the summer of 2001 by a (now retired) associate superintendent to support CAP implementation. Mr. Kennedy, however, recalled that the position was added to support inclusion at the school; but added "...inclusion is, of course, directly related to the CAP."

Ms. Ziegler was hired as the third special education teacher in the summer of 2001. During the 2001-2002 school year, she did not have any CAP-related responsibilities because the school delayed implementation until the fall of 2002. When the CAP was implemented in the fall of 2002, all three special education teachers provided special education services, and served as grade level coaches and early interventionists throughout the year.

According to Dr. Baldwin, when Pleasant Valley agreed to pilot the CAP, the school was given specific assurance that the three special education positions would not be jeopardized if fewer students were classified as eligible to receive special education services. Mr. Kennedy verified Dr. Baldwin's recollection and offered additional insight about the situation:

> We had a commitment from the school system, right from the top. The associate superintendent, the then associate superintendent, said that for any school doing CAP, if the outcome was fewer inappropriate referrals to special education,

> and then follow that to the next level, if you had less kids on your rosters, then you would not be punished by losing staff. Because, if you were, it was a disincentive to participate in the CAP. Well, that's not what happened. And, what actually happened, had nothing to do with CAP. It had to do with who came next, and the way things got restructured. If you didn't have the numbers, you didn't get to keep your positions. And that was totally opposite of the promise.

At Pleasant Valley, the district's new formula resulted in the elimination of one full time special education teaching position and one half time paraprofessional position.

Commenting on this outcome, Ms. McHenry took great exception to Mr. Kennedy's assertion the staffing reduction "...had nothing to do with CAP." She fervently believed that if the school had not implemented the CAP, they would have been allowed to maintain three full time special education teachers. Just prior to the January 9th Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meeting, Ms. McHenry explained her perspective to Mr. Kennedy:

> We're trapped in a vicious cycle. First, we're told to use the CAP and offer early intervention, because it eliminates the need to code. And we did. And it worked. We slashed our [special education] roster. But then they took away the positions that allowed us to do E.I. [early intervention].

To support Ms. McHenry's assertion, Dr. Baldwin added:

> I'll test until my hands fall off, but it's not going to solve the bigger problem. If we need to code six kids to get that position back, we can do it by April. . . then, we can go back to doing CAP. But, we'll be in the same place next year.

As Mr. Kennedy, Dr. Baldwin, and Ms. McHenry adjourned to the library for the ILT meeting, Ms. McHenry concluded their conversation by reflecting, “We talk about setting students up for success, but we can’t even set ourselves up for success.”

The district’s decision to reduce Pleasant Valley’s special education allocation directly impacted the CAP because the school’s implementation structure relied upon three full-time special education teachers to provide the early intervention support recommended by grade level CAP teams. Although significant in itself, this influence was compounded by Ms. McHenry’s belief that it was impossible to re-assign the early intervention responsibilities in a way that would have allowed the school to continue to offer need-based support, as had been done during the 2002-2003 school year. Consequently, during the 2003-2004 school year, academic and behavioral support was made available only to students who were classified with a disability.

Financial resources. When the school professionals at Pleasant Valley described their concerns related to the staffing reduction, their descriptions frequently extended to emphasize the cumulative impact that resulted from also losing funding for substitute teachers. At the end of October, Dr. Baldwin concisely summarized this perspective:

> By having one and a half positions cut, the early intervention piece has been decimated. Additionally, I think this year’s progress has been really stifled by the lack of funding so that teachers have the time to process on a regular basis, in a structured manner.

The school professionals at Pleasant Valley unanimously interpreted the elimination of the funding used for substitute teachers as being symptomatic of the

district's lack of support for the CAP. For example, in September, Mr. White explained his frustration with the district's decisions:

> I'm not sure what the school system wants, because it seems like it's a mixed message. You know, they want us to do CAP, and now they're signing even more schools up to do CAP. But then they took away all the supports, the people, the money, so it's the same old thing we see every time there's a budget crisis. CAP was fine when there was lots of money, but as soon as the pot dries up, they don't care what happens.

The following month, Ms. Nichols expressed similar dissatisfaction with the district's actions and priorities:

> I know the county isn't committed to [the CAP]. If they were, they wouldn't have cut all our funding which allowed our teams to meet. They would have come out here and saw what we're doing and said, you know, "Wow. This is really valuable." Or they would maybe do a case study, or a study on our CAP teams as they progressed through last year to show how effective it can be.

However, staff members' perception that the elimination of the funding used for substitute teachers was directly related to the CAP did not take into consideration the mediating effect created by Pleasant Valley's unique implementation structure. Ostensibly, the school improvement money and the CAP were independent of one another; the district did not designate those funds to support the CAP. Rather, the school improvement money was generic, discretionary funding to help each principal achieve his or her school's unique school improvement goals. According to Ms. McHenry, the majority of school improvement plans targeted improvements in standardized test scores.

At Pleasant Valley, however, the 2002-2003 school improvement plan was written to promote implementation of the CAP. Specifically, it contained goals designed to enhance inclusion and provide early intervention support to students based on need, not eligibility for special education services. To achieve these goals, Ms. McHenry used her entire 2002-2003 school improvement fund to pay for substitute teachers. This, allowed grade level CAP meetings to be held for two hours, twice a month, during the instructional school day.

Ultimately, it was that unique allocation that circuitously connected the elimination of the school improvement money to the CAP at Pleasant Valley. When the funding was no longer available, Ms. McHenry required CAP teams to meet after school. Teachers did not consistently comply with that new expectation, and the frequency of grade level CAP meetings was significantly reduced during the 2003-2004 school year.

Influence of State and Federal Decisions and Policies

As described, district policies and decisions appeared to have directly and indirectly impacted the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. In contrast, data did not suggest a similar influence from state or federal policies. During the 2003-2004 school year, only Mr. Kennedy, Dr. Miller, and Ms. McHenry ever referenced a connection between the No Child Left Behind Act and the CAP. In each instance, however, the actual influence that the legislation had on implementation at Pleasant Valley proved to be minimal. Moreover, none of the school professionals at Pleasant Valley, nor any of the district level CAP personnel, identified any other federal decisions or policies, nor any state decisions or policies that influenced the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school years.

Based on his experiences and observations throughout the district, Mr. Kennedy outlined the factors he believed inhibited successful implementation of the CAP. He then specified that, "...the constant bombardment of legislation from the feds" was most influential because both general education teachers and special education teachers were overwhelmed by the responsibilities associated with the No Child Left Behind Act. Consequently, he explained, they had neither the time, nor the desire, to prioritize the CAP, and participation became "...just one more thing to worry about."

In some respects, Mr. Kennedy's assessment accurately reflected the sentiments of Pleasant Valley's teachers during the 2003-2004 school year. They frequently described themselves as feeling overwhelmed and some directly reiterated his phrase that the CAP was "...just one more thing." However, whereas Mr. Kennedy believed the No Child Left Behind Act negatively impacted the CAP, this legislation was not the nexus identified by the teachers. Instead, they associated their stress with the district's decisions and policies. For example, in the beginning of November, Ms. Baden offered the following explanation about why the second grade CAP team had not held any meetings:

> The time constraints on classroom teachers this year are just out of control. The paperwork, the number of students, students with special needs in regular classes with limited support because we lost one and a half special ed teachers and two classroom positions last year, all the districts tests; but yet, we've been enrolling new kids almost every week. Putting up [the district's] essential questions and the objectives, and blah, blah, blah. So, CAP just becomes one more thing we don't have time for.

Even when directly asked, none of the special education teachers, or regular education teachers at Pleasant Valley validated Mr. Kennedy's assertion that the No Child Left Behind Act was the source of their increased responsibilities. When asked about the difference between teachers' descriptions and Mr. Kennedy's perspective, Ms. McHenry explained that some district decisions and policies may have originated with the No Child Left Behind Act, but had since been "...filtered down through the district coffers." Further, because the federal legislation had not translated into specific mandates, or punitive action at Pleasant Valley, she believed that most teachers had not internalized the impact of the law. Consequently, she explained, although teachers understood that students were expected to meet certain grade level standards in reading and math (a derivative of the No Child Left Behind Act), they associated those requirements with district policies.

Additional evidence of teachers' indifference toward the No Child Left Behind Act emerged from their reactions to the many artifacts throughout the building that referenced the federal legislation. For example, immediately inside the front door at Pleasant Valley, was a bulletin board which proclaimed, "Pleasant Valley Leaves No Child Behind!" It consisted of multi-colored, child-sized hands reaching upwards towards stars. When asked about the impact of seeing this display every morning, many teachers and other school professionals minimized or dismissed the message.

One fifth grade teacher, for example, described the bulletin board as "transparent." A kindergarten teacher explained that she did "...not know anyone who had time to marvel at scenery like that." Similarly, when asked about the importance of the prominent main office display that contained framed graphics for each of the

variables used to determine adequate yearly progress, staff members cited the district's emphasis on data and assessment.

During Pleasant Valley's November staff meeting, Ms. McHenry specifically referenced the alignment between the No Child Left Behind Act and CAP participation when she said it was "...a way to make sure we're doing all we can for every kid to help them meet the standards." However, the following week, she privately clarified that her remarks were aimed solely at motivating teachers to participate in grade level CAP meetings. In actuality, she believed there was a tremendous incongruence between the legislation and the philosophy of the CAP. She explained, "No Child Left Behind puts out the expectation that every child will learn at the same rate and succeed in the same way, which means that the law and CAP are directly, diametrically opposed." Dr. Baldwin elaborated on this perspective:

> It's on one hand, [through the CAP] we say to [teachers], "Think about the individual needs of this child, and see how you can match the intervention." ...But, on the other hand, No Child Left Behind tells them, "Yes, but, everybody needs to be in the same place at the same time."

However, Dr. Baldwin and Ms. McHenry said their analysis was essentially hypothetical because Pleasant Valley's staff had yet to understand or prioritize the philosophy of the No Child Left Behind Act. Thus, where the federal legislation was described as having the potential to influence CAP implementation, such influence was not evident at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school years.

Experiences at Other CAP Elementary Schools

The data presented in Chapters Four and Five focused exclusively on the implementation, perceptions, and outcomes associated with the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Similarly, in the first section of this chapter, the role and influence of administrative forces on the CAP at Pleasant Valley were discussed. As described in Chapter Three, when it became evident that CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year was very different than originally anticipated, data sources were expanded to include information from additional schools regarding their experience with CAP implementation.

Specifically, four pupil personnel workers and four psychologists who were assigned to the twelve other CAP schools in same field office region as Pleasant Valley were interviewed, or provided written responses to the interview questions. Additionally, the district's CAP supervisor was interviewed and the three district CAP facilitators provided written responses to interview questions. In Chapter Seven, the limitations associated with these sources of data are discussed. However, the descriptions offered provided information and insight that suggested Pleasant Valley's experiences with the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year were not entirely unique.

Data presented in this section are organized into three sections. First, an overview of the CAP implementation procedures used at the other elementary schools is offered. Next, perceptions about the CAP at the other elementary schools are presented. Finally, the administrative forces and other factors which were noted to have influenced CAP implementation at the other schools are described.

Implementation of the CAP

During the 2003-2004 school year, Pleasant Valley Elementary School was one of thirteen elementary schools within one of the district's field office regions implementing the CAP. Of those thirteen schools, Pleasant Valley was one of six schools in the district that had agreed to pilot the CAP during the 2001-2002 school year. As described in Chapter Four, implementation at Pleasant Valley actually commenced at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. Two schools piloted the CAP in 2001-2002 as planned, thus the 2003-2004 year, was their third year of implementation. Six of the other twelve elementary schools (along with Pleasant Valley) began implementation during the 2002-2003 school year; thus the 2003-2004 year was their second year of implementation. The remaining four schools first implemented the CAP in the fall of 2003. A review of the descriptions regarding implementation at each of the twelve schools failed to reveal any clear pattern or correlation between the number of years a school had implemented the CAP, the specific procedures used at the school, or the reported level of implementation integrity.

Descriptions of the CAP implementation procedures used at the twelve other schools indicated that there were many commonalities with Pleasant Valley, as well as two specific differences. One difference related to the grade level CAP team meeting times, the other to the level of parental involvement. The noted procedural similarities and differences are described next, but should be considered within the context that they are "reported" procedures. Where an interviewee offered information about implementation integrity or school professionals' adherence to the CAP procedures, such data were included in the subsequent description. However, as discussed in Chapter

Seven, this study did not involve a direct assessment of implementation integrity at these other twelve CAP schools.

Procedural similarities. The twelve CAP elementary schools were described as using many of the same basic CAP procedures used at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school years. That is, at each school, grade level CAP teams and a building level CAP team were used concurrently. Teachers were expected to refer any student who experienced academic, social, or behavioral difficulties to their grade level CAP team. The grade level team, guided by the four problem solving steps, attempted to understand and intervene appropriately to address teachers' noted areas of concern. After multiple interventions, if a student continued to experience difficulty, he or she was subsequently referred to the building level CAP team for additional problem solving. Then, if appropriate, eligibility for special education services was considered.

Grade level CAP meetings at three of the other twelve schools were described to have frequently involved additional school professionals, as well as the grade level teachers. Specifically, meeting participants included any or all of the following: the school psychologist, the counselor, the special education teachers, the staff development teacher, the nurse, the reading specialist, and a building administrator. This description was consistent with CAP meeting participation at Pleasant Valley during 2002-2003, but not during 2003-2004.

Similar to the procedures from Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, all twelve schools were noted to have used grade level CAP coaches. At one of Ms. Gost's elementary schools, some teams had two coaches. She explained:

> What we found last year [2002-2003], was one of the biggest issues was that some of the younger teams, especially K through 2, because of the class sizes, or the number of teachers that would come, that we really needed to have two coaches. So, this year we've started that at the lower levels.

Each of the twelve other CAP elementary schools were reported to have used CAP-related documentation for student referrals, intervention design, progress monitoring, and team discussion summaries. At seven schools, the district's CAP forms were used to collect data and document student progress. At the other five schools, modifications had been made based on staff input and recommendations.

Of the interventions recommended by the other schools' grade level CAP teams, providing students with small group reading support to develop phonological awareness skills was referenced most frequently. Other noted classroom interventions included general education strategies to improve math computation, reading comprehension and fluency, and behavior management. Also described were recommendations to contact parents regarding a student's progress or follow-up with parents regarding a student's classroom behavior.

As described, direct assessment of implementation integrity of the CAP at the other twelve elementary schools was not part of this study. However, based on the descriptions that were offered, some inferences were able to be drawn which suggested that implementation integrity spanned a continuum. At three schools, implementation integrity was described as consistent with the high level of integrity at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year. These included one of Ms. Dillon's schools, one of Ms. Doe's schools, and one of Ms. Gost's schools. At the other

end of the continuum, Ms. Karz indicated that at her school, after only one year of implementation (2002-2003), "... for all intents and purposes" the staff abandoned use of the CAP.

Implementation integrity at the remaining eight schools appeared to range within this continuum. At these schools, some procedures were followed with integrity (e.g., documentation was still used, coaches were members of grade level teams). Adherence to other procedures, however, resembled those observed at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year (e.g., infrequent meetings of grade level teams, intermittent use of documentation).

Procedural differences. Although Pleasant Valley and the other twelve schools used many similar CAP implementation procedures, two significant differences were noted. The first involved the times scheduled for grade level CAP team meetings. The second related to the level of parental involvement with the CAP.

Descriptions given of the twelve CAP schools revealed that in each of these schools, all grade level CAP team meetings were held during the instructional school day. Specifically, they were scheduled to occur when the general education teachers in a particular grade did not have direct classroom responsibilities. Consequently, unlike implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, none of the other schools relied on substitute teachers to cover the general education classes during a grade level CAP meeting. Additionally, Pleasant Valley was the only school where grade level CAP teams were required to meet after the instructional school day.

At eleven of the twelve schools, the grade level CAP teams met during the teachers' common planning period. At the remaining school, meetings occurred during an hour-long "data interval." Ms. Gost explained their format:

> The teams are meeting three times a week. But the CAP coach will only usually meet with them once a week. But the principal has asked that teams meet during that data time because part of the CAP process, you know, is collecting a lot of data. You know, getting your baselines of where you start and then making them monitor what is going on with the kid.

She further clarified that the "data interval" was an additional, daily planning period for teachers, made possible with supplemental resources from a Safe and Drug Free Schools grant.

Mr. Kennedy summarized his thoughts about scheduling grade level CAP meetings this way:

> Schools are creating time during their school day to have those dialogues, those conversations about kids. Normally, there used to be a reserved time for teacher planning time. And what that was, was, that they wrote in their grade book. So isn't that the best time to talk about which kids are doing well? To discover why they're doing well and to apply the why about the kids who are doing well to the kids who aren't doing well? Schools that are committed to the CAP know they need to use their time to ask these questions.

The level of parent involvement was the second major difference between procedures at Pleasant Valley and five of the other twelve schools. At Pleasant Valley (and seven of the other schools) parents were not directly involved in the grade level

CAP meetings. In contrast, at five of the other CAP schools, parent involvement was described as an integral part of the process. Parents were contacted as soon as a referral concern was noted and subsequently involved as participants in the process.

For example, Dr. Dillon explained that at one of her schools, parents were invited to attend grade level CAP meetings and were frequently asked by the classroom teacher to provide input as part of the initial referral. This, she felt, facilitated parents' participation as part of the "intervention team," ensured they were informed about the student's progress, and motivated them to support the school's goals by implementing recommended strategies at home.

Parents were also involved in various aspects of the CAP at Ms. Gost's three elementary schools. She explained that parental participation was welcomed and perceived to be beneficial in each of her schools. However, at one school in particular, where the majority of students' primary language was not English, she felt parental participation in the CAP was especially noteworthy:

> Many of these parents had never come to school. But because we had the ESOL teacher as a member of each CAP team, she could put it all together for them. So, they would come in and learn about their child, and learn about what they could do, and like, they would leave with a lot of information about how to help their children who were having academic problems. But, what came out of it, also, was that we had, like, a lot of parents who were themselves interested in literacy stuff. And with [the ESOL teacher's] help, we were able to get them into programs. And, then, that seemed to benefit a lot of the students, too.

Perceptions of the CAP

Overall, school professionals at the other twelve CAP schools were described as perceiving participation in the CAP as beneficial for teachers and students. When and where concerns were noted, they predominantly reflected difficulty with the realities involved with implementation, not the philosophy of the CAP, nor the potential outcomes. Specifically, CAP implementation at the other elementary schools was described to have promoted inclusion, increased teachers' use of data, encouraged collaboration among school professionals, allowed access to early intervention services, and reduced special education referral and classification rates. These benefits closely resemble those described by Pleasant Valley's staff, when they reflected on the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year. Perceptions in each of the identified areas are now described.

Inclusion. Descriptions from each of the other CAP schools suggested that participation in the CAP promoted a sense of shared responsibility. In other words, general education teachers no longer expected that special education teachers would be the ones who focused on students who received special education services. Instead, general education teachers assumed ownership for all students in their classroom. For example, Ms. Doe described this paradigm shift:

> There are so many benefits to the CAP, such as team building and reduced numbers of kids being coded, but the greatest benefit is when general ed teachers start really looking, and actually become involved in the process to start looking at each child as an individual. They get excited when they discover facts about the child that they never knew before they implemented an effective intervention. And mainly, when they discover they, themselves, helped the child, they are

> usually pleasantly surprised, and a little humbled, since their original feeling was that the child has a disability and needs services that only a special educator can provide.

Similar descriptions that cited increased involvement of general education teachers were offered in relation to each of the twelve CAP schools, regardless of the school's special education service delivery model (e.g., inclusion, resource rooms, satellite self-contained programs). Additionally, because participation in the CAP increased general education teachers' level of involvement with students who experienced difficulties in the classroom, the CAP was observed to have facilitated providing early intervention support in the least restrictive environment (i.e., the general education classroom).

Data. As at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, participation in the CAP at all twelve of the other schools was described to have increased school professionals' use of data to understand student's difficulties, identify reasonable goals, select appropriate interventions, and monitor student progress. For example, Ms. Gost said, at her three schools, participation in the CAP "...absolutely influenced data. [Teachers] have learned how to do it, why it's beneficial, how to use it, and how to graph it." To illustrate her point, she proudly showcased a teacher's graph that tracked a student's acquisition of kindergarten, first, and second grade high frequency words. Additionally, she explained:

> I happen to have this one here, but there are tons more just like it, because it's become what's expected any time you start intervention with a CAP kid. Three

> years ago, hardly any of us could have done this, and wouldn't have even thought to. Now, I can't think of any teacher that can't.

Descriptions about experiences at other schools were similar to Ms. Gost's, and suggested that participation in the CAP helped teachers understand and use data.

However, some descriptions also contained caveats that outlined certain conditions deemed necessary to actualize the benefits related to the collection, interpretation, and use of data. For example, commenting on what he had seen in schools throughout the district, Mr. Tetlow explained that the CAP influenced the ways teachers collected and used data "…when there is commitment and accountability from the administration, along with on-going training." Ms. D'Amico also identified the need for training, and cited how the teachers at her school evidenced varying levels of expertise:

> My eyes were really opened to how much the teachers didn't know about gathering information from folders as part of an ed history. … They didn't know how to interpret [gifted and talented] data at all, so they didn't even look at GT. A lot of times they didn't even know the kid they were referring [to the CAP team] was GT. And even if they weren't GT, they didn't know how to use those scores to see that, gosh, maybe a kid that I thought wasn't very bright scored dynamite. I remember we were at one CAP meeting and we were going through the child's folder and looking at test scores from past years, and we came to this N.S.A. data and were looking, and not one person knew what the number 320 meant.

Collaboration. Descriptions of experiences at all twelve other schools suggested that CAP implementation was associated with improving collaboration among the school

professionals. Specifically observed were increased levels of communication among general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals (e.g., the staff development specialist, the school nurse, the school psychologist). However, similar to what was found at Pleasant Valley, descriptions from all twelve schools revealed how individual staff members evidenced varying levels of enthusiasm for working and learning with their colleagues. Ms. Karz reflected on the variation she observed at her school during the 2002-2003 school year:

> I think the CAP is very good for teachers who are willing to problem solve and who are willing and open to look at new perspectives. Most of our teachers really buy into it and used the strengths and weaknesses of other teachers and other staff members. . . The collaboration, for sure, is a huge benefit. The shift from looking at just it's the kid problem, to maybe there are other variables effecting this kid, is huge and this happens because the teachers work together and rely on others' strengths and don't become defensive during a discussion. There are a few, though, that probably won't be willing, or maybe even some not able, to let themselves benefit.

Thus, while CAP implementation was described as having increased collaboration at each of the twelve schools, none of the schools, including Pleasant Valley, achieved unilateral enthusiasm for collaboration.

Early intervention. Similar to the experience at Pleasant Valley, access to early intervention services was also cited as a significant (although not always realized) benefit associated with participation at the other twelve schools. For example, Dr. Dillon explained that students referred to the grade level CAP teams at one of her schools are

"…getting really good service. They're getting varied interventions, and certainly more intervention now than they would have, I think, under what people called the EMT." She then elaborated on what interventions were provided:

> There's been a lot of specific reading support provided to kids because they have a special educator at each grade level. And, as part of the CAP [early intervention] support can be given. So, they can help them right in the regular classrooms, or they can pull them and give non-handicapped resource. So kids get a lot of support in an ancillary way.

Specifically, implementation of the CAP was seen as having helped teachers identify students' needs, recommend appropriate interventions, and quickly access early intervention support, if necessary. Consequently, teachers' (perceived) need to immediately refer a student who experienced difficulties in the classroom for special education eligibility was alleviated.

Although the benefits of early intervention were unanimously expressed, descriptions also suggested that many professionals at in the other CAP schools were keenly aware how reduced special education rates resulted in incongruous district action. For example, Ms. Post described how she was initially "...energized to participate because the CAP allowed you to get support to all kids so much sooner." However, based on what occurred during the summer of 2003, and the "ever churning rumor mill," she had lingering concerns about early intervention:

> I'm worried [early intervention] might become an issue because I also know that, whether it's Pleasant Valley, or one of the other schools that was doing all that good stuff, now they're positions are being slashed exactly because they did

> all the good stuff. And that's totally wrong because it's the opposite of what we were told would happen.

Special education rates. Similar to the experiences at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, descriptions from all twelve other schools indicated that CAP-related interventions (e.g., classroom strategies for general education teachers, or early intervention support) had successfully addressed the needs of many referred students. Consequently, fewer students were referred for special education screening or classified as being eligible for special education services. Based on her observations, Ms. Post, described this benefit in the following way:

> I've done significantly less testing, which was nice because my load was lessened that way. But, the real benefit comes in that the kids are getting help sooner and it's done in a way where we can figure out that, yes, there is a problem without having to diagnose something. We are caught up very much in this world that, "Oh, it must be this disorder or that disorder." Maybe it's just that it's a struggle. And now we can start to just figure out how to fix it and go on, as opposed to calling it something.

The strong correlation between CAP implementation and reduction in special education rates was emphasized by each of the CAP facilitators and Mr. Kennedy. Dr. Smith, for example, indicated, "We have seen changes at every school in referral, testing, and placement rates. Hard data that referrals drop dramatically, and those that are pursued are more appropriate." Similarly, Dr. Miller described what he observed at Pleasant Valley and other schools:

> The goal of CAP is to develop problem solving, CBA, and functional intervention skills of teachers so that they can better handle Johnny's needs in the regular classroom. "Give me your tuff kid, I can handle him." Not, "Get him out of my class." The point is that with CAP you still have tuff kids. The school and teachers are just better able to handle them in the regular education setting. From the data, we know that happened at Pleasant Valley last year and they dropped their referrals to special education. There is another point: "The Hit Rate" is higher for CAP schools. What I mean is that the kids referred for testing usually qualify for services. That means, we psychs are working more efficiently and we are testing the right kids.

Quantitative data to compare special education rates before and after CAP implementation at each school were not made available, thus are not included in this study. As such, conclusions drawn about reductions in special education rates are based on descriptions provided by the interviewees.

Influences on CAP Implementation

Descriptions about what influenced CAP implementation at the twelve other elementary schools coalesced around two main factors. One was teachers' increased responsibilities (and corresponding time constraints) and the other was the role and influence of the building administrator. Consistently, these two factors were cited as exerting the most influence on implementation; irrespective of years of implementation, specific implementation procedures, or reported level of implementation integrity. Additionally, where federal decisions and policies had not significantly impacted CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 or 2003-

2004 school years, the No Child Left Behind Act was described as having impacted implementation in at least three of the twelve other CAP elementary schools.

Increased responsibilities and time constraints. As with Pleasant Valley, descriptions about CAP implementation at all twelve other schools consistently referenced teachers' increased responsibilities as one of the factors that inhibited active and consistent participation. Additionally, in nearly every instance, the increased responsibilities and time constraints were described to be either directly or indirectly associated with district-level decisions and policies.

Ms. Gost, for example, predicted that not one of her three schools would be able to maintain their comprehensive CAP implementation procedures and notably high levels of implementation integrity for more than another year. This hypothesis was based on her observation of staff members' high stress levels due to curriculum rigor, district assessment requirements, a newly implemented grading policy, and large class sizes. Additionally, she expressed that there were continually rising numbers of students who required "…individual attention that [teachers] end up providing before school, during any free time they may have during school, and then after school, too." She summarized her observations of increased responsibilities this way:

> The staff in each school are extremely dedicated. I've been in those buildings at seven at night and many of them will still be there working. Then, they'll be back less than twelve hours later to try and keep up with all the things [the district] is requiring them to do. And they know that if they can't cut it, there are plenty of other teachers who are waiting in line to take their job in this county. So, they put in all this work because they're worried and, too, because they're scared. But,

> I've seen this before, and I know that since they're not evaluated on CAP, and they are on a lot of other things, it's going to be one of the first things that starts to go. . . You can only cut a pie in so many pieces, and these teachers have too many pieces already.

Similarly, Ms. Cove indicated that at both of her schools, teachers' increased responsibilities created stress and feelings of helplessness, well beyond what she had observed in prior years. She characterized the atmosphere at both schools as "being under siege" because of district requirements related to the curriculum and mandatory assessments. This, she explained, fostered animosity and decreased communication in each building. Given that context, she felt the schools' environments were no longer conducive to CAP implementation; like Mr. Kennedy, she concluded that increased responsibilities caused many teachers to perceive the CAP as "... just one more thing" they needed to worry about.

Ms. Cove further described how, in an effort to respond to the stress, the principal at one of her schools modified CAP implementation procedures in the beginning of December, such that teams were required to meet only once every six weeks, rather than every two weeks. At her other school, which was described to have implementation procedures very similar to those used at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, she indicated that, as of the middle of February, "…despite good intentions [CAP teams] have not been meeting regularly, and have only done two students in the entire building because of a lack of time to allow staff to meet regularly."

Dr. Dillon observed similar patterns at her two CAP schools, which were the other pilot sites. Specifically, she said that implementation procedures and integrity had

been “gradually reduced” over the last three years because teachers’ increased responsibilities decreased their enthusiasm for CAP participation. She summarized the connection this way:

> I think we need to honestly give people realistic expectations, and to the extent that none of what [the district] seems to do is aligned with anything else, especially CAP, it’s not a priority because there are too many priorities. And now we’re seeing that teachers, some of them, won’t even bring their kids to the grade level meetings. There’s a lot of that starting to go on. And when they don’t feel like they can do it all, they’re not wanting to go along. So, instead, they’ll just say, “The hell with that.” You’ve got to decide what is it that you want to accomplish. And I don’t think we have any clear idea on that. I think we have a huge systemic problem, and CAP is only a, only represents only a piece of that issue.

Ms. Doe characterized her schools’ experiences very similarly and hypothesized that even though the CAP is “... very much worth the effort, …it won’t continue to fly. There are too many issues taking priority in classrooms and schools.”

Ms. Karz provided an additional, vivid, example of how she believed teachers’ increased responsibilities lead to the eventual abandonment of the CAP at her school after only one year. She explained:

> The CAP worked really well for many of [the teachers], but it can’t all be done at one time. It’s too much for any one teacher, given the diversity of students, the diversity of need, as well as culture, as well as familial or social pressures; there’s too much on people’s plates to be able to address it. But to me, [the district]

> needs to stop changing the curriculum, for oh, say a year or two. Stop changing assessments every day. Then we might be able to really do the CAP and work with kids and look at individual students. It's really beneficial, but they don't have time to do the data analysis right now. They're trying to learn the curriculum, they're trying to cover the curriculum, and they're trying to sleep at night too. And, unfortunately, it's not working.

In addition to descriptions about the negative impact that general education teachers' increased responsibilities had on CAP implementation, analogous concerns that specifically referenced increased responsibilities among special education teachers (e.g., assessments, learning the new curriculum for multiple grades, increased case loads, excessive paperwork, increased due process hearings and mediation appearances) were also offered. These were perceived as especially disconcerting in relation to CAP implementation because special education teachers typically had pivotal roles as grade level coaches and interventionists. Consequently, when they were not able to maintain a high level of participation in the CAP, it was said to have impacted implementation throughout the school. For example, Ms. Karz explained that, just like regular education teachers, special education teachers "...only have so many hours in the day. And all these other things they have to do takes away from time they may have otherwise had for CAP."

The issue of the district's role with special education staffing was also emphasized by Ms. Doe. She indicated that two of her three CAP schools experienced reductions in their staffing allocation, similar to that which occurred at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. These reductions transferred additional responsibilities to others in

the building. At one of the schools, the staff development specialist had assumed most of the former special educator's CAP-related duties. Consequently, at that school, Ms. Doe described the impact as, "...emotional, more than anything else." However, at her other school, she said that the loss of the special education position, combined with a new principal who "...was not vested in the process," had significantly and negatively impacted the process to where she doubted whether the CAP would be able to "limp along" through the end of the school year.

Building administrators. Descriptions about the experiences at the twelve other CAP schools suggested that, along with increased teacher responsibilities, building administrators significantly impacted CAP implementation. Descriptions from some schools reflected how the building administrator exerted a positive influence on CAP implementation. These descriptions mirrored Ms. McHenry's influence at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year. Descriptions from other schools, however, suggested that the building administrator exerted a negative influence on implementation. These more closely resembled Ms. McHenry's influence during the 2003-2004 school year.

From the descriptions about the other twelve schools' experiences, three specific factors related to the building administrator emerged as being especially salient: the administrators' level of direct participation in the CAP, the administrators' visible enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the CAP, and the administrators' enforcement of the CAP procedures at his or her school. These, also, were similar to the findings at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years.

The significant influence that building administrators had on CAP implementation was emphasized by all three of the CAP facilitators, as well as Mr. Kennedy. For example, Dr. Miller stated:

> The research on the building administrator is very clear. Building administrators are paramount in the change process. My personal experience with CAP has reinforced the literature. The more involvement of the administrator, the more success has been noted in successful implementation of the CAP model.

Similarly, Dr. Smith reinforced that administrators are "…very important because they must set the time and use it themselves for teachers to give [the CAP] the priority it needs."

Dr. Dillon offered insight about how an administrator's level of involvement, commitment, and enforcement all influenced the CAP. She had a unique perspective because the principal at one of her schools was enthusiastically involved with the CAP. Whereas at her other school, the principal demonstrated indifference about the CAP and her role was minimal. She explained the later situation this way:

> There's a lack of support, a total lack, that's just blatant by her actions. She's rarely at the building level CAP, and I don't think I've ever seen her at a grade level meeting. She never talks about why we'd want to do this, and she never talks about what will happen if you don't.

Dr. Dillon also hypothesized that, had the principal increased her level of involvement with the CAP, it would have directly translated into an increase in teachers' active participation. She illustrated her point this way:

> So, you have me, right, and the special education teachers, and a handful of others who are trying to make [the CAP] work. And, if I were to say to a teacher, "You know, I really don't appreciate you grading papers during this meeting, and maybe if you offered your insight, we'd all benefit," they'd laugh me out of town and be resentful and then I'd be in an even worse position. But if [the principal] were to just be there, just even show up, I'd bet next year's salary that you wouldn't see any of that nonsense going on during the meetings. Call it imposed fidelity, if you will.

Dr. Dillon then contrasted that description with what she experienced at her other elementary school where, "The principal has been very supportive, very supportive. She's at the other end of the continuum. Her push is that we need to identify these kids and get them up to speed because we don't want to have to code everyone as special ed." This, she believed, translated into teachers also placing a priority on participation.

Ms. Gost provided another illustration of how the building administrator positively impacted CAP implementation. She explained that, at one of her schools, the assistant principal supervised CAP implementation and assumed an active role in the process. He served as the chairperson of the building level CAP team, attended "most, if not almost all" of the grade level meetings, and specifically scheduled a monthly time so the CAP coaches were able to talk about achievements and concerns at each grade level. Overall, she believed that his active involvement with the CAP promoted high levels of implementation integrity. She described how, with regard to the CAP, he did an "outstanding job because he's infused it into everyone's day. So, it's only a rare few

teachers who aren't completely on board with us." Based on her observations Ms. Gost concluded that:

> … because he's very, very, very involved, in fact he's involved in the forms and everything, with, you know, Mr. Kennedy. Because he's involved, that's why it's doing so well. Despite everything else going on in the building and with the teachers and the curriculum, he made the CAP stay as a priority one project.

The description offered by Ms. Karz starkly contrasted with Ms. Gost's reflections, and illustrated how a building administrator can negatively influence CAP implementation. Specifically, she believed that when increased teacher responsibilities were combined with a minimally involved principal, it ultimately lead to the elimination of the CAP at her school. She explained:

> To me, the whole thing is totally dependent on leadership. The administrator is so critical in the implementation of CAP because they set the tone for openness, team spirit, and commitment with the staff. And, if they aren't willing to do that, you can almost predict what will happen. Again, so I think it's the principal's buy-in to the whole process.

Descriptions related to the building administrator's influence on the CAP indicated that at more than half of the twelve other schools, the administrator was not actively involved with the CAP. However, the reasons for minimal involvement appeared to vary. At three schools, the administrator was noted to have never expressed much enthusiasm or commitment to the process. At others, however, the administrator initially supported and actively participated in the CAP, but did not maintain that level of

involvement. As Ms. D'Amico's example illustrates, this diminution resulted from competing demands, not necessarily a conscious disavowal of the CAP.

> So, we signed on to do CAP with our new administrator, and he came in and said "I think this would be good for the school." He buys into the data analysis and he buys into that kind of strategic planning. But, then, now he's so frequently pulled here, and there, and everywhere. He gives the word and all the, the presentation of being interested and supportive, and I think his underlying desire is to be supportive. But, I also think that he's being pulled in so many different ways, that he just can't manage keeping all those spinning plates in the air.

Finally, the degree to which the building administrator required adherence to the CAP procedures was also described as influencing implementation. Descriptions of the CAP experiences from at least four of the twelve schools specifically referenced how the administrators' physical presence during CAP meetings influenced participation. It was also noted that the administrator focused and, at times, "gently steered" the meeting dialogue, as necessary. None of the descriptions, however, suggested that other administrators consistently assumed the role of facilitator, as Ms. McHenry did during the 2002-2003 school year.

It was also described that, in some cases, CAP implementation was influenced because the building administrator actively enforced expectations related to teachers' participation. For example, Ms. Palmer described how, at her elementary school, the

> …teachers' buy-in was a little shaky, because they are inundated with this, that, and the other thing, and it seemed that the CAP didn't quite make it to, you know,

> the top of their list. This was, especially with the 'key players,' who happen to be the popular ones, in the building.

Consequently, she explained, the principal became increasingly concerned this negativism would spread and jeopardize school-wide participation. Ultimately, Ms. Palmer explained, he took direct action:

> He was getting really frustrated that they weren't putting in the effort. So he had to put his foot down and say, "No, this is the process we're using and that's the way it is, basically. These are best practices sort of things."

Although the teachers did not respond by enthusiastically embracing the CAP, Ms. Palmer indicated it reduced their "complaining" and noticeably increased their involvement. She also recalled a situation where one of the teachers surreptitiously encouraged a parent to request a special education screening for their child as a way to usurp the CAP. After the principal's action, however, Ms. Palmer indicated she was not aware of other, similar, screening requests.

Federal legislation. As described, Mr. Kennedy believed the No Child Left Behind Act influenced CAP implementation because it increased teachers' responsibilities. At Pleasant Valley, that direct connection was not evident. However, descriptions about experiences at three of the other twelve CAP elementary schools suggested that the accountability associated with the No Child Left Behind Act, and some programs which were mandated in response to unmet standards, had influenced implementation.

Related to accountability, Dr. Dillon described how teachers at both of her schools were keenly aware of the achievement standards outlined in the No Child Left

Behind Act. However, she did not believe the teachers perceived that participation in the CAP would ensure students met the standards. She described how this subsequently impacted implementation:

> Every day [teachers] are reminded that we're going to parade our test scores everywhere. And they know that the President is stuck on that everybody's going to read by the time they're in 3rd grade, or eight years old, or whatever it is. And, maybe if CAP had some magic bullet that got the kids to where they needed to be, it wouldn't be an issue and we'd all know that CAP saved the day. But it won't. So, to where they can put their efforts into a quick fix like teaching how to take a test, that's a priority right now because that keeps their job. Doing CAP doesn't.

Referencing the divergent experiences at her two CAP schools, Dr. Dillon further elaborated how the building administrator mediated the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act on the CAP. At one school, she explained, the principal held teachers accountable for student progress, but concurrently vocalized support for the CAP. This balance, she believed, enabled the teachers to "…put N.C.L.B. in perspective" so it had not negatively impacted CAP implementation.

Dr. Dillon contrasted that perspective with what she observed at her other CAP school. There, she believed, the principal's lack of support for CAP combined with her "hyper-focused" goal to improve test scores, reinforced the staff's perception that the No Child Left Behind Act and the CAP were mutually exclusive.

At three of the twelve schools, descriptions suggested that the district's response to address the needs of students (and schools) who did not meet the standards outlined in

the No Child Left Behind Act, impacted CAP implementation during the 2003-2004 school year. Mr. Kennedy explained the situation this way:

> So when kids don't make annual yearly progress, we need to immediately do something. So, instead of looking at why, our school system has rushed to intervention. So when we have this cohort of kids who haven't made yearly progress in reading, those schools were told to adopt this reading program.

He then explained that he was extremely troubled by the district's actions, because the way they mandated the program was antithetical to the philosophy and goals of the CAP:

> I don't even have any true data, and I'm not about to comment, because it's probably an effective program. But, if we go back to what we started our conversation with, how do we know if it's a strategic decision that links directly to why those kids are not performing well on their assessments which then made them not meet annual yearly progress, that part some how got left out.

The perceptions of those who worked at the three CAP schools where the reading program was mandated were nearly identical to those expressed by Mr. Kennedy. Whereas the CAP encouraged teachers to comprehensively understand and strategically address students' unique concerns, they believed the district's unilateral action negatively impacted CAP implementation. Based on her observations during the fall, Dr. Dillon explained her concerns:

> So, [the teachers] had to target five kids from each of the 9 first grades. It's insane. So these kids are all getting this program on a daily basis which is great, you know, prescriptive and all that stuff. My contention is, "Is that what they need?" So once again, we're being told, "Oh, CAP is a priority." But then, on the

> other hand, here's an intervention you have to use. You have to use it whether you opted for it or not. So when you then try to make the assessment of whether or not the intervention worked for a kid, you don't know if it was the right one to begin with.

Whereas the mandated reading program was described as having negatively impacted, but not eliminated the CAP at three schools, Ms. Post described how she observed consequences associated with the No Child Left Behind Act completely precluded CAP implementation. She explained how CAP implementation was scheduled to begin in the Fall of 2003 at one of her other schools, but never did:

> We never got off the ground, and literally we were all ready to do it, but then [the district] stepped in because [the school] was on the verge of being taken over for poor performance, and that basically squashed all possibility of doing anything because now they had such rigorous requirements that there was no way they were going to continue with some program they volunteered for. So, this all hit the fan pretty quickly, and when it came time to think about whether we wanted to start implementing the CAP, it all but stopped because we didn't have the time to do it with all the other N.C.L.B. things. And the principal was even trying to be supportive, I mean really, and had worked hard to try and problem solve, but there are only so many hours in the day and this other thing is being mandated, so something's gotta give somewhere.

When asked whether anyone at the school felt that implementation of the CAP might have been a helpful way to turn the school around, Ms. Post responded, "No, they

didn't…the powers that be that were making these decisions about what to do and what to implement never once even mentioned the CAP."

In summary, descriptions provided about the other twelve CAP elementary schools revealed many similarities between the CAP implementation procedures used in those settings and those used at Pleasant Valley during either the 2002-2003 school year or the 2003-2004 school year. For example, most schools used grade level coaches, maintained CAP documentation throughout the process, and provided necessary early intervention support. However, unlike at Pleasant Valley, it was found that grade level CAP team meetings at all twelve other schools occurred during teachers' common planning time. Consequently, substitute teachers were not required and teachers did not have to meet after the instructional school day.

Similarities related to perceptions about the CAP at the other twelve schools and the perceptions about the CAP at Pleasant Valley were also found. Specifically, these involved benefits related to: promoting an inclusive philosophy, increasing teachers' understanding and use of data, increasing collaboration and communication among school professionals, providing necessary early intervention support, and reducing special education referral and eligibility rates. Similarities related to the factors that influenced CAP implementation at the other twelve schools and those that influenced implementation at Pleasant Valley were also found.

For example, teachers' enthusiasm and participation was negatively impacted by increased responsibilities associated with district decisions and policies (e.g., a new curriculum, increased assessment requirements). Additionally, the building administrator's level of direct involvement with the CAP, enthusiasm for implementation

of the CAP, and willingness to enforce implementation procedures were all described to have influenced CAP implementation, either positively or negatively. Finally, unlike Pleasant Valley, the No Child Left Behind Act was described to have negatively influenced implementation at three of the twelve other schools.

Based on the descriptions provided about the twelve other schools, CAP implementation integrity was found to span a continuum. Relatively high levels of implementation integrity were reported at three CAP schools, and their experiences were described to resemble those of Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year. Eight schools were described to have implemented the CAP at "reduced levels," and their experiences more were akin to Pleasant Valley's during the 2003-2004 school year. Specifically, the CAP was still used, but implementation procedures were modified and minimized, fewer students were referred, and overall procedural adherence was inconsistent. Finally, it was found that one of the twelve schools had discontinued use of the CAP.

Taken together, this information suggested that the experiences at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year were not entirely unique. Many benefits associated with the CAP were described at each of the twelve schools, as they were by the staff at Pleasant Valley. However, at all twelve schools and at Pleasant Valley, descriptions about the CAP's benefits were situated within the context of the significant challenges associated with the "reality" of implementation.

In Chapter Seven, findings which correspond to each research question are summarized. Based on a synthesis of those findings, the themes that emerged from this study are then presented and situated within the context of the literature base on

prereferral problem solving. Next, the limitations of this study are described. Finally, implications for practice and future research are outlined.

Chapter 7: Findings, Themes, and Implications

This study was an investigation of an elementary school's implementation experience with a prereferral problem solving process: implementation of the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Within the chosen research paradigm, a case study using modified analytic induction, research questions guided data collection and analysis toward the development of a descriptive model (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The original proposed goal of this study was to develop a model of how to successfully implement a prereferral problem solving process. Site and participant selection reflected that original goal, as an "exemplary" school and "exemplary" team were chosen.

As described in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2003-2004 school year differed significantly from CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year. During the summer of 2003, the district reduced the school's special education staff allocation and unilaterally eliminated all school improvement funding. The principal, Ms. McHenry, made what she believed were necessary modifications to the school's CAP procedures in order for implementation to continue at the school. However, during the 2003-2004 school year, grade level CAP teams demonstrated minimal adherence to the modified procedures, and implementation did not resemble the "exemplary" model, as anticipated.

However, as both Meyers (2002) and Nastasi (2002) expressed, understanding the challenges associated with program implementation is a vital pursuit because, "We often learn more from what went wrong than from what worked well," (Nastasi, 2002, p. 222). The findings from this study support that assertion. Ultimately, the divergent CAP

implementation experiences at Pleasant Valley Elementary School proved very instructive; perhaps more so than if implementation had occurred as anticipated. Researching the contrast between the school's experiences in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 provided a unique opportunity to explore the complexities associated with prereferral problem solving.

In the first section of this chapter, a summary of the key findings that correspond with each of the guiding research questions is offered. Collectively, this information creates the model of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. In the second section, the themes that emerged from a synthesis of the findings are discussed. In the third section, the limitations of this study are outlined, and the implications for practice and future research are described.

Revisiting the Research Questions

CAP Implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

The first research question guided exploration of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. This was done by focusing on the second grade CAP team's implementation procedures. Where possible, data related to the implementation experiences of other grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley were also gathered. Data were collected to understand how the second grade CAP team implemented the problem solving model, how they monitored student progress, and how they measured student outcomes. Data were also collected to compare CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year with CAP implementation during the 2003-2004 school year.

Finally, the CAP implementation procedures used at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years were compared with those outlined in the district's published model. The most salient differences in implementation procedures between the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year included: CAP team membership and CAP meeting participants, the frequency, time, and structure of grade level CAP meetings, the use of the problem solving steps during grade level CAP meetings, and the use of data to monitor student progress and measure student outcomes. Each is now described.

Team membership and meeting participants. During the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School included all the general education teachers at each level and a CAP coach who was assigned by the principal. The CAP coach was responsible for the organizational aspects of the team (e.g., developed meeting agendas that included new referrals and on-going case reviews, brought student folders to the meeting, assigned participant roles). All CAP team members attended each of their grade level CAP meetings (unless there was an extenuating circumstance) and they were consistently joined by Ms. McHenry, Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Little, Mr. White, and Ms. Nichols.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the second grade CAP team at Pleasant Valley was comprised of three of the four general education teachers at that level: Ms. Sullivan, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Baden. The fourth teacher, Ms. Pollock, chose not to participate because she did not believe the CAP was relevant to her class of students who were all meeting the district's academic standards. The originally assigned second grade CAP coach, Mr. White, also did not play a significant role. This was because Ms.

McHenry discontinued use of CAP coaches in November, prior to the first second grade CAP meeting. Similarly, none of the other grade level CAP teams convened before the coaches were removed.

During the CAP meeting on January 15th, the second grade CAP team was joined by Ms. McHenry, Mr. White, and Ms. Little. This multidisciplinary participation represented the exception, not the pattern, at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2003-2004 school year.

Meeting times and frequency. During the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School consistently met twice a month, for two hours during the instructional school day. Thus, between September 2002 and June 2003, each CAP team met approximately 20 times. Scheduling meetings during the instructional school day was possible because Ms. McHenry allocated all of her school improvement funds to provide substitute coverage for team members.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry modified the CAP meeting procedures at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Specifically, grade level teams were instructed to meet after school on the first Monday of every month, and one other afternoon later in the month. The second grade CAP team did not adhere to this expectation. Between September 2003 and June 2004, the second grade CAP team held three meetings; January 6th, January 15th, and March 1st.

Originally, a second grade CAP meeting was scheduled for December 8th, but was cancelled because, as stated by Ms. Baden, “No one had any kids to CAP.” Another second grade CAP meeting was scheduled for December 22nd, but was also cancelled due

to an emergency staff meeting. The other grade level CAP teams evidenced similar patterns, with each team meeting a total of two, three, or four times during the year.

Meeting structure. During the 2002-2003 school year, teachers referred a student to their grade level CAP team by submitting a completed CAP referral form to the coach. The coach developed and distributed a meeting agenda that incorporated new referrals and cases being monitored by the team. Using that pre-determined schedule, the coach brought the corresponding student records to each meeting. At the beginning of each CAP meeting, specific time allocations for discussion related to each student were determined and meeting roles were assigned (i.e., note taker, process observer, facilitator, time keeper).

During the 2003-2004 school year, none of the second grade teachers completed a CAP referral form, nor were meeting agendas used. During the January 6th and March 1st CAP meetings, students were discussed in an impromptu fashion; teachers posed names of students throughout the discussion. This procedure resulted in some students being mentioned, but never actually discussed. During the January 15th CAP meeting, Ms. McHenry focused discussion on the students listed in the January 6th meeting log. Because the meeting log was not an accurate reflection of the students who were discussed on January 6th, the concerns of all students were not reviewed.

Meeting roles were not assigned during any of the three second grade CAP team meetings. However, serving in a role akin to the facilitator, Ms. Baden led the meetings on January 6th and March 1st, and Ms. McHenry led the meeting on January 15th. Specific time allocations for each student were not determined, but rather discussion transitioned from one student to the next after an intervention was identified, or, if the

person leading the meeting decided the team had devoted enough time to that referral. Student records were not brought to any of the second grade CAP team meetings. However, approximately half-way through the January 6th meeting, Ms. Shoemaker retrieved a student's confidential file.

Problem solving steps. During the 2002-2003 school year, grade level CAP teams closely adhered to the four problem solving steps. This was facilitated by the use of CAP forms which corresponded to each step and reference guides which outlined salient questions for the facilitator to ask. As teachers completed the CAP referral form, they were required to synthesize multiple sources of data to understand a student's history and establish baseline levels of performance. The CAP team collaboratively discussed each referral, and based on their understanding of the student's strengths and needs, an appropriate intervention was identified, and short and long term goals were established.

Assessments used to monitor a student's progress were selected to provide information related to the specific skill or behavior targeted by the intervention. Most frequently the classroom teacher, or the classroom teacher and another school professional, collected either individually referenced or criterion referenced data at pre-determined points during the implementation of an intervention plan. On occasion, the teacher graphed a student's progress. During subsequent CAP meetings, the student's progress was reviewed, and modifications were made to the goals or intervention strategies, as deemed necessary by the team.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the CAP forms which corresponded to the problem solving steps were not used by the second grade CAP team. During the CAP meetings on January 6th and March 1st, the teachers introduced each referral with a

narrative description of the student's classroom performance using generalized, subjective statements that focused on his or her difficulties (e.g., "really low", "just can't pay attention", "not making progress academically"). When quantitative data were presented, the most frequently referenced metrics were the student's relative standing with the district's reading standards and the number of objectives a student mastered on the district's unit math assessments. When these data were presented, they were frequently offered as an approximation (e.g., "He's about a two").

After presenting the initial description, the referring teacher or one of the other team members almost immediately proposed an intervention. Nearly identical recommendations were made for all students, irrespective of the referral concerns (e.g., "needs skills group", "call parent"). No short term or long term goals were established for any of the referred students, although it could be inferred that a reading level or math score would serve as a baseline measure of performance.

When student progress was subsequently reviewed, teachers' descriptions mirrored those offered when the initial referral was presented (i.e., generic description of classroom performance, references only to reading level and math score). No data, beyond that which was routinely collected for every student in the classroom, were collected by any of the second grade teachers, nor any other school professional, in relation to a second grade CAP referral. On the team's meeting log, follow up dates and student performance (i.e., reading level or math score) were intermittently recorded.

During the CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. McHenry, Ms. White, and Ms. Little expanded the teachers' January 6th discussion, by asking questions to decipher each student's needs. They then recommended interventions that were more closely aligned

with the student's specific difficulties. Mr. White offered the only reference to collecting baseline data, establishing goals, monitoring performance, or measuring outcomes. Specifically, he recommended that a first grade math test be used to determine a student's current performance. The meeting participants all appeared to agree with his suggestion. However, the assessment was never administered.

At the beginning of this meeting, Ms. McHenry specifically informed the participants that they were not going to use any of the formal CAP procedures including the four problem solving steps. No notes were taken during this meeting, and the only mention of follow up or monitoring occurred when Ms. McHenry verbally told the second grade teachers they should "...see how [the students] are doing at your next CAP meeting."

Comparison with district model. During the 2002-2003 school year, implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley evidenced all the primary elements contained in the district's model. The school used grade level CAP teams for initial problem solving and a building level CAP team for students who did not respond to interventions. Additionally, grade level coaches were used, meetings were structured, the four problem solving steps were followed, multiple sources of data were collected and utilized, collaboration among a variety of school professionals was common, and strategically developed intervention plans were implemented and monitored. Mr. Kennedy described CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during 2002-2003 as "exemplifying" the district's expectations.

During the 2003-2004 school year, although grade level CAP teams and a building level CAP team still existed at Pleasant Valley, actual CAP implementation no

longer closely resembled the district's model. Specifically, grade level teams did not include coaches, meetings rarely involved other school professionals, there was minimal use of documentation and data, grade level meetings were infrequent and unstructured, and the problem solving steps were not routinely followed. Finally, the expectation that a referral would impact student experiences and achievement was not realized.

In summary, implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2003-2004 school year diverged significantly from implementation during the 2002-2003 school year. During 2002-2003, grade level CAP teams meetings occurred consistently and involved multiple school professionals. Meetings were structured to ensure adherence to the four problem solving steps, and documentation was maintained throughout the process. Referred student's strengths and needs were systematically explored, and intervention plans were strategically developed. Multiple sources of data were used to monitor student progress, modify interventions, and measure student outcomes. These implementation procedures closely resembled the district's model.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, the second grade CAP team met three times during the school year, the meetings lacked formality, the problem solving steps were essentially indistinguishable, and there was minimal use of documentation or data to measure student progress or document outcomes. The general education teachers generically described referred students' needs, and interventions were not strategically selected. Similar patterns were described with each of the other grade level teams, suggesting that school-wide implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year differed significantly from the district's model.

Second Grade CAP Referrals

The second research question guided the exploration of the nature, severity, and impact of the second grade students' referral concerns in relation to the CAP. Data were collected to understand the teachers' reasons for referral, and whether referral reasons influenced the CAP process or outcomes. Data were also collected to compare referred second grade students with non-referred second grade students. To the extent possible, data were collected to compare CAP referrals during the 2002-2003 school year to CAP referrals during the 2003-2004 school year. As described in Chapter Four, for the purpose of this study, a student was considered to have been 'referred' to the second grade CAP team if his or her name was at least mentioned by one of the teachers during a CAP meeting.

During the 2002-2003 school year, school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School estimated that approximately 100 students were referred to grade level CAP teams. Referral concerns were described to be academic, behavioral and social in nature, with the latter being the least common. All grade level CAP teams considered multiple referrals during the school year. However, the combined kindergarten / first grade team and the second grade team were reported to have referred the most students because they wanted to immediately address student difficulties, especially those related to reading.

School professionals expressed different opinions about whether there was a relationship between referral concerns and the CAP process or outcomes. Mr. White believed academic concerns were more conducive to the CAP because early intervention support effectively addressed basic skill deficits (e.g., Wilson reading with phonological

awareness). Others, however, indicated that teachers were more satisfied with the CAP when the student's difficulties were behavioral because well-designed interventions quickly lead to classroom improvements which satisfied the teacher's need for immediacy. All of the district CAP personnel indicated they had observed satisfactory levels of success with the CAP, irrespective of the referral concerns.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. Baden referred two students, Ms. Shoemaker referred five students, and Ms. Sullivan referred ten students, for a total of 17 second grade CAP referrals. Ms. Pollock did not refer any students to the CAP team. Fourteen students were referred for concerns related to academic performance, most commonly in reading. Four of those 14 students were also described having behavioral difficulties. Three students were referred for behavioral difficulties. All three second grade teachers indicated that, although the majority of referrals were academic, that ratio was a reflection of students' needs during the 2003-2004 school year, not their belief that the CAP was preferable for referral concerns of that nature.

Nine of the 17 students referred by the second grade teachers had been referred to the first grade CAP team during the 2002-2003 school year. Four of the 17 students were previously identified as having a speech and language disability, one of the 17 students had a 504 Accommodation Plan in place, and two of the 17 students were receiving supplemental English as a Second Language instruction. Other data sources supported teachers' identified areas of concern with referred students. For example, all ten students who were referred because of reading difficulties were at least two quarters below the district's grade level standard. In some instances, referred students also evidenced difficulty in areas that were not identified by the teacher.

At the end of the 2003-2004 school year, none of the second grade students who were referred to the CAP team for academic reasons evidenced significant improvement in the identified area(s) of concern. For example, none of the ten students who were referred for reading difficulties made enough progress to meet the district's grade level reading standards in June. Additionally, the growth rates decreased for the majority of those students, such that they were further behind their peers in June than when the school year began. Finally, a comparison of all the second grade students revealed that there were at least seven students who were a year or more below the district's reading standards, but who were not referred to the CAP team. None of these students were in Ms. Pollock's class.

In summary, during the 2002-2003 school year, approximately 100 students were referred to grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Referrals were made at all grade levels and initiated because of academic, behavioral, and social concerns. There was no consensus among the school's staff about whether the nature of a student's referral concern influenced the CAP process or outcomes.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the second grade teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School referred 17 students to the CAP team, primarily because of academic concerns. This was not because they believed the CAP was more successful with referral concerns of that nature. Rather, academic difficulties were more prevalent. Data indicated that all of the students referred because of academic concerns were experiencing difficulty in the area identified by the teacher, and in some cases they were experiencing difficulty in additional areas not described by the teacher. There were at

least seven other non-referred second grade students who experienced difficulties similar to those of the referred students.

Students' Experiences

The third research question guided the exploration of the influence of a CAP referral on students' experiences. Data were collected to understand how a CAP referral influenced students' experiences inside and outside of the general education classroom. Data were also collected to understand how implementation of the CAP influenced special education rates. Finally, referred students' experiences during the 2002-2003 school year were compared with referred students' experiences during the 2003-2004 school year.

Students' experiences in the general education classroom. During the 2002-2003 school year, a referral to the CAP team appeared to have significantly influenced students' experiences in the general education classroom. For every referral the team considered, an intervention was recommended and implemented. For many students, recommended interventions involved the general education teacher using a specific strategy, accommodation, or modification to address the referral concerns (e.g., repetition of directions, graphic organizers, behavior charts, home-school communication logs, reduction in number of homework problems). In other instances, CAP team recommendations involved one of the special education teachers collaboratively teaching with the general education teacher. As a result, the referred student and all the other students in the classroom benefited.

During 2003-2004 school year, a referral to the second grade CAP team had little, if any, impact on students' experiences in the general education classroom. Nearly all the

recommendations made by the second grade CAP team involved an adult "Action Item," that never translated into a classroom intervention. During the three second grade CAP meetings, one intervention was recommended that could have influenced the student's experience in the general education classroom. Specifically, Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Nichols were to collaboratively develop a progress chart to help a student monitor her own reading growth. However, the chart was never developed. Documentation from the other grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley indicated a few general education strategies were recommended (e.g., "extra practice with spelling words during free time", "try peer tutoring").

Students' experiences outside the general education classroom. During the 2002-2003 school year, if a referred student's concerns were not able to be successfully addressed by interventions within the general education classroom, grade level CAP teams frequently recommended that the student receive targeted early intervention support. This support usually involved one of the three special education teachers working with a small-group of students. Early intervention support was available to students at all grade levels, and was used to address referral concerns related to math, reading, and written language. Most frequently, however, it was used to develop the phonological awareness skills of emergent readers.

During the 2003-2004 school year, early intervention support was not an option for grade level CAP teams at Pleasant Valley Elementary School due to special education staff reductions. Despite this lack of availability, the second grade teachers passionately requested this support throughout the 2003-2004 school year, citing how successful it had

been during 2002-2003. None of the second grade students who were referred to the CAP team were provided with early intervention support.

During the three second grade CAP meetings, two interventions were recommended which could have influenced students' experiences outside of the general education classroom. On January 6th, the second grade teachers recommended eight referred students for a remedial skills group. On January 15th, the team recommended that a fifth grade student mentor a referred second grade student. However, neither intervention was implemented. Documentation from other grade level CAP team meetings suggested a very similar pattern, where a CAP referral had little, or no, impact on students' experiences outside the general education classroom.

Special education rates. Implementation of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year was credited by most at Pleasant Valley with reducing the number of students who were referred, and found eligible, for special education services. Although there were some discrepancies between the district's data and the recollections of staff members at Pleasant Valley, both sets of data reflected a significant drop in the number of students found eligible for special education service during the 2002-2003 school year; the district reported no students were classified, the school reported two students were classified. The reduction in Pleasant Valley Elementary School's special education staff allocation during the summer of 2003 provides further verification of this conclusion.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry, Ms. Little, and Mr. White frequently articulated the need to code more students at Pleasant Valley in an effort to have their special education positions reinstated. Dr. Baldwin indicated that she assessed more than 25 students at Pleasant Valley during 2003-2004, which was more than any

prior year. Seventeen of the students who were assessed were found eligible to receive special education services. Of the 17 students, four were second graders. One student was classified as having autism, one student was classified as having a speech and language disability, and two students were classified as having specific learning disabilities. None of these students were among the 17 students referred to the CAP team, nor were they among the seven non-referred students who were not meeting the district's grade level standards.

In summary, during the 2002-2003 school year, implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School appeared to be consistent with the district's goal that a CAP referral would directly and positively impact students' experiences and achievement. Based on referred students' identified needs, interventions in the general education classroom and outside the general education classroom were recommended. Access to these services was described to have improved student performance and reduced special education referral and eligibility rates that year.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, a referral to the CAP team at Pleasant Valley Elementary School had little, or no, impact on students' experiences inside or outside the general education classroom. In the few instances where a recommended intervention could have impacted a student's experience, the intervention was never implemented. Additionally, the special education eligibility rate reduction experienced at the school during the 2002-2003 school year, was not maintained during the 2003-2004 school year. Rather, the rate increased to more closely resemble the yearly average prior to CAP implementation.

Teacher Behavior

The fourth research question guided the exploration of whether participation in the CAP influenced the behavior of general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals. Data were collected to understand whether participation in the CAP influenced general education teachers' behavior in the classroom. Data were also collected to understand whether participation in the CAP influenced school professionals' roles and school professionals' levels of collaboration. Finally, the influence that participation in the CAP had on school professionals' behavior during the 2002-2003 school year was compared with the influence that participation in the CAP had on school professionals' behavior during the 2003-2004 school year.

Classroom behavior. During the 2002-2003 school year, participation in the CAP appeared to have a significant, positive influence on general education teachers' behavior in the classroom. Since many of the interventions recommended by grade level CAP teams focused on addressing students' needs in the least restrictive environment (i.e., the general education classroom), general education teachers had many opportunities to learn and implement new strategies. Academic interventions included strategies designed to improve students' automaticity with high frequency words, phonological awareness skills, reading comprehension abilities, spelling skills, reading fluency rates, and understanding of mathematical concepts. They also implemented behavioral strategies (e.g., contracts, home-school communication logs, the "Think Chair") and used instructional accommodations (e.g., repeated and rephrased directions, provided graphic organizers, reduced homework assignments, differentiated reading materials).

Participation in the CAP also influenced how general education teachers collected and used data because they were required to complete the CAP referral forms, establish baseline levels of performance, and monitor student progress. These changes occurred with the second grade teachers, and teachers at other grade levels at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Teachers were willing to implement interventions and collect more data because the CAP met their expectation of working collaboratively with other school professionals to meet students' needs.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, participation in the CAP had little, if any, influence on teachers' behavior in the classroom. This finding is tandem to the minimal impact that a CAP referral had on students' experiences in the general education classroom. During the January 6th and March 1st CAP meetings, no classroom-based recommendations were made for any of the referred students. Even after one of the teachers described a strategy which had proved to be unsuccessful, the other team members did not offer ideas for alternative classroom interventions.

During the January 15th CAP meeting, one intervention that could have influenced teacher behavior was recommended. Specifically, it was recommended that Ms. Shoemaker collaborate with Ms. Nichols to develop a reading progress chart to use with a student in her classroom. However, the chart was not developed, and Ms. Shoemaker's behavior in the classroom was not influenced by her participation in the CAP. This, and similar examples, served to repeatedly emphasize how the teachers did not prioritize the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year.

Collaboration. Increased collaboration among school professionals was one of the most frequently cited benefits of CAP participation at Pleasant Valley Elementary

School during the 2002-2003 school year. More precisely, general education teachers valued collaboration with the special education teachers and other school professionals because it allowed them to learn classroom intervention strategies and assessment techniques, to share information about students' home situations, to emotionally support each other, and to access early intervention support. Frequent collaboration was facilitated by the integral involvement of the special education teachers and other school professionals with grade level CAP teams. These patterns and perceptions were described by the second grade CAP team members, as well as teachers representing all grade levels.

During the 2003-2004 school year, participation in the CAP did not promote collaboration among school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Instead, communication between general education teachers and special education teachers was significantly diminished and general education teachers perceived a lack of special education support. This change was consistently attributed to the district's reduction in the school's special education staff allocation.

The absence of Mr. White, Ms. Little, Dr. Baldwin, Ms. McHenry, and Ms. Nichols during grade level CAP meetings diminished teachers' belief that participation in the CAP facilitated beneficial collaboration. In that regard, there was no evidence of collaboration among general education teachers and the other school professionals with interventions or assessment. Additionally, whereas Ms. Pollock indicated that participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year was beneficial because she learned strategies from other teachers, she articulated how she had nothing to add, nor gain, by attending the second grade CAP meetings during the 2003-2004 school year.

Similarly, where Ms. Ziegler enthusiastically endorsed participation in the CAP because it fostered collaboration during the 2002-2003 school year, she actively avoided participation in the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year.

Professional roles. In conjunction with promoting collaboration, participation in the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year also influenced school professionals' roles. Specifically, it promoted an egalitarian relationship between general education and special education teachers as they worked together during the grade level CAP meetings. They also shared responsibility for all students; the special education teachers provided early intervention support to regular education students, and the general education teachers implemented many interventions with special and general education students who were experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties in the classroom.

Participation in the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year also influenced the roles of other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Prior to implementation, those such as Dr. Baldwin, Ms. Kane, and Ms. Nichols were described as tangential to general education instruction. However, their active participation in grade level CAP meetings increased their direct involvement with teachers and students. Although this increased level of involvement corresponded with an increased work load, school professionals unanimously endorsed their new roles and responsibilities.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, participation in the CAP did not continue to foster egalitarian roles for general education teachers and special education teachers. Instead, their roles separated. When the special education teachers did not actively participate in the CAP, the second grade teachers felt unsupported and over-

burdened. They believed the special education teachers abnegated their responsibilities, and transferred sole responsibility and accountability for the success of all students to general educators. This was especially frustrating for them because they felt overwhelmed by all of their other responsibilities in the classroom (e.g., learning and implementing a new curriculum, frequent district-mandated assessments). Additionally, they did not place any credence in the notion that participation in the CAP would impact or alleviate these concerns. Teachers at each grade level expressed similar sentiments.

Similarly, the other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School did not actively participate in the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year. Whereas they frequently attended grade level CAP meetings and collaboratively worked with teachers in the classroom during the 2002-2003 school year, they served only as members of the building level CAP team during 2003-2004. Unanimously, the other school professionals interpreted this as a negative regression in their role because they were, again, ancillary to instruction.

In summary, during the 2002-2003 school year, participation in the CAP appeared to have a significant, positive influence on general education teachers' behavior. They implemented academic and behavioral strategies recommended by the grade level CAP team and they collected data to monitor students' progress with interventions. Participation in the CAP also increased collaboration among school professionals, wherein teachers and other school professionals assumed more egalitarian roles that focused on direct student intervention. During the 2003-2004 school year, participation in the CAP appeared to have little, if any, influence on teacher behavior in the classroom. Classroom-based strategies were rarely recommended during the CAP team meetings,

and those that were recommended, were not implemented. Collaboration among school professionals was minimal, and roles returned to what they had been prior to implementation of the CAP.

Perceptions of the CAP

The fifth research question guided the exploration of how teachers and other school professionals perceived participation in the CAP. It was also designed to explore how teachers and other school professionals interpreted the outcomes of the CAP. Data were collected to explore what knowledge and skills school professionals believed were necessary for participation in the CAP. Based on the identified knowledge and skills, data were also collected to explore whether school professionals felt adequately prepared for participation. Data were collected to explore what contextual factors and supports school professionals believed were necessary for participation in the CAP. Based on the identified contextual factors and support, data were also collected to explore whether those factors were evident during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year. Finally, data were also collected to explore whether school professionals believed participation in the CAP facilitated productive problem solving during the 2002-2003 school year and during the 2003-2004 school year.

Knowledge and skills. Teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School indicated that certain skills were required for active and successful participation in the CAP. Relying on the experience with participation during the 2002-2003 school year, they identified the following as the most critical: the ability to gather and synthesize information and data to understand students' difficulties (i.e., to complete the referral form), the ability to identify, select, and implement appropriate interventions,

and the ability to measure students' progress. Additionally, the second grade CAP members identified how team members needed to respect one another, believe they could learn from each other, and maintain confidentiality.

Whether Pleasant Valley's teachers possessed the necessary knowledge and skills for participation in the CAP ultimately proved equivocal. Some data suggested they were not adequately prepared whereas other data suggested they were. It was evident, however, that members of the second grade CAP team lacked an accurate understanding of many issues related to special education. This finding was not surprising though, because none of the three second grade CAP team members had taken special education college courses, and each teacher characterized potentially relevant county-sponsored trainings as "...a waste of time."

As mentioned, some data suggested that school professionals at Pleasant Valley did not have the necessary knowledge and skills for successful participation in the CAP. For example, at the conclusion of the second grade CAP meeting on January 15th, Ms. Baden described the experience as analogous to a fish learning to swim. Specifically, she believed that Ms. McHenry's, Mr. White's, and Ms. Little's participation in the CAP meeting made the experience more productive because those individuals had skills and expertise which allowed them to guide the teachers through the problem solving steps. Similarly, at the ILT meeting on February 10th, the fourth grade team leader described how her grade level CAP team was not effective during the 2003-2004 school year because she, and the other teachers, lacked the necessary skills to engage in the four problem solving steps. Her conclusion was that the coaches should be put back on the teams.

Analysis of the dialogue and documentation from the January 6th and March 1st CAP meetings offered support for the hypothesis that general education teachers lacked the skills necessary for independent and successful CAP participation. Specifically, the three second grade teachers did not systematically use the problem solving steps, they did not evidence sophistication with collecting or interpreting data, they did not comprehensively consider each student's strengths and needs, and they did not strategically identify intervention strategies.

However, other data suggested teachers' minimal adherence to the CAP procedures during the 2003-2004 school year may not have resulted solely from a lack of knowledge or skills. Supporting this inference was the fact that all three second grade CAP team members explicitly described how, during 2002-2003, they synthesized data to understand students' referral concerns, implemented a variety of academic and behavioral strategies, and utilized numerous classroom assessment techniques to monitor student progress. Thus, they demonstrated that they did have the necessary knowledge and skills, but were not applying them during the 2003-2004 school year. Additionally, when asked about their training needs, none of second grade teachers (including Ms. Pollock) believed they needed additional training. Instead, when asked about necessary knowledge and skills, each teacher independently referenced the reduction in special education staffing and the loss of substitute teachers as the primary barriers to participation.

Although none of the second grade teachers identified a need for any training, the dialogue that occurred during the CAP meetings indicated that neither Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, nor Ms. Sullivan had an accurate understanding of the special education

process. For example, during the January 6th CAP meeting, Ms. Baden decided one referred student needed to have language dominance testing. During the January 15th CAP meeting, Ms. McHenry explained this was not an appropriate recommendation. Similarly, during the March 1st meeting, the three second grade teachers strategized for approximately fifteen minutes about how to ensure another referred student "…qualified for an IEP." During their conversation, they frequently referenced inaccurate information related to assessment procedures, federal guidelines for eligibility, and classroom implications. The team ultimately decided the student needed to see a psychiatrist for a complete evaluation because then she would automatically qualify for special education.

Contextual factors and support. During the 2003-2004 school year, teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School fervently asserted that successful CAP implementation depended on two key factors; adequate time and adequate staffing. Ms. McHenry, the general education teachers, the special education teachers, and others school professionals overwhelmingly indicated it was incumbent upon the district to provide that required support. There was, however, a vocal minority of teachers who concurrently faulted Ms. McHenry for not adequately supporting implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year.

Dr. Baldwin endorsed both views; she believed the principal and the district should assume joint responsibility for supporting the CAP. Reflecting on her observations during the 2002-2003 school year, Dr. Baldwin also described how the school professionals at Pleasant Valley rarely acknowledged the significant level of support that was infused throughout the school's unique CAP implementation structure.

In other words, the necessary contextual factors and support had not been delineated, nor appreciated, until they were removed.

Throughout the 2003-2004 school year, the teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley cited the elimination of the school improvement funding and the absence of substitute teachers as being detrimental to CAP implementation. However, the nexus of their concern was not actually the loss of money, nor the loss of substitutes; both served as proxies for time. Situated within the context of their other responsibilities, the second grade teachers repeatedly asserted that, even though they philosophically supported the CAP, it was impossible to successfully participate without being given time during the instructional day to hold CAP team meetings.

In conjunction with the call for adequate time, the teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley also insisted that the success of the CAP was dependent on adequate staffing. To poignantly illustrate this need, staff members frequently described how the loss of special education positions was directly responsible for the elimination of early intervention support during the 2003-2004 school year. At least four staff members explicitly described that the lack of early intervention support was tantamount to “child neglect.”

The contrast between CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year and CAP implementation during the 2003-2004 school year highlighted two other beneficial staff-related supports. First, there needed to be someone to coordinate school-wide CAP implementation. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. Ziegler and Ms. McHenry shared this role. They collaboratively arranged the teams’ schedules, maintained the

notebook of school-wide documentation, ensured each grade level team had adequate forms, and did other tasks to facilitate grade level team efficacy.

Second, there needed to be someone to coordinate each grade level CAP team. During the 2002-2003 school year, the coach assumed this responsibility. Additionally, the coaches actively participated in the CAP meetings, provided support and guidance with the problem solving steps, and frequently collaborated with the general education teachers (e.g., completing documentation, implementing interventions, and assessing student performance and progress). Given the teachers' limited knowledge related to special education, support and guidance from the coaches significantly influenced the success of the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year.

Finally, the members of the second grade CAP team also described how certain curricular factors inhibited successful implementation. Specifically, they believed the increases in content, expectations, and structure of the district's revised curriculum left no time for them to review, re-teach, or reinforce skills with students who did not initially master the material. Thus, insofar as problem solving with the CAP sought to create an "instructional match" to align instructional materials and intervention strategies with students' unique needs, the curriculum made that goal elusive. However, the three second grade teachers did indicate that the 2002-2003 special education staffing level somewhat alleviated that challenge because multiple adults supported classroom instruction.

Productive problem solving. Staff members' perceptions of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year were overwhelmingly positive. They described how participation in the CAP expanded teachers' "bag of

tricks," provided access to early intervention support, improved data collection, increased collaboration among staff members, and decreased special education rates. Ultimately, it was perceived to have resulted in significant academic and behavioral improvements among many referred students. Even school professionals who did not enthusiastically endorse CAP implementation indicated the process facilitated productive problem solving and positive student outcomes. Their concerns focused primarily on how the CAP increased general education teachers' responsibilities and on how participation consumed a large amount of their time.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, concerns about CAP implementation and outcomes were unanimously expressed among the staff at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. As the school year progressed, participation in the CAP became an increasingly contentious issue. The increased animosity was illustrated during the building level CAP meeting on October 29th when Ms. McHenry asked who would be willing to present the modified CAP procedures to the staff; everyone immediately put their finger to the side of their nose and proclaimed, "Not it!"

General education teachers from every grade level said participation in the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year no longer promoted student achievement. This change was evident even among teachers who enthusiastically participated during the 2002-2003 school year. For example, Ms. Baden cancelled the first second grade CAP meeting because the team had, "No one to CAP." Yet, that morning the three teachers talked about feeling stress because so many students were not meeting the district's grade level expectations in reading. Similarly, there was evidence that at least one teacher strategically directed a parent to request a special education screening as a way to evade

the CAP. Thus, one can infer that the CAP was no longer perceived as facilitating productive problem solving.

In summary, Pleasant Valley's divergent CAP implementation experiences during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years allowed teachers and other school professionals to identify what factors were necessary for successful participation. Related to knowledge and skills, teachers and other school professionals identified the importance of being able to collect and interpret data for an initial referral, select and implement interventions, and monitor student progress. Although data were not conclusive about whether Pleasant Valley's teachers possessed those skills, it was found that the second grade CAP team did not have an accurate understanding of the special education processes and issues.

Related to contextual factors and support, teachers and other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School repeatedly articulated that the success of the CAP depended on being provided adequate time and adequate staff. Unless release time was given, teachers believed successful participation in the CAP was impossible. Unless adequate staffing was available to provide early intervention support, teachers believed the CAP was not beneficial. Additionally, a school-wide coordinator and grade level CAP coaches were identified as having promoted successful implementation.

Because these contextual factors and supports existed during the 2002-2003 school year at Pleasant Valley, most school professionals believed the CAP facilitated productive problem solving. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year when the necessary contextual factors and support were absent, school professionals concluded participation in the process was no longer viewed as beneficial, and it was not prioritized.

Administrative Forces

The sixth research question guided the exploration of the impact of administrative forces on the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Data were collected to explore the role and influence of the principal. Data were also collected to explore the influence of district, state, and federal level decisions and policies on the CAP. Finally, data were collected to compare the influence of administrative forces on the CAP during the 2002-2003 school with the influence of administrative forces on the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year.

Role and influence of the principal. Ms. McHenry voluntarily piloted the CAP at Pleasant Valley because she believed it would promote inclusion and allow all students access to necessary academic and behavioral support, regardless of whether they were formally eligible to receive special education services. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry's actions at Pleasant Valley Elementary School were consistent with her dedication to the process. She demonstrated enthusiasm for the CAP and was integrally involved with implementation because she wanted to ensure success. Specifically, she attended the summer training with members of her staff, required active involvement of all staff members throughout the year, and allocated all of the school improvement funds to pay for substitute teachers so general education teachers could consistently participate in grade level CAP meetings for two hours, twice a month during the instructional day.

She also personally attended nearly all of the grade level CAP meetings at the school. Her physical presence at these meetings inherently increased accountability among all meeting participants. By serving as the facilitator, she was able to guide team

discussions to ensure that all four problem solving steps were considered in relation to each referred student. Her participation with grade level teams contributed to the high level of implementation integrity during the 2002-2003 school year. However, some staff members also believed it ultimately may have inhibited teams' skill development and independent functioning.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry assumed a very different role with the CAP. Throughout the year, she continued to assert that CAP implementation would continue at Pleasant Valley. However, her personal enthusiasm and commitment to the process wavered as she struggled with a sense of disenfranchisement and significant frustration. Specifically, she believed the district's decisions to reduce the school's special education staff by one and a half positions and eliminate the school improvement funding, repudiated the time and effort that she and her staff had devoted to ensuring successful CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year.

In response to the district's actions, Ms. McHenry made significant modifications to Pleasant Valley's CAP procedures. Specifically, without funding for substitute teachers, she required grade level CAP teams to meet after the instructional school day; with the loss of the special education positions, she eliminated early intervention support; because of teacher complaints, she reduced the CAP documentation and data collection requirements; and, she removed CAP coaches from the grade level teams.

During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry was minimally involved with the grade level CAP teams. The one meeting she attended was with the second grade team on January 15th. At that meeting, she assumed the lead role, asked salient questions, and proposed many of the interventions which were ultimately adopted (though not

implemented) as “Action Items” by the team. Throughout the year, she periodically reminded school professionals of her expectation for their participation, including twice monthly grade level CAP team meetings. However, she did not take direct action to address the pervasive non-compliance because she agreed with teachers that they were overwhelmed with other district-mandated responsibilities.

District-level decisions and policies. Two district decisions appeared to significantly influence CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School; the reduction in the school’s special education staffing and the elimination of discretionary funds used to support the school improvement plan. During 2002-2003, the school had three full time special education teachers who each served as a grade level CAP coach and an early interventionist. During summer of 2003, the district reduced the school’s special education allocation to be commensurate with the number of students who were formally classified as eligible for special education services. This resulted in the loss of one full time special education teacher and one half-time paraprofessional position. This staff reduction proved especially salient because Ms. McHenry and the staff at Pleasant Valley directly correlated the reduction in special education students with successful CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year.

The district’s staffing decision significantly impacted CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley. Ms. McHenry believed that, without three special education teachers, the school could no longer offer early intervention support, a direct service to students. The lack of access to early intervention support, in turn, limited the intervention options available to grade level CAP teams and diminished teachers’ perception regarding the benefits of CAP participation.

The second district decision that significantly impacted CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year was the elimination of school improvement funding. Although the district did not designate these funds to support the CAP, Ms. McHenry chose to direct her allocation to provide substitute teacher coverage for team members, allowing grade level CAP teams to meet during the instructional day. Thus, although the district's decision was not intentionally related to the CAP, it had a significant impact at Pleasant Valley because of the school's unique implementation structure.

Because the school improvement funds were no longer available, Ms. McHenry required grade level teams to meet after the instructional school day. Teachers ardently expressed that this expectation was unrealistic because of all the other requirements on their time. Within the context of this new expectation, the frequency of grade level CAP meetings at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year dropped significantly, compared with the frequency of grade level CAP meetings during 2002-2003.

State and federal-level decisions and policies. Whereas district-level decisions significantly influenced CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, neither state-level decisions or policies, nor federal-level decisions or policies exerted a similar influence. Even when specifically asked, none of the school professionals at Pleasant Valley described any impact from state decisions or policies. Related to federal decisions and policies, Mr. Kennedy believed the No Child Left Behind Act negatively influenced CAP implementation because it increased teachers' responsibilities. These additional demands then competed with the CAP for their time.

Ms. McHenry and Dr. Baldwin believed the No Child Left Behind Act was philosophically incongruent with the CAP because it required unilateral achievement standards, whereas the CAP recognized inherent developmental differences and focused on students' unique learning needs. However, the teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School associated the impediments to CAP implementation solely with district-level decisions, rather than with the No Child Left Behind Act. Consequently, federal legislation appeared to have minimal, if any, direct influence on CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during either the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school years.

In summary, data from this study suggested a high level of influence from both Ms. McHenry and the school district on CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry positively influenced the CAP because her enthusiasm engendered a high level of support among school professionals and her integral involvement with grade level teams facilitated implementation integrity. Additionally, her commitment to successful implementation meant she allocated resources which created an implementation structure that teachers endorsed. Her actions also reflected her personal belief that successful implementation was feasible at Pleasant Valley, given the level of support provided by the district.

In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry's enthusiasm for the CAP was significantly diminished. She interpreted the district's decision to reduce the school's special education staffing allocation as punitive, and, when paired with the concurrent elimination of the school improvement funding, she no longer viewed implementation of the district's CAP model as feasible. She modified the school's

implementation procedures, but did not actively, nor consistently enforce those procedures during the year. Neither did she maintain her direct involvement with grade level teams. Taken together, these actions appeared to have contributed to the reduced implementation integrity at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year. Similar levels of influence were not apparent at the school as a result of state or federal decisions or policies.

Other CAP Elementary Schools

The seventh research question guided the exploration of how Pleasant Valley Elementary School's CAP implementation compared with the CAP implementation experiences of other elementary schools. As described in Chapter Three, when it was evident that CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year was different than anticipated, the data sources in this study were expanded to include the perspectives of eight student services personnel who were assigned to the other CAP schools in the district's same field office region as Pleasant Valley. Additionally, perspectives from the three district CAP facilitators and the district's CAP supervisor were also gathered.

Specifically, data were collected to explore how the CAP was implemented and perceived at the other twelve CAP elementary schools. Data were also collected to explore the influence of administrative forces on the CAP at the other twelve CAP elementary schools. Based on this data, the CAP implementation experiences at the other twelve schools were compared with the CAP implementation experience at Pleasant Valley Elementary School.

Implementation. Descriptions from the other twelve CAP schools revealed many similarities between the implementation procedures used in those settings and those used at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school year. For example, at all twelve schools, teachers were expected to refer any student who experienced academic, behavioral, or social difficulties to their grade level CAP team. Each of the twelve schools used grade level CAP coaches and the four problem solving steps. As appropriate, general education intervention strategies and early intervention support were recommended and provided to address students' referral concerns.

All twelve schools used some form of documentation to refer students and monitor their progress with an intervention plan. When students continued to experience difficulty after multiple interventions, they were referred to building level CAP teams for additional problem solving. If those interventions were also unsuccessful, special education eligibility might be considered.

One significant difference related to grade level CAP meeting structure. During the 2002-2003 school year at Pleasant Valley, grade level CAP teams were given additional release time during the day. This was possible because Ms. McHenry allocated the school improvement funding to provide substitute teacher coverage for the general education teachers' classes. During the 2003-2004 school year at Pleasant Valley, substitute coverage was no longer available, so grade level CAP teams were required to meet after the instructional school day. At all the other twelve CAP schools, grade level CAP meetings occurred during teachers' regularly scheduled common planning period. No other administrator required grade level CAP teams to meet after the instructional school day.

While all twelve schools utilized CAP implementation procedures resembling those used at Pleasant Valley, descriptions offered by the student services personnel indicated that implementation integrity spanned a continuum. At three schools, CAP implementation was characterized with high, or relatively high, adherence to the district's model. Implementation at these schools appeared to resemble implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary during the 2002-2003 school year. At eight of the other schools, implementation was somewhat similar to the district's expectations, although some modifications had been made and not all procedures were consistently followed. Descriptions from these schools more closely resembled the experiences of Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2003-2004 school year. Finally, at one school, the principal essentially discontinued implementation of the CAP after one year.

Perceptions of the CAP. Descriptions of how school professionals at the other twelve schools perceived the CAP were similar to those at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year, with many benefits noted. Although challenges were also cited, they predominantly focused on the difficulties with actually implementing the CAP in a school, not with concerns related to the CAP philosophy or process. Specifically, participation in the CAP was said to have promoted an inclusive philosophy at all twelve schools, wherein general education teachers assumed increased responsibility for all students in their classroom and special education teachers provided early intervention support to students not formally identified as having a disability.

Additionally, participation was described to have improved teachers' ability to collect and use data and to have increased collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals. Finally, the benefits

of early intervention support available with the CAP were unanimously emphasized as the reason many students' needs were successfully addressed. This, in turn, reduced special education screening and eligibility rates at all twelve CAP schools.

Influences on implementation. Along with describing the benefits of participation in the CAP, descriptions from the other twelve schools also highlighted the factors that influenced implementation. Cited as most salient were increased teacher responsibilities associated with district decisions, and the role of the building administrator. As with Pleasant Valley, descriptions of CAP implementation at all the other schools consistently referenced teachers' increased responsibilities as inhibiting active and consistent participation. Unanimously, these responsibilities were described to be related to district-level decisions (e.g., on-going changes to the curriculum, mandated classroom assessments). Taken together, it was believed that the district had created unrealistic expectations for teachers. Because teachers felt overwhelmed by all that was being asked of them, their enthusiasm for the CAP decreased and many schools modified their implementation procedures to reduce the demand on teachers' time.

Descriptions also suggested that the building administrators had the potential to positively or negatively influence CAP implementation. Specifically, implementation was enhanced, or maintained, when the administrator was directly and consistently involved with the grade level CAP teams. The administrator's physical presence at meetings as well as his or her willingness to enforce the CAP procedures all facilitated implementation integrity. Similarly, when the administrator actively and enthusiastically promoted use of the CAP, it engendered support among the staff, and in turn, increased participation.

In contrast, when the administrator was not directly involved with implementation, when he or she did not enforce adherence, or when he or she was not personally enthusiastic and committed to the process, overall implementation was significantly, negatively influenced. The patterns described at the other twelve CAP schools mirrored the divergent experiences related to Ms. McHenry's role and influence at Pleasant Valley Elementary school.

Finally, unlike at Pleasant Valley, the No Child Left Behind Act appeared to have influenced CAP implementation in at least three of the other twelve CAP schools. Specifically, the heightened sense of accountability was thought to have inhibited CAP implementation because teachers focused their efforts on programs they felt would have a better chance of directly increasing students' ability to met established standards. Additionally, the remedial reading program that was mandated when schools did not make adequate yearly progress (as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act) was seen as antithetical to the CAP because it was a unilateral intervention.

In summary, descriptions from the other twelve CAP elementary schools indicated many of the CAP implementation procedures resembled those at Pleasant Valley during either the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school year. One significant difference was found related to the grade level CAP team meeting schedule, where Pleasant Valley's structure was unique. It was also described that implementation integrity was not consistently high across all twelve schools, and some had chosen to modify their procedures to accommodate the increasing demands on teachers' time.

At the other twelve CAP elementary schools, the principal influenced CAP implementation. In some situations, he or she had a positive influence on

implementation, similar to Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year. In others, the principal's lack of enthusiasm and minimal level of participation negatively impacted implementation. This resembled Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year. Unlike Pleasant Valley, the No Child Left Behind Act was thought to have negatively influenced CAP implementation in at least three of the other twelve schools.

Relationship to Previous Research

Together, the findings related to the guiding research questions in this study offer insights into how the CAP was implemented, perceived, and influenced at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Many of the findings provided evidence to support and the results of previous research. For example, Pleasant Valley's experiences with CAP implementation during the 2002-2003 school year provided additional evidence that prereferral problem solving has many potential benefits. These included: increased collaboration among professionals (e.g., McDougal et al., 2000), academic and behavioral improvements among referred students (e.g., Burns & Symington, 2002; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990), improvements in teachers' ability to gather, interpret, and use data (e.g., Ingalls & Hammond, 1996), the expansion of academic and behavioral strategies used by general education teachers (e.g., Costas et al., 2001), and decreased special education eligibility rates (e.g., McDougal et al., 2000).

Additionally, the contrast between CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year added support for the conclusion that the mere existence of a prereferral problem solving process does not guarantee successful outcomes (e.g., Rock & Zigmond, 2001). Based

on the descriptions of CAP implementation experiences at the other twelve schools, tentative support was also provided for the hypothesis that there is not a consistent, direct relationship between years of implementation and procedural integrity (Telzrow et al., 2000). This study also enhanced the finding that the specificity of the problem solving model influences outcomes by offering observational data to support that conclusion (e.g., Kovaleski et al., 1999; Levinsohn, 2000; McNamara & Hollinger, 2003). Finally, the data supported the conclusion that implementation and sustainability of prereferral problem solving programs are influenced by many complex, interrelated factors involving the school district, the building administrator, and school professionals (e.g., Fuchs, Fuch, Bahr et al., 1990; Fuchs et al., 1996).

Qualitative research is particularly well suited for illuminating the complexity of educational environments and ethos because the data captures multiple perspectives within real world settings. With this study, multiple sources of data were systematically and persistently collected, coded, and analyzed to answer each of the guiding research questions. A synthesis of those answers, in turn, created a descriptive model of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. As described, many of the findings supported and enhanced the conclusions of previous research.

However, by design, the research questions were conceptually and contextually bound, which meant ceasing analysis before synthesizing and extending the corresponding findings would be shortsighted. It was imperative to also distill themes that reached beyond describing “What” happened, to understand “Why” certain phenomenon occurred. With this study, that meant exploring questions such as: “Why

was the CAP seemingly successful during the 2002-2003 school year?", "Why were the experiences during the 2003-2004 school year so divergent?" and, ultimately, "Why does this study matter?".

However, before exploring those themes, it needs to be acknowledged and understood that throughout the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. Baden, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Sullivan consistently demonstrated genuine dedication and concern for all the students in their classrooms. A tertiary review of the second grade CAP team's experience during the 2003-2004 school year could lead to the conclusion that teacher apathy or incompetence caused implementation to be unsuccessful. However, that would be a significant misinterpretation of the data and the context at Pleasant Valley Elementary School.

It was unequivocally documented that the second grade teachers struggled to effectively address students' multitude of needs after the district reduced the school's staffing and funding. Additionally, because CAP implementation was successful during the 2002-2003 school year, the teachers' experiences during the 2003-2004 school year were regarded as being even more frustrating for them. Ms. McHenry explained:

> It's so painful to watch. [Teachers] know what they should be doing. They know what these kids need. But, they just can't do it this year. So, they know they're letting me down, and more importantly, they know they're letting the kids down. And, that piece is so difficult for them.

Parallel levels of dedication and frustration were observed with the other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School, as well as with Ms. McHenry, throughout the 2003-2004 school year. Given that caveat, a discussion of the study's

overarching themes relating to the district, the principal and the teachers is now offered. It begins with a discussion of how an analogy using the sun, the moon, and the stars evolved.

The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars

In September, Dr. Baldwin explained that she believed a combination of factors facilitated successful implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley during the 2002-2003 school year. These included Ms. McHenry's enthusiastic and integral involvement, time during the instructional day for grade level meetings, and the availability of staff to provide substantial early intervention support. She explained, "Collectively, things were just right. You know, it was that everything came together, like the sun and the moon and the stars were all in the right place in the sky."

In contrast, by the end of December, Ms. McHenry lamented how CAP implementation had been detrimentally impacted by the staffing reduction and the elimination of school improvement funding. She specifically praised all three second grade teachers for maintaining their philosophical belief in prereferral problem solving, but simultaneously explained that their other responsibilities had superseded fidelity to the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year. She concluded, "The sun, the moon, and the stars are just not aligned for CAP anymore."

Ironically, this celestial reference was reiterated by others at Pleasant Valley on a number of occasions during the spring. And, ultimately, as the data from this study was synthesized, this phrase provided an excellent analogy for understanding how the district, the principal, and the teachers all impacted CAP implementation. As described next,

"The sun" represents the school district, "the moon" represents the principal, "the stars" represent the teachers.

Specifically, by examining the impact of the "alignment" among these three entities, the following conclusions were drawn: district support influences implementation; district facilitators potentially influence implementation; the principal's attitude and level of enthusiasm influences implementation; the principal's level of control and participation influences implementation; teachers' perceptions about the feasibility of participation influence implementation; teachers' perceptions about the benefits of participation influence implementation; and, collaboration among school professionals influences implementation. After each conclusion is described, the necessity and influence of "alignment" is re-visited.

The Sun: The School District

District support influences implementation. There is a strong relationship between a school district's level of support (i.e., money, time, and staff) and the successful implementation and sustainability of educational reform programs, including prereferral problem solving (Desimone, 2002; Fuchs et al., 1996; Fullan, 2001). Data from this study provided additional evidence to support the conclusion that district support influences the implementation integrity and sustainability of prereferral problem solving programs. Additionally, where previous findings primarily highlighted the logistical influences of district support, data from this study indicated that district support also has a cascading impact on motivation, commitment, and program efficacy. When the principal believed district resources were inadequate and implementation was no longer a district priority, enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the process were

significantly diminished at the building level. This diminution, in turn, reduced classroom teachers' willingness to participate, which ultimately impacted student outcomes.

When the district reduced Pleasant Valley's special education staffing allocation, Ms. McHenry felt "betrayed" and "bewildered" because, their decision negated a previous promise to maintain staffing, and was generally antithetical to CAP implementation since the school was penalized for successfully reducing special education rates. When the school improvement funding was subsequently eliminated, Ms. McHenry's disenfranchisement with the district and the CAP increased to where she no longer creatively allocated resources to support CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley.

For example, in December, Ms. Kelly indicated that Pleasant Valley had staff development money which could have been creatively paid for substitute teachers. This would have allowed grade level CAP teams to meet during the instructional day, as they did during the 2002-2003 school year. Similarly, a number of staff members believed that with some recruitment and training, parent volunteers, paraeducators, and others in the building could have provided early intervention support for students. However, Ms. McHenry's visceral response to the district's actions minimized her desire to actively pursue options which may have enhanced CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year.

District facilitators potentially influence implementation. According to Fullan (2001), principals are critical in determining whether reform efforts are successful. However, given the increase in principals' responsibilities, he poignantly asked, "If

effective principals energize teachers in complex times, who is going to energize principals?" (p.141). Data from this study indicated that Ms. McHenry frequently felt overwhelmed by her daily responsibilities and increased accountability. Because she was already struggling with dissonance related to the CAP, stress from other responsibilities cumulatively decreased her willingness to devote time, effort, and emotional energy towards implementation during the 2003-2004 school year.

Within that context of heightened stress, district facilitators have been shown to help alleviate some of the principal's responsibilities related to implementation (Fullan, 2001; Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). Specifically, an effective facilitator helps create and maintain enthusiasm, help the principal assume an appropriate level of participation, helps modify and adapt procedures to meet a school's unique needs, helps support and monitor implementation, and ensures that district and school efforts are coordinated (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Desimone, 2002; Fullan, 1997). Data from this study suggested that CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School would have benefited from the support of an effective facilitator in all of these areas during the 2003-2004 school year.

However, that did not occur because Dr. Miller, the district facilitator assigned to Pleasant Valley, was minimally involved at the school and did not enhance implementation. During the 2003-2004 school year, Dr. Miller visited the school three times. He met with Ms. McHenry, Mr. White, and Dr. Baldwin twice, but on both occasions his commentary and suggestions were perceived as being inappropriate and irrelevant. Dr. Miller also attended the ILT meeting with Mr. Kennedy, however he did not speak.

Similarly, none of the school professionals at Pleasant Valley believed that the district's CAP supervisor, Mr. Kennedy, understood the challenges associated with CAP implementation during the 2003-2004 school year. During his one visit to the school, Mr. Kennedy told the members of the ILT that he would arrange for teacher training and a meeting between Pleasant Valley's staff and the associate superintendent so they could express their frustrations. However, neither of these promises was seen to fruition, further diminishing Ms. McHenry's perception regarding the district's commitment to the CAP.

During the 2003-2004 school year, many school professionals at Pleasant Valley expressed a desire to have an active and supportive CAP facilitator. They believed such a person could illuminate how other schools maintained high implementation integrity, creatively scheduled grade level CAP meetings, and offered early intervention support. Ms. McHenry also noted that, if relevant suggestions were offered, she would be willing to try new procedures. In other words, even though the staff at Pleasant Valley did not benefit from an effective district facilitator, they indicated potential receptivity to that support.

The Moon: The Principal

The principal's attitude and level of enthusiasm influences implementation. As described, Ms. McHenry's commitment to successfully implementing the CAP at Pleasant Valley was significantly diminished in response to the district's reduction in support. During the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry articulated the expectation for all teachers to actively participate in the CAP. However her message lacked the enthusiasm and authenticity that was omnipresent during the 2002-2003 school year.

Rather than using the words that encouraged and inspired teachers to actively participate in the CAP, her descriptions during 2003-2004 were characterized with defeatist connotations that chastised the district's actions.

By November, Ms. McHenry's sentiments had been adopted and internalized by the teachers and other professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. As such, they parroted her interpretation that the staff reductions were punitive and, when combined with the loss of school improvement money, precluded successful CAP implementation. Simultaneously, teachers' motivation to participate in the CAP was rapidly declining.

That pattern mirrored previous findings that a principal's level of enthusiasm significantly influenced the success of reform efforts (e.g., Desimone, 2002; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Specifically, Fullan (2002) described how school culture is only conducive to sustaining reform efforts and programs when the principal is able to motivate and energize teachers (especially those who are skeptical of change). During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry's positive attitude and pervasive enthusiasm successfully facilitated CAP participation at Pleasant Valley, even with many of the teachers who did not initially endorse the CAP. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, Ms. McHenry's lack of personal motivation and commitment prevented her from engendering school professionals' sense of meaning, importance, or enthusiasm towards the CAP.

The principal's level of control and participation influences implementation. During the 2002-2003 school year, Ms. McHenry maintained high levels of control and participation with the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. She chose to initially pilot the CAP, she established the school's implementation structure and meeting

schedules, she frequently served as the facilitator during grade level meetings, and she personally reviewed nearly every CAP referral that teachers submitted. Her consistent participation during grade level meetings and her active enforcement of CAP expectations translated into high implementation integrity at all grade levels.

However, principals need to establish a balance between offering support, providing pressure, and allowing independence (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Fullan, 2001). At Pleasant Valley, Ms. McHenry's high level of control and integral participation with the CAP during the 2002-2003 school year may have ultimately jeopardized the sustainability of the process. During the 2002-2003 and the 2003-2004 school year, when Ms. McHenry wanted a second opinion about something related to the CAP, she almost exclusively consulted Mr. White, Ms. Little, or Dr. Baldwin. Although teacher involvement has been shown to increase ownership for reform efforts (Desimone, 2002; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), and to improve sustainability of programs (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), teachers were not involved in the development or modification of CAP procedures at Pleasant Valley. Consequently, when Ms. McHenry's personal commitment and direct participation with the CAP waned, implementation integrity was significantly reduced because teachers had not assumed ownership or shared responsibility for the process.

The Stars: Teachers

Teachers' perceptions about the feasibility of participation influence implementation. Teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School repeatedly explained that active participation in the CAP was significantly hindered by their many other demands and responsibilities (e.g., learning and implementing a new reading and math

curriculum, giving, scoring, and interpreting mandated bi-weekly assessments). As an illustration, all three second grade teachers opined that the only way they could adequately meet their responsibilities was to arrive at Pleasant Valley by 7:00 a.m. each morning and remain there until well after 5:00 p.m..

Teachers' burgeoning responsibilities are well documented and frequently associated with rigorous curricular demands, large class sizes, increased accountability for student success, and increased diversity within the classroom (e.g. Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). The divergent CAP implementation experiences at Pleasant Valley illustrated how the overwhelming demands of the daily "classroom press" created anxiety and stress among teachers and diminished their willingness and ability to participate in the CAP (Fullan, 2001, p. 31). During the 2002-2003 school year, teachers believed active participation in the CAP was feasible because grade level meetings were held during the instructional day. In contrast, during the 2003-2004 school year, teachers animatedly expressed that, because of competing demands on their time, active participation in the CAP was not realistic since grade level meetings could only occur after the instructional school day. The CAP was no longer congruent with their expectations and goals for collaboratively understanding and addressing students' needs. Consequently, active and constructive participation was no longer a priority.

Teachers' perceptions about the benefits of participation influence implementation. In addition to believing that active participation in the CAP was not feasible during the 2003-2004 school year, teachers' participation was influenced by the fact that they no longer viewed the outcomes of the CAP as beneficial. During the 2002-2003 school year, participation in the CAP provided teachers with the opportunity to

collaborate with the special education teachers and other school professionals, and allowed them access to early intervention support for students. During the 2003-2004 school year, other school professionals were not consistently involved in the CAP, and early intervention support was no longer available. Thus, teachers saw little reason to devote their coveted time and energy to the CAP, despite evidence of significant student need.

Collaboration among school professionals influences implementation. As was observed at Pleasant Valley during the 2003-2004 school year, general education teachers frequently assume primary responsibility in the problem solving process, including implementing and monitoring recommended interventions (Buck et al., 2003). However, previous research and data from this study indicated that general education teachers do not always select appropriate interventions, collect and accurately interpret data, nor independently implement academic and behavioral interventions (Fuchs et al., 1990; Gresham, 1989; Noell et al., 1997; Wilson, et al., 1998).

However, when general education teachers collaboratively participate in prereferral problem solving with other school professionals, these concerns are minimized (Allen & Blackston, 2003; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr et al., 1990; Kovaleski et al., 1999). Data from Pleasant Valley Elementary School specifically highlighted that collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, the psychologist, the principal, and the counselor was beneficial. Whether these other school professionals served as a grade level coach, or as participants in grade level meetings, their inclusion helped compensate for the teachers' limited knowledge and skills, and, in turn, significantly enhanced the problem solving process and outcomes. Collaboration

also increased implementation integrity with classroom interventions and facilitated access to early intervention support. Finally, when general education teachers believed that other school professionals shared the responsibilities associated with the CAP, their perceptions were enhanced and their level of participation increased.

Aligning the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars

Successful implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley was depicted as analogous to the proper alignment of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Through extensive field engagement, analysis of voluminous amounts of data, and multiple iterations of emerging themes, an understanding of this analogy was ultimately developed.

At perhaps the most basic level, it was found that no single factor or decision determines whether a prereferral problem solving process is successfully implemented. Establishing that premise was critical, because at Pleasant Valley, the majority of school professionals chided the district's actions as solely responsible for the deterioration the CAP during the 2003-2004 school year. Data from this study revealed that, in actuality, a combination of intertwined factors involving the district, the school, and the teachers collectively influence implementation.

District support for prereferral problem solving is indisputably important. This includes giving release time for teachers to meet, providing adequate staff so early intervention support can be offered, and assigning effective district facilitators to promote implementation at individual schools. When such support is provided from the district, other potentially inhibiting factors are minimized (e.g., increasing teacher responsibilities, lack of ownership among teachers). When adequate support is not provided from the district, when a district has multiple (competing) initiatives, and when

district decisions are not aligned with the goals of prereferral problem solving, there is a negative impact on the logistical ability to successfully implement the process. Inadequate district support also creates a cascading effect that negatively influences the principal's level of motivation and participation, school professionals' motivation and participation, and ultimately student outcomes.

Specifically, when a principal feels implementation is adequately supported, his or her level of enthusiasm and participation is positively influenced. Conversely, if a principal believes district support is inadequate, or that implementation is not valued, it is less likely he or she will actively participate or creatively allocate resources at the school level. In turn, teachers' levels of motivation and participation are influenced by the principal's beliefs and actions. They are also influenced by their own perceptions about whether participation is feasible or beneficial to their students. Finally, shared ownership and collaboration among staff members enhances adherence to the problem solving steps, as well as teachers' level of motivation and participation.

Given that context, the picture of the necessity for alignment of factors involving the sun (the district), the moon (the principal), and the stars (the teachers) is created. This picture, in turn, provides a framework for understanding the divergent CAP implementation experiences at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. During the 2002-2003 school year, the district supported CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley by maintaining the school's special education staffing level at three full time special education teachers. Ms. McHenry perceived that level of support to be adequate, and thus, was enthusiastic about implementation and committed to ensuring success. Specifically, she assumed an active role during grade level meetings, assigned a coach to

each CAP team, and required all school professionals to actively participate and adhere to procedural expectations.

Grade level CAP meetings occurred on pre-determined schedule during the instructional school day, and involved many of the other school professionals at Pleasant Valley. The participation of Ms. McHenry and others in grade level meetings ensured they were organized, structured, and involved comprehensive problem solving. General education intervention strategies were recommended, implemented, and monitored. When it was appropriate, early intervention support was provided. Over the course of the year, many referred students' academic and behavioral difficulties were successfully addressed through the CAP. The sun, the moon, and the stars were aligned; the system was working successfully.

Implementation of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary School during the 2003-2004 school year looked very different. After the district reduced the school's special education staffing allocation, Ms. McHenry became angry and disenfranchised because she felt the school had been penalized for achieving the goals of the CAP. Without the third special education teacher, she believed it was impossible to continue providing early intervention support. When the school improvement money was also eliminated, Ms. McHenry's commitment was further diminished. She responsively modified CAP procedures at the school, but did not evidence motivation to creatively allocate the school's internal resources to compensate for the district's actions or to monitor teacher adherence to the modified procedures.

Teachers quickly adopted Ms. McHenry's perceptions of the CAP, and their level of enthusiasm and commitment also waned. Because of increased teacher

responsibilities, lack of collaboration and involvement with other school professionals, a lack of ownership, and minimal enforcement of CAP procedures, implementation integrity was significantly decreased. During the three second grade CAP meetings, there was a lack of structure and minimal problem solving. The interventions recommended by the second grade CAP team, as well as other grade level teams, had minimal impact on teachers' behavior or students' experiences. The sun, the moon, and the stars were no longer aligned; the system to support student achievement was no longer successful.

In this section, a description of the study's themes was offered. It included a discussion about how factors related to the district, the principal, and the teachers collectively influence prereferral problem solving. In the final section, methodological limitations are presented and recommendations for successful implementation and future research are offered.

Limitations

With qualitative research, limitations related to the researcher's role and biases, as well as the actual methodology, need to be considered. A discussion of the researcher's role and biases was presented in Chapter Three. Here, other methodological limitations are addressed. These included the modifications that were made to the research design during the course of the study and the inherent limitations associated with the use of interview data.

Research Design Modifications

Qualitative research was especially well suited to capture the complexities of the environment at Pleasant Valley Elementary School because it allowed for responsive design modifications as understandings about the nuances of this setting evolved (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1998). With this flexibility, however, it was vital to ensure that the rigor of the original design was not jeopardized. Two responsive modifications were made to the original methodological design of this study. First, data collection was extended approximately six months. Second, data sources were expanded to gather information from schools in addition to Pleasant Valley.

The original research proposal for this study specified that data collection would take place between September 2003 and January 2004 at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Based on the 2002-2003 model of CAP implementation, grade level CAP teams were expected to meet twice a month during that time frame. However, by November 2004, it was evident that CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley differed significantly from the anticipated model. Consequently, a responsive modification was made to the original research design to extend field engagement and data collection through June 2004.

This extension proved beneficial because the data collected during the spring facilitated the development of a more precise and comprehensive model of CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Thus, this design modification was an asset, not a limitation. It should also be mentioned that even with this extension, the second grade CAP team did not convene as frequently as originally anticipated. However, the patterns and behaviors observed during the meetings that were held (e.g., general education teachers' minimal use of data, lack of meeting structure) were highly consistent and the second grade teachers made approximately the same number of referrals as originally expected. Consequently, there is little reason to suspect that additional meetings would have resulted in substantially different findings.

Along with extending the time frame for this study, a second design modification was also made in November 2004. Specifically, data sources were expanded to include interviews with student services personnel representing twelve other CAP elementary schools, the district's CAP supervisor, and the three district CAP facilitators. The perspectives of these professionals were gathered to explore whether Pleasant Valley's CAP implementation experience during the 2003-2004 school year was unique. Here also, the design modification proved to be an asset, not a limitation because the additional data illuminated some of the similarities and differences between the other schools' experiences with the CAP and those at Pleasant Valley. These findings then helped refine the developing themes related to the complex interactions among the district, the principal, and teachers.

Interview Data

To address a frequently noted limitation in previous prereferral problem solving research, each of the second grade CAP team's meetings were observed and recorded. This allowed participants' dialogue to be analyzed and the implementation procedures to be directly reviewed. Interviews were the other primary research strategy used with this study. However, unlike direct observations, interviews did not provide verifiable descriptions of implementation procedures or outcomes.

Specifically, interview data could have been affected by error if an interviewee did not accurately recall their experiences with CAP implementation during the prior year. There was also a risk that biased information was offered since interviewees recollections are potentially influenced by personal opinions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). At Pleasant Valley, the school professionals passionately contrasted CAP implementation

during 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, thus there was the potential that teachers or other school professionals (intentionally, or unintentionally) overstated or exaggerated descriptions.

However, using the recommendations made by Isaac and Michael (1997) and Pugach (2001) these risks were mitigated as much as possible. Specifically, data sources were triangulated and multiple perspectives were continually sought to verify the information offered during each interview. For example, when teachers described their implementation of certain interventions as a result of CAP during the 2002-2003 school year, that information was verified by reviewing the corresponding CAP documentation and talking with other staff members who were aware of the referral and the intervention plan. In the few instances where unconfirmed data were presented, it was specifically noted to be an opinion, not a proven fact. Additionally, Wolcott's (1990) suggestion to "talk little" was heeded during the structured interviews and other interactions at the school to reduce the researcher's potential influence on the data.

The interview data from the student services personnel representing the other twelve CAP schools had additional limitations. Specifically, the interviewees were all members of their respective building level CAP teams, but they did not always participate with all of the grade level CAP teams. Thus, their descriptions were not necessarily based on a comprehensive understanding of the CAP experiences at their school. Similarly, interview data from the district's CAP facilitators and supervisor were primarily based on generalizations from multiple sites, rather than intimate implementation experiences in specific schools.

Finally, the student services personnel and the district CAP personnel unanimously endorsed the CAP, so their descriptions can not be assumed to be totally neutral or objective. Instead, there was the potential that interviewees' recollections were overly positive or optimistic, rather than reflective of the full spectrum of implementation experiences. Although this limitation can never be eradicated, it was addressed in this study by having interviewees provide specific, detailed examples to illustrate the points or themes they espoused. Additionally, although the descriptions provided about each of the other CAP schools (and those offered by Mr. Kennedy) highlighted the benefits of the CAP, they were also infused with uncensored descriptions about genuine disappointment and frustration associated with implementation. This range suggested that their responses were not disproportionately positive.

Given those limitations, the descriptions offered about the other CAP schools are intended to provide an initial understanding about whether Pleasant Valley's experience was unique. They are not meant to offer a generalized, nor comprehensive, conclusion about all CAP schools. Similarly, as described in Chapter Three, this study illuminated Pleasant Valley's experiences with the CAP and allowed for specific recommendations to be developed. However, future research to support and extend the findings is needed. The recommendations for implementation and research are described next.

Recommendations

Prereferral Problem Solving Implementation

The perspectives of general education teachers, special education teachers, psychologists, building administrators, district administrators, and other school professionals representing a total of 13 schools informed the findings of this study.

Perhaps one of the most salient discoveries was that, even when describing their frustrations with implementation, these school professionals unanimously endorsed the use of prereferral problem solving because of the potential benefits participation has for teachers and students. The challenge, then, is to translate this philosophical endorsement into successful implementation within the realities and constraints of educational environments. Based on a synthesis of the data from this study and previous research findings, the following recommendations are offered to facilitate and sustain successful implementation in the future.

1.) School district administrators need to thoroughly understand and prioritize implementation of prereferral problem solving programs. District policies should consistently support implementation with adequate resources and school-based flexibility. This includes providing release time or substitute coverage to allow problem solving teams to meet during the instructional day. It also includes providing adequate personnel to ensure appropriate early intervention support can be offered to identified students.

2.) School district policy should reflect the understanding that, if successful, prereferral problem solving will reduce the number of students classified as eligible to receive special education services. However, successful implementation does not reduce the need for special education teachers to provide academic and behavioral support to students who are experiencing difficulty meeting classroom expectations. Thus, special education staffing formulas need to allow schools to maintain positions, so early intervention support recommended by problem solving teams can be provided.

3.) School district policies should cohesively support the implementation of prereferral problem solving. This includes ensuring the curriculum is flexible enough to accommodate students' differential developmental and learning rates. It also includes ensuring that mandated assessments yield reliable and valid data which are relevant during the prereferral problem solving process.

4.) School districts should provide effective facilitators who collaborate with the building administrator and other school professionals to promote the use of prereferral problem solving at individual schools. Facilitators should actively and enthusiastically support implementation, guided by their knowledge of each school's unique culture and needs.

5.) Building administrators should understand and enthusiastically support the goals and procedures of prereferral problem solving. They should ensure all school professionals collaboratively participate and share ownership in the process. With the district facilitator, they should determine staff professional development needs, provide appropriate training, and provide positive feedback as teachers adhere to expected procedures.

6.) Building administrators should creatively allocate resources within each school to support implementation, recognizing the multiple demands on teachers' time. This means providing ample time for school professionals to consistently participate in problem solving meetings and ensuring that appropriate intervention options are available at the school. It also means ensuring that there is procedural coordination at the school level, and at each grade level.

7.) Collaboratively, general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals should be dedicated to implementing a prereferral problem solving process. Even when additional resources are not provided by the school district, the school professionals should work with the building administrator to creatively ensure that problem solving teams meet on a consistent basis and that appropriate early intervention support is provided to students.

8.) Collaboratively, general education teachers, special education teachers, and other school professionals should understand, endorse, and prioritize participation in a prereferral problem solving process. This includes ensuring that referred students' strengths and needs are comprehensively understood and documented, implementing interventions with integrity in the least restrictive environment, monitoring students' progress with multiple sources of data, and persistently following-up until the referral concerns are successfully addressed. If teachers or other school professionals do not possess the knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation, they should take advantage of opportunities for professional development.

Pleasant Valley Elementary School's experiences with the CAP during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years revealed how the district, the building administrator, and school professionals all contributed to successful implementation of prereferral problem solving. The data allowed specific recommendations for implementation to be developed. However, this study captured the implementation experience at primarily one school; important questions related to the complexities involved with prereferral problem solving still remain.

Prereferral Problem Solving Research

1.) How is a successful prereferral problem solving process implemented? The original goal of this study was to directly document the implementation of prereferral problem solving by an exemplary team, at an exemplary school. This goal remains elusive, and should continue to guide future investigations employing qualitative methodology.

2.) How does a successful prereferral problem solving process influence teacher behavior, student experiences, and student outcomes? Preliminary answers to these questions were offered through interview data that referenced successful CAP implementation at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. However, additional research is needed to support the conclusion that implementation has significant benefits for teachers and students.

3.) How do other schools implement prereferral problem solving programs? Descriptions from the twelve other CAP schools suggested some similarities and some differences between the implementation procedures at these schools and at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. Additional research is needed to understand how prereferral problem solving procedures have been effectively modified to meet schools' unique needs and under what conditions high levels of implementation integrity have been sustained. Additional research is also needed to further delineate the differential influence that the district, the principal, and school professionals exert on implementation.

4.) What role should parents have with prereferral problem solving programs? At Pleasant Valley Elementary School, parents of second grade students were invited to

participate with the CAP team only after a screening for special education eligibility was recommended. Additional research is needed to investigate parents' perceptions of prereferral problem solving, their potential influence on intervention integrity and outcomes, and effective ways to facilitate parental participation throughout the prereferral process.

Appendix A: CAP Forms

COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS (CAP)

REFERRAL, PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION, AND STUDENT PROFILE FORM

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION				
Student Name:	DOB:	Age:	Race:	Date:
School:	ID #:	Grade:	Form Completed by:	
Teacher:	Teacher:		Teacher:	
Teacher:	Teacher:		Teacher:	
Parent/Guardian:	Home Phone:		Work Phone:	

CRITICAL QUESTIONS	PURPOSE
1) Why are you referring this student?	Describe the problem(s), how often, where & when it/they occur.
2) What are the student's strengths/interests?	Identify relevant student strengths, academic or otherwise.
3) What relevant information is available regarding educational history, test scores, instructional levels from the student's files?	Detail by grade, schools the student has attended, relevant report card grades earned, & teacher comments.

r/Grade	School	Relevant Report Card Grades/Comments

Relevant test results (IRI, CTBS, GT, CRT, ECAP etc.) Attach any special education/504 assessments.	Date

Current Instructional Levels:	Reading Decoding:		Math Calculation:		Spelling:	
1 = Above Grade, 2 = On Grade	Reading Comprehension:		Math Problem Solving:		Oral Expression:	
3 = Below Grade, 0 = Very Low	Listening Comprehension:		Written Language:		General Knowledge:	

What critical skills needed for the current grade/course curriculum does this student not yet demonstrate?

Other relevant school issues (discipline referrals, retentions, suspensions, excessive absences, other data from record)

e/Grade	Issue/Problem	Reason/Explanation

4) What is the student's health history? (Obtain information from the health room staff and family.)	Health issues can affect academic progress. List diagnoses, prescription medicines, hearing/ vision results, and excessive health room visits, etc.
Health issues	Include relevant medical diagnoses such as asthma, allergies, ADD, diabetes, etc. and when diagnosed
Medications	Include the name of the medicine, its purpose, dosage, when it is prescribed and administered.

School Health Screening Results	Vision	Date:	Pass	Fail	Glasses/ Contacts	Yes	No
	Hearing	Date:	Pass	Fail	Hearing Aids	Yes	No
Frequent Health Room Visits	Describe the reason for the visits, the frequency, and dates.						

5) What concerns/feedback does the family have about their child's school performance and referral problems	Information provided by the student's family is very important. They often share the same academic and behavior concerns as the teacher.

Relevant communications with the student's parents (Include information from pertinent notes, calls, emails, and/or meetings):

What is the primary language spoken at home?		Other language spoken:	

Relevant Family Issues (separation, divorce, custody issues, deaths, trauma, hardships, family changes, sibling issues):

Level of family support for homework and discipline:

6) What documented interventions have occurred already? (Consult specialists, cumulative and confidential folders)	Gathering information about past interventions will help build on successes and avoid repeating ineffective interventions.

Program/Service	Grade(s	Targeted area(s) or goals of service	Effectiveness
Title I			
Reading Recovery			
Tutoring/ Mentoring			
Enrichment (GT and other)			
School Counseling			
Out of School Counseling			
ESOL			
504 Plan (attach)			
Special Education (attach IEP)			
Other:			

7) What other strategies have been tried? (contracts, incentives, informal accommodations, special groupings/ instruction, etc.)

Date	Strategy	Effectiveness

8) What other information may help explain the problem(s)?	Include information from observations, portfolio, records, etc.

Submit CAP Referral with relevant work samples and plans (IEP, 504, contracts etc.) to CAP Chairperson**

COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS (CAP)

STUDENT PROBLEM ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION

Student Name:		DOB:	Age:	Date:
School:	ID #:	Grade:	Form Completed by:	
Referring Teacher(s) Names:				
Other CAP Team Members:				

1) Discuss and prioritize the student problems listed on the *"Student Referral and Problem Identification Profile"* form based on instructional impact. Define, at most, three academic and/or behavior problems in measurable terms. Describe context, location, and frequency.
2) Describe the desired behavior or academic performance level that could correct the problems. Make it measurable.
3) Review the *"Factors that Influence Behavior and Learning"* chart to carefully analyze instructional/curricular, teacher/teaching, student, school environment, and home/community factors that may be reasons for the academic or behavior problem.
   a. Consider whether the problem is a skill deficit (student can't do it) or a performance deficit (student won't do it).
   b. Closely examine triggers and consequences of academic/behavior problems as factors that could be the reason(s) for the problem.
4) Note current evidence (e.g., record review, behavior counts, interviews, test data, error analysis) that confirms factors as reasons for the problem.
5) Determine what other evidence, if any, (see #8 on next page) may be needed to confirm the reason(s) for the problem.

1) Identified Academic or Behavior Problem	2) Measurable Desired Behavior or Academic Performance Level	3) Factor(s) that could be the reason(s) for the problem	4) Evidence confirming factor(s) as reason(s)	5) Other evidence needed to confirm reason(s)

6) CAP T[illegible] discussion notes that help confirm the primary reason(s) for [illegible] problem(s).

7) For problems caused by reasons that have been confirmed with current evidence, the CAP team can begin to develop strategies targeting those reason using the *CAP Student Intervention Plan* form (see # 9 below).

8) For problems caused by reasons that cannot be clearly confirmed with current evidence, record below the methods to gather needed evidence. When the reason(s) are confirmed, the CAP team can develop strategies to address the problem using the *CAP Student Intervention Plan* form.

METHOD(S)	√	PURPOSE/TYPE	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	DUE BY
a) Student conference/interview				
b) Parent conference/interview				
c) Academic				
1. Portfolio of work samples				
2. Error analysis				
3.Curriculum-based assessment				
4. Skill Inventories (e.g. IRI)				
5. Other:				
d) Behavioral				
1. Observation				
a. Frequency count				
b. Narrative				
c. Time /event sampling				
2. Rating scale(s)				
3. A-B-C charts				
4. Other:				
e) Specialist Consultation				
f) Other:				

9) Develop *CAP Student Intervention Plan* now or schedule future meeting to develop it once all reason(s) for the problem(s) have been confirmed.

CAP Student Intervention Plan due date:		CAP Intervention Planning Participants to be invited to next meeting		

CAP Case Manager Signature: _____ _____Date: _____

COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS (CAP)

STUDENT INTERVENTION PLAN EVALUATION

Student	ID#	DOB	Age	Date
School	Grade	CAP Case Manager		

Other CAP team members present:

CAP TEAM REVIEW: Review evidence of ***CAP Student Intervention Plan*** effectiveness after 4-8 weeks according to listed Criteria for Success. In the Review Date/Code column, note interventions that resulted in Success (S), Improvement (I) or No Progress (N). Decide if interventions should Continue (C) or Discontinue (D) and evaluate the plan as a whole according to the criteria below:

CAP Student Intervention Plan resulting in **success or significant improvement** but minor changes may be needed:

Explain:

CAP Student Intervention Plan resulting in **improvement in some areas** but significant changes may be needed:

Explain:

CAP Student Intervention Plan resulting in **little or no progress** because interventions:

Did not match the true reasons for the problem(s). Explain:

Are not being implemented consistently and/or as planned. Explain:

Did not contain appropriate or effective incentives and/or consequences. Explain:

Are not strong or comprehensive enough to address problem severity. Explain:

NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

ACTION STEPS (check all that apply):

___ 1)	Continue *CAP Student Intervention Plan*. Note minor changes on current form. Plan to fade interventions and/or generalize behaviors when appropriate. Evaluate plan again by:
___ 2)	Significantly revise *CAP Student Intervention Plan* on new form. Evaluate plan again by:
___ 3)	Refer for further problem analysis and/or intervention planning by building-level CAP Team. Invite the following persons who may have additional expertise or resources:
___ 4)	Only refer to the IEP or 504 Team if an educational disability is suspected **and** the problems are consistently resistant to targeted general education interventions that are implemented as designed.

CAP Team Chairperson Signature:	**Date:**

COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROCESS (CAP) STUDENT INTERVENTION PLAN

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION					
Student Name:	DOB:	Age:	Initial Plan:	Revised Plan:	Date:
School:	ID #:	Grade:	Teacher:		
Problem 1:	Reason(s):				
Problem 2:	Reason(s):				
Problem 3:	Reason(s):				
Parent/Guardian:	Home Phone:		Work Phone:		

Desired Behavior or Academic Performance	Intervention (s) & Frequency of Intervention	Person Responsible	Criteria for Success	Review Date/Code

Case Manager Signature: Position:		CAP Student Plan Evaluation Meeting Scheduled for:	
CAP Team Members (list):			

Review Codes: S = Success I = Improving N= No Progress D= Discontinue Intervention C= Continue Intervention

Appendix B: Summary of Data Sources

5 initial interviews with second grade CAP team members:

Kay Baden
Jacqueline Shoemaker
Gail Sullivan
Susan Pollock
Derrick White

7 interviews with other school professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School:

Donna McHenry
Kristen Little
Beth Kane
Sandra Ziegler
Patricia Kelly
Melanie Nichols
Colleen Baldwin

3 follow-up interviews with second grade CAP team members:

Kay Baden
Jacqueline Shoemaker
Gail Sullivan

6 interviews with school professionals at other CAP schools:

Sarah Karz
Carla Dillon
Jasmine D'Amico
Rochelle Gost
Marla Post
Sally Palmer

2 sets of written responses to interview questions from professionals at other CAP schools:

Cammile Cove
Dominique Doe

1 interview with District CAP Coordinator:

Mark Kennedy

3 sets of written responses to interview questions from district CAP personnel:

Brian Tetlow
Billy Miller
Maureen Smith

3 CAP Meeting Observations and Recordings:

Meeting #1
Meeting #2

Meeting #3

17 educational histories / CAP meeting summaries compiled
Permanent products and artifacts collected between May 2003 and July 2004
Field notes and contact sheets between May 2003 and July 2004

Appendix C1: Interview Protocol:
Initial Interview with Second Grade CAP Team Member

1.) You indicated on the demographics sheet that you have had some previous experience with the Collaborative Action Process. Can you please describe your experiences?

Probe for information related to: student characteristics, meeting process / dynamics, intervention plans, data collection, student outcomes

2.) Based on your experiences, what do you see as the benefits / strengths of the CAP?

3.) Based on your experiences, are there aspects of the CAP that you think should be modified / improved? How would you make those improvements?

4.) Do you think participating in the CAP has effected what you do in your classroom? How?

Probe for information related to: instructional modifications, behavioral modifications

5.) Do you think participating in the CAP has influenced how you interact or collaborate with other professionals in the building?

Probe for information related to: teachers, other professionals, principal

6.) Can you talk about any training you received related to the CAP?

Probe for information related to: training perceived as effective, areas of need

7.) What are your expectations for the CAP this year?

Probe for information related to: process, students of concern, expected outcomes

Appendix C2: Interview Protocol:
Follow-Up Interview with Second Grade CAP Team Member

1.) How would you describe your experiences with the CAP this year?

Probe for information related to: perceived benefits / challenges, impact on teacher behavior in the classroom, perceived efficacy

2.) Please describe how you saw the CAP impacting students this year?

3.) Do you think the CAP should continue to be used next year? If so, how would you like to see it implemented.

Probe for information related to: roles among staff members, prin support, district policies, actual procedures

4.) Are there any final thoughts or suggestions you would offer to help me better understand your experiences and perception related to the CAP at Pleasant Valley?

Appendix C3: Interview Protocol:
Interview with School Professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School

1.) If someone were to ask you, "What is CAP?" how would you describe the process?
2.) Can you please describe your past experiences with the CAP?

Probe for information related to: their understanding of the goals / purpose, their role in the process, student characteristics, student outcomes

3.) Based on your experiences, what do you see as the benefits / strengths of the CAP?
4.) Based on your experiences, are there aspects of the CAP that you think should be modified / improved? How would you make those improvements?
5.) Do you think participating in the CAP has influenced how you interact or collaborate with other professionals in the building?

Probe for information related to: teachers, other professionals, principal

6.) Can you talk about the role and influence you think the principal has on the process? How about district level administrators, district/state/national policies?
7.) Can you talk about any training you received related to the CAP?

Probe for information related to: training perceived as effective, areas of need

8.) How would you describe your role with the CAP this year?
9.) What are your expectations for the process this year?

Probe for information related to: process, students of concern, expected outcomes

Appendix C4: Interview Protocol:
Interview with School Professionals at Other CAP Elementary Schools

1.) If someone were to ask you, "What is CAP?" how would you describe the process?
2.) Can you please describe how the CAP is implemented at your school?

Probe for information related to: their role, meeting process, student characteristics, roles of teachers and other professionals, intervention plans, data collection, student outcomes

3.) Can you please describe how teachers and others perceive participation in the CAP at your school?
4.) Based on your experiences, what do you see as the benefits / strengths of the CAP?
5.) Based on your experiences, are there aspects of the CAP that you think should be modified / improved? How would you make those improvements?
6.) Do you think the professionals at your school have the skills to successfully participate in the CAP?

Probe for information related to: group dynamics, problem solving steps, data collection

7.) Do you think implementation of the CAP has influenced how the professionals at your school collaborate with each other?

Probe for information related to: teachers, other professionals, principal

8.) Can you talk about the role and influence you think the principal has on the CAP at your school? How about the district level administrators, district/state/national policies?
9.) Can you talk about any training you and / or the professionals at your school have received related to the CAP?

Probe for information related to: training perceived as effective, areas of need

10.) What are your expectations for the process this year?

Probe for information related to: process, students of concern, expected outcomes

Appendix C5: Interview Protocol:
Interview with District CAP Personnel

1.) If someone were to ask you, “What is CAP?”, how would you describe the process?
2.) Based on your experiences, what do you see as the benefits / strengths of the CAP?
3.) Based on your experiences, are there aspects of the CAP that you think should be modified / improved? How would you make those improvements?
4.) What is the current status of the CAP in the county?

Probe for information related to: how CAP fits in with the districts other initiatives, the level of support for the CAP from district administrators

5.) Can you describe how you see the status of the CAP at Pleasant Valley Elementary?

Probe for information related to: strengths, positive outcomes at the school, areas in need of change, impact of the staffing cuts and loss of substitute money, current level of support from the district

6.) What factors do you believe are required for the CAP to be effective?
7.) Can you describe how you see the CAP next year, in three years, in five years?

Appendix D: Sample Interview Transcript
(From interview with Mark Kennedy)

TS: Can you talk about what role you see teachers having in CAP? What role do others play?

MK: Well, the teachers are our interventionists. Largely our support staff are about 90% of the time are consultants with the teachers, they aren't directly involved with the kids. And the teacher has to feel comfortable that whatever changes we're asking them to provide in the classroom, they can do it within the structure of their day. So, they will be the ones counting behavior if we ask them to do that. They'll be the ones reinforcing students, if it's a behavioral issue. They'll be the ones changing the instructional approach, if the approach needs to be different. They need to help us decide what's the best approach in reading because a whole class of kids could mean 25 different reading programs and that makes for a challenge for the teacher. Now our role, the support people, is to see if the teacher has the skills and to help teach them; almost like we go back to coach, model, apply. We coach them through what we expect, give them opportunities to practice it under controlled situations, and then by giving away what we know to the teacher who needs to know what we know, they now have that in their repertoire so the next kid who comes along with the same problem. . .

TS: They can generalize?

MK: And they don't have to rush to us. They can generalize the skill and use it forever. They become trainers of other teachers. It's a kind of domino. The more we teach them, the more it's out there.

TS: And do you see that working?

MK: Um, yes. Is it working everywhere? No. There are two things that impact why. The one is, is the organizational infrastructure available at the school to make that happen? Do they set themselves up to have important and courageous conversations about kids and dialogue so they feel comfortable talking to other teachers about "I don't know how to do that. Can you help me? Once you help me, will I be able to perform?" So that's an infrastructure issue and that's where the principal comes in. They have to set their school up to do that. And the second thing is a kind of motivational piece. "If I've always done something really well and it's worked for the majority of my kids, then why should I change?" That's one motivational piece. And the other is that, "You're asking me to do so much with No Child Left Behind and a new curriculum, changes are happening all over the place. Why should I do what you're asking me to do?" So it's another thing. So, how do we motivate them to make these changes? Most teachers have a high ethic related to teaching, so it's not that hard to do, once you get past those two things that are the organizational and motivational road blocks or challenges. Then we see teachers who are much more willing. One of the outcomes that we want to be able to collect data on is whether teachers are good problem solvers themselves, and don't rely on the specialists so much. And we are seeing the data to support that.

Appendix E: Sample Meeting Transcript

(From second grade CAP meeting on 1/6/04)

G: The next one is Thomas.

K: Oops, there goes my phone. *(takes call for six minutes)*

G: Okay. For Carrie, I've just recommended her for the skills group, also.

K: Well, she already has a CAP form, so do you want to read it to me so I can continue to be the note taker, please?

G: This is 2/25. I don't know, is that last year? Here's 1/21…

K: So first grade, and there was…

G: Tardiness. Is it still?

K: It's gotten better, it was a lot better when school first started, but…

J: How late is she coming in?

K: It's not even that late. It's like five of 9. But, she's already missed hanging up her coat, and the directions for morning work. And all the kids are already in their seat. Some days, she misses lunch count. But it's always starting off on the wrong foot. And Melanie is working with her, Ms Nichols, and we even offered a bribe. She has a videotape of a cheerleading assembly she wanted to show the other kids and they were going to do lunch with Melanie. She had to do a three day week, or two day week. She had to be on time, and she couldn't do it. She made it maybe three days out of the five, she couldn't do it. They belong at Melody Elementary, but her mom brought her older sister here because her sister's kids were here, Olivia, Cheyenne, and Derrick all started kindergarten here. The three sisters and the three cousins. And then when it came time for Carrie to go to school, her mom wanted her to be here also because at that time her

sister and her mother were watching her here in town. Well, now they have moved away, and I don't know where her mother lives.

G: She lives right here in town.

K: She lives right here in town? They live out near…

G: Is it near Falling Waters?

K: Anyway, it's an argument about getting dressed and what we're wearing. Colleen says it's her sister's fault…

G: Oh, she's down on Smith Road.

K: The girls say it's their mom's fault. Nobody takes responsibility, and they're late. So that's been going on since Kindergarten. I mentioned to her mom, when we had our parent conferences, that maybe she has an attentional concern. Maybe she has the silent kind. You know, the kid that sits there and you think they're paying attention, and they're very quiet, but they're missing directions. They're getting maybe the beginning and the end, but they're missing all of the middle. Because when I worked one on one with her she could do a lot better than what she shows in a group setting.

J: What is her reading level?

G: She's a nine.

J: And what did she start the year at?

G: Four. Well, four or five.

K: What about her spelling?

G: Not real good. Oh my, it's like when we had the 'A' words when everything was the same, she had most of her words correct. But, I mean mix them up…

Appendix F: Sample Meeting Probe

Name: ***Jackie***
Date: ***1/15/04***

What are your thoughts about how well this CAP meeting went?
The meeting was well-paced.
It went very quickly- to the point.
Questions were asked that would help gain information on the students.
Ideas / strategies were shared
- Cooperative / positive feelings
- Comfort level- not stressful

Did you feel this CAP meeting was an effective use of your time? (Why or why not?)
Yes- All of the students discussed are in need of constant follow up.
The input from Derrick and Kristen was very helpful. –It was great for all of us to have the opportunity to meet.

How do you feel about the outcomes / strategies / follow-up recommended as a result of this meeting?
Most of the recommendations were beneficial. It's just frustrating that more can't be done- more one-on-one, more parent support in some cases. Also, scheduling follow up meetings can be difficult- - not enough dates available. Too much time passes and the school year goes so quickly.

THANKS AGAIN for your time!!!!

Appendix G: Sample Student Educational History

Name:	Alisa			Homeroom Teacher:	Sullivan
DOB:	8/17/96	Ethnicity:	White	Prior CAP?	No
Attendance	(also attended Head Start) K: 8 Absent; 0 Tardy 1: 6 Absent; 0 Tardy 2: 2 Absent; 4 Tardy			Special Ed?	Yes (coded in first grade). Direct service with B. Kane 1hr/wk; Goals: using clear speech in school setting & artic. No instructional or testing accommodations

Academic Summary

K	Report Card: Semester 2 Mostly P's; I's for Monitors own behavior, manages classroom materials appropriately, follows class routines and rules, uses strategies to solve problems, works and solves problems with others, matches spoken word to written word, Art, PE Comments: Cooperative, outgoing, alert learner, eager to share and willingly participates in classroom discussions Reading level 2 6/02 Noted on Early Screening Form- has been referred to EMT for Speech
1	Year Average: Academic All S's; N's for Follows oral / written directions, stays on task, shows consideration for others, exercises self-control, meets school standards for behavior BGL for Reading; BGL for Math Comments: Always has smile, popular personality, able to grasp math after repeated practice but has difficulty with application in problem solving, enjoys writing- but struggles with letter formation/cap/punct and spelling HF words. "has a great deal of academic potential and I feel that she would perform better in all of her academics if some of her classroom behaviors improved... has a difficult time working quietly at her desk and a hard time paying attention during instruction. She often distracts those around her". Difficulty with decoding, retaining site word vocab and using reading strategies. Difficult time attending to her work. 6/03- "As we've discussed, I am very concerned with Alisa's lack of control…behavior has severely declined since the last marking period", has show good progress this marking period with reading Coded 04 for Speech / Language in April Reading Progress Report: Q1=; Q2=; Q3=7; Q4=beg 12
2	Report Card Quarter 1: All S/O's, except N for reading, word rec, math concepts, computation, application / problem solving; All S/O's for WSS except N for stays on task, works neatly OGL for Reading: BGL for Math Report Card Quarter 2 and 3: All S/O's except N for reading, word rec, math, concepts, application / problem solving; All S/O's for WSS BGL for Reading: BGL for Math Report Card Quarter 4: All S/O's except: Math concepts, application / problem solving; All S/O's for WSS Reading Level Summary: Artic: 12 1: 12 2: 14 3: B2.1 4: B2.2 CTBS: Reading = 40%, Language = 43%; Math = 60%; Language Mech = 27%; Math Comp = 90%

Meeting Date:	1/6/04	Referring Teacher:	Shoemaker
Referral Concern:	Attention, but "if there's a priority list, she would not be as bad as some of the others"		
Summary of CAP Discussion:	Shoemaker says she's "capable of doing good work and doing a good job, but doesn't always stay on task"- and that she's explained this to her parents *MEETING NOTES: "Level 16 for reading, very chatty, frequently off task"*		
Recommended Strategies from Meeting:	Comments on report card to let parents know about attentional concerns *MEETING NOTES: " None at present"*		
Targeted Outcome:	none discussed		
Monitoring Plan:	none discussed		
Follow Up Date:	*none discussed* *MEETING NOTES: " One month"*		
Intervention Integrity:	Did not implement strategy (no comments were written on report card)		

Meeting Date:	1/15/04	Referring Teacher:	Shoemaker
Summary of CAP Discussion:	Reviewed notes from 1/6 meeting- re-affirmed she was "very chatty." Currently reading at Level 16- which is below grade level. 'Off-task-ness" is greatest concern. Ms. Sullivan talked about her "here I am" attitude in the beginning of year, but seemed better at this point in her class. Ms. Baden said, "She's had problems like this ever since she was born" because of young mom who didn't set boundaries or parameters. Ms. McHenry said then they need to set some. Asked teachers if they thought she'd be a good candidate for a contract? Decided to involve her in charting and monitoring reading progress; teachers agreed and seemed to support idea. (No notes were taken during this meeting)		
Recommended Strategies from Meeting:	Ms. Shoemaker to work collaboratively with Ms. Nichols to make a self-monitoring chart of reading progress. First, need to determine current reading level so know where to start. Ideas to use a 'rocket', stickers, or a thermometer were mentioned by other teachers.		
Targeted Outcome:	Reading 'progress' ? No specific goal set.		
Monitoring Plan:	chart?		
Follow Up Date:	none noted		
Intervention Integrity:	Ms. Shoemaker did not speak with Ms. Nichols. Chart was not developed.		

Meeting Date:	3/1/04	Referring Teacher:	Shoemaker
Summary of CAP Discussion:	Ms. Baden reviewed notes from 1/6; said she was "talkative, frequently off task, a 16, someone to watch" Ms. Shoemaker said she didn't make chart. Ms. Sullivan said that she's worried about her emotional state because the other day she said "my dad might adopt me" and she has been practicing writing her dad's last name instead of hers *MEETING NOTES: "B2.1 level- being pushed/challenged- may give a contract to look at own progress. Math regrouping OK"*		
Recommended Strategies from Meeting:	None specifically discussed- Ms. Shoemaker indicated she could still make a contract if she decided she needed to. *MEETING NOTES: "Continue to monitor progress"*		
Targeted Outcome:	Reading 'progress'?		
Monitoring Plan:	none discussed		
Follow Up Date:	none discussed *MEETING NOTES: "4/15/04"*		
Intervention Integrity:	no intervention to be implemented		

Appendix H: Sample Contact Summary Sheet

Name: ***Donna McHenry*** **Date:** ***11/12/03(3:25-5:35 p.m.)***
Location: ***Her office***

Purpose / Context: Interview
Summary of main themes / information learned / information not learned:
Gave history of process and implementation. Appears driven much by her own belief in goals of EI and connection to inclusion. She stressed how she feels very unsupported by the district (in general) and by specific 'higher-up' administrators. Feels that much of what she did (stressed how difficult it was to convince staff to begin with) has now been undermined. Re-iterated that she's committed to 'publicly maintain' CAP as much as she can for this year... but admitted doesn't know if the diluted version is worth the effort, or maybe she should go back to EMT. Identified cuts in sub time and staffing as both having an impact: Would need both to have it work. Seems to genuinely believe that she is doing all she can, given the circumstances.
Any important / illuminating / surprising information?
Staff bought into inclusion and CAP with much hesitation and "coercion." She doesn't seem to regret or be reconsidering the decision to remove grade level coaches, and genuinely believes that they were be relied on to heavily and teachers won't become independent if they don't have to. She implied that she thinks most have the skills, but it's easier to let someone else do it, and for those that may not have skills, this is a good way to make them learn. Specifically identified two things she feels are needed for CAP to be successful at the school: 1) a building coordinator that handles the scheduling and process-related things (didn't refer to D White as such, even thought Kennedy and Miller say he is) 2) a CAP 'interventionist' who could support teachers and do much of the EI support / groups etc (didn't feel it was realistic for sped teachers to do this b/c of their existing case loads). Indicated 2nd grade teachers are very overwhelmed this year, so even though they are committed to ideas of process, having trouble making it come together (no mention of loss of coach impacting this). Specifically said NCLB and district's grade level standards are contradictory to ideas of CAP.
Any remaining questions for this person?
How does she see her role this year- will she be involved in the grade level meetings (if they ever take place)? Are there other changes she thinks she'll make this year?
Any new questions for this person?
Does she ever talk with principals at other schools about how they implement CAP? Will there be accountability for teachers who don't use CAP like she has said she expects?

Appendix I: Sample Field Notes

Field Notes (11/12/03) DM=McHenry CB= Baldwin

Context: *DM met with CB to share new flow chart (9:30-10:25 am in DM's office). It was an impromptu meeting where they started a conversation about something else, and it became a discussion about CAP.*

(When asked if I could stay and listed to what was being recommended, neither minded, and throughout discussion, they didn't pay any attention to me in back of room)

Description / Reflections:

CB very concerned that the lack of CAP forms will dilute the problem solving and teachers won't generate hypotheses related to interventions… said they'll "jump to intervention and then play intervention roulette" again ... also very concerned that cases will be coming to the building level CAP too quickly with out the initial problem solving or the pre-referral interventions…. also concerned about the impact of removing coaches because now there will be less intervention integrity and monitoring. She doesn't think teachers will collect baseline data, set goals or and monitor the way they would with outside person on the team.

DM sees the district's academic expectations of all children making rapid progress and being on grade level meaning there isn't time to do multiple grade level CAP meetings. "We need to get these kids up here so we can figure out what to do." She emphasized this point by pointing to the charts of progress now required to be hanging on the wall. Implied in this seemed to be that the grade level teams are effective enough to successfully address the issues?

They extensively debated the issue about early intervention and coding relating to the loss of staffing. CM clearly said that she expects to code a lot more kids than they did the last year to get the position reinstated. Neither seemed to philosophically believe it was right. Showed two different reactions to the 'now what?' question... DM clearly angry and not seeming creative; CB much more concerned about how to salvage the best parts of the process from year before.

DM said she absolutely agrees with what we 'should' do, philosophically, "But I can't do that right now." She was very protective of the teachers' time, said she would never (repeated at least twice) make them give up their planning time for CAP. Said thought it was against the union contract "I can't ask them to do that." CB said that can't be true because other schools are doing it. DM ended discussion by saying, "Okay, let me say it differently. I won't ask them to do that."

Power of the principal was clear. She set out to inform, not discuss how she wanted thing to be this year. Did not appear to be willing or desiring to dialogue, brainstorm, think outside box etc. about ways to creatively make CAP work. Clearly bitter over cuts of money and staff. DM and CB started off with calm demeanor- but both also looked tired (DM normally has lots of jewelry on and 'elegant' clothes- very different look today. Only earings and plain shirt/pants). By end of conversation, both were angry and raising voices. (I've never had seen that before at the school). CB thinks DM has given up and now kids will be the victims. DM doesn't think CB understands that implementing CAP is impossible without staff and sub time.

According to staff news letter that was hanging on DM's bulletin board, grade level CAP meetings were supposed to be held on 9/22 and 10/27. After CB left, I asked if the teams had actually met, and she said "some did"- but clearly didn't want to talk

about it. Checked with team leaders at all grade levels throughout the rest of the day, and no team met. Will FU when DM seems less stressed.

Appendix J: Initial Data Themes

Code	Theme
CAP Proc	Understanding / interpretation of the CAP process and / or goals at PVES
Benefits	Benefits of participation in the CAP at PVES for teachers and / or students
P/P	Influence of people and / or personality factors on the implementation of CAP at PVES
Roles	Roles of various school professionals at PVES in the CAP
Prin	Influence of, and / or perceptions about the role of the principal with the CAP at PVES
Dist	Influence of, and / or perceptions about the role that district policies, people, initiatives have with the CAP at PVES
Laws	Influence of, and / or perceptions about the role that state or national laws have with the CAP at PVES
Needed	Things identified as being related to the success of the CAP at PVES
Barriers	Things identified as being barriers to the success of the CAP at PVES
Skills-Have	Skills that teachers and other school professionals have that promote participation / outcomes of the CAP at PVES
Skills-Need	Skills that teachers and other school professionals need to promote participation / outcomes of the CAP at PVES
“Buy-In”	Reasons that teachers and other school professionals “buy-in” to the CAP at PVES
Data	Role and use of student data in the CAP at PVES
POC	References to implementation of the CAP involving a “process of change” at PVES
Dedication	Evidence of school professionals’ dedication to their students at PVES
Inclusion	Relationship between inclusion and the CAP at PVES
Training	Impact of training on participation / implementation of the CAP at PVES
Parents	Role / impact of parents with the CAP at PVES
Logistics	Information about process and procedures used by grade level CAP teams at PVES

Appendix K: Final Data Codes

'02/03' and '03/04' notation was added to any of the following codes when information specifically described experiences / perceptions of that year

'Other' notation was added to any of the following codes when information specifically described the experiences / perceptions at schools other than Pleasant Valley ES

Code	Description
P/G	Understanding/description of purpose and/or goals of the CAP
Proc	Description of the CAP implementation process
Des OC	Desired outcomes from participation in the CAP
Act OC	Actual outcomes from participation in the CAP
CAP doesn't…	Limitations of the CAP
SpEd	Relationship between the CAP and special education referrals and /or services
EMT	Similarities and/or differences between the CAP and the EMT process
Act Ben Tchr	Actual benefits of participation in the CAP for teachers
Act Ben Std	Actual benefits of participation in the CAP for students
Pot Ben Tchr	Potential benefits of participation in the CAP for teachers
Pot Ben Std	Potential benefits of participation in the CAP for students
P/P	Impact of people / personality issues with participation, implementation processes, or outcomes of the CAP
GenEd Role	Roles of General ed teachers in the CAP
SpEd Role	Roles of Special ed teachers in the CAP
Prin Role	Role of principal in the CAP
Prin Infl	Influence / impact of principal with the CAP
Perc Support	Perceived level of support for implementation of / participation in the CAP
Des Support	Desired support for implementation of / participation in the CAP
Dist Plcy	Influence / perceptions of district policies on implementation of the CAP
Dist Ppl	Influence / perception of district personnel on implementation of the CAP
Dist I/E	Influence / perception of other district initiatives on implementation of the CAP
Curric	Curriculum / academic standards / grading policies relating to and / or impacting implementation of the CAP
Dist Impl	Procedures used by the district to phase in / implement the CAP
Dist CAP Support	Support from district personnel for implementing the CAP
Dist Expect	Similarities and differences compared to the district's expectations / guidelines for CAP implementation
Changing	Changes in the expectations about CAP implementation procedures during the school year
Forms	CAP forms / documentation
NCLB	Influence / relationship between the CAP and No Child Left Behind
Needed Success	Anything noted to be needed for successful implementation of the CAP
Barriers Success	Anything noted to be a barrier to successful implementation of the CAP
OP	Role / impact of other (non-teaching) professionals with the CAP
Skills have	CAP-related skills other professionals have
Skills have 2nd	CAP-related skills the 2nd grade teachers have
Skills need	CAP-related skills other professionals need
Skills need 2nd	CAP-related skills 2nd grade teachers need
Buy-In reasons	Reasons school professionals do or don't "buy into" the CAP

Buy-In impact	Impact that school professionals' "buying-in" or "not buying-in" has on the CAP participation and / or outcomes
Data collection	How data is collected as part of the CAP
Data use	How data is monitored / used as part of the CAP
Dedication	Evidence of school professionals' dedication to their students
Inclusion	Relationship between CAP implementation and / or participation and inclusion (or "owning all children")
Training +	Benefits / positive impact of training that was provided to support implementation of the CAP
Training -	Training needs that exist, but were not provided to support implementation of the CAP
Parents	Role / impact of parents with the CAP
Meet Prob Solv	Implementation of problem solving stages during grade-level CAP meetings
Meet Prep	Preparation and organization during grade-level CAP meetings
True Info	Use of factual vs. non-factual information by participants in grade-level CAP meetings
Stress	Other non-CAP stressors on school professionals
Collab	Collaboration among school professionals
Early Int	Early intervention support / service provided as part of the CAP
Srvc Inside	Instruction and / or services provided within general education classroom as part of the CAP
Srvc Outside	Instruction and / or services provided outside general education classroom as part of the CAP
Time	Amount of time required to participate in the CAP
OMT	Attitude that CAP is 'one more thing'
St Fact	Impact / influence of student factors on CAP participation and / or outcomes

Appendix L: Study Participants

Pseudoname	***Position during 2003-2004 school year***
School Professionals at Pleasant Valley Elementary School	
Kay Baden	2nd Grade Team Leader
Jacqueline Shoemaker	2nd Grade Teacher
Gail Sullivan	2nd Grade Teacher
Susan Pollack	1st / 2nd Grade Teacher
Donna McHenry	Principal
Derrick White	Special Education Teacher
Kristen Little	Special Education Teacher
Beth Kane	Speech Pathologist
Sandra Ziegler	ESOL Teacher
Patricia Kelly	Staff Development Teacher
Melanie Nichols	Counselor
Colleen Baldwin	School Psychologist
School Professionals at Other CAP Elementary Schools	
Sarah Karz	PPW- 1 CAP school
Carla Dillon	School Psych- 2 CAP schools
Jasmine D'Amico	PPW- 2 CAP schools
Rochelle Gost	PPW- 3 CAP schools
Marla Post	School Psych- 1 CAP school
Sally Palmer	School Psych- 1 CAP school
Cammile Cove	School Psych- 2 CAP schools
Dominique Doe	PPW- 3 CAP schools
District CAP Personnel	
Mark Kennedy	District CAP Coordinator
Billy Miller	CAP facilitator assigned to Pleasant Valley Elementary
Brian Tetlow	CAP facilitator
Maureen Smith	CAP facilitator

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