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ADDRESSING THE DISPARITY OF OUTCOMES FOR ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS AT CENTRAL INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL: AN APPLIED
RESEARCH STUDY RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AVID PROCESSES

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education
The University of Mississippi

STEVEN J. HURDLE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied action research study was to close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged (ED) students and their non-disadvantaged peers (non-Ed) through the implementation of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) system of processes. This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data to answer four core research questions. While the initial implementation of the plan failed to attain the targeted goal of closing the achievement, there were positive indicators for future success. ED students did appear to be effectively engaged with the AVID implementation. This engagement was validated through data about student participation in key AVID strategies, classroom observations, lesson plan analysis, and focus group interviews. Data collected also revealed implementation problems which serve as a basis for recommendations for continuation and improvement of the ongoing AVID implementation. Lastly, data revealed strong reasons to believe the AVID implementation had a positive impact on collaborative organizational capacity toward bettering outcomes for all students.

DEDICATION

This process has required much from many. I am beyond grateful to, Lynndy, my faithful best friend, accountability partner, and wife for never letting me give up or giving up on me. To my daughter Ella Beth, for never showing any disappointment when I was stretched too thin to give you the time and energy you deserve. You both are my life and I love you. To my parents, you both have modeled hard-work and faithful love for family. I could not ask for more. To my school family, you have challenged me to be a better servant-leader. Finally, and most especially, I give thanks to God to whom I owe my life, breath, and being. May my work be pleasing in His sight and may it bring glory to His Name.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Poverty and Mississippi are two words which seem to be inextricably tied together. As of 2015, 22 percent of Mississippians lived in poverty as defined by Federal guidelines (Glassman 2016). Poverty carries with it the realities of children who are living in substandard housing, who have inadequate nutrition, and who are more likely to struggle in school. Common sense would suggest students who are hungry, not well rested, and who are concerned about basic life necessities are less apt to perform at high levels with their school work. Particularly in the state having the designation of the poorest in the nation (Poverty Map, n.d.), public schools in Mississippi must address the effects of poverty on student achievement.

The Central Phenomena

The central area of concern for this applied research study was the achievement gap between students who are economically disadvantaged (ED) and their non-disadvantaged (Non-ED) peers at a fifth and sixth grade school. Since the area of concern was the achievement gap, then we needed to address the reasons why a gap exists. On one side you have those who essentially speak from feeling. From one perspective, home life or poor parenting might be blamed for poor academic performance. Other times teachers might blame a student's behavior for the reason why he or she does not learn on par with his or her peers. Sometimes, it is not unlike going to a doctor and being told our arm is broken because we fell from a tree, and then being sent home without the broken bone being set. In this analogy, it does not matter how the bone was broken. We go to the doctor to get a remedy. In our society, the purpose of public education is to educate, not to find blame for why it appears more difficult to educate some

children. On a simplistic level, the achievement gap exists because schools have not been able to equitably apply appropriate teaching and learning strategies to all students. While there are a multitude of factors contributing to a student's academic struggles, the school must focus on educating the child where we find them.

Using the previously mentioned medical analogy, schools must consider each student's situation when developing a plan for educating every child. A broken arm requires different treatment than a runny nose. Public education is well equipped to provide a homogenous educational treatment for all, but at times struggles to apply appropriate treatment for students who come with specialized needs. The conversation in education is turning away from achievement gap to opportunity gap (Cowan Pitre, 2014). This change in focus moves educators from lamenting things which they have no control, and redirecting efforts to addressing school level issues impacting student learning. This applied research study will seek to avoid blame and instead focus on continuous cycles of improvement. We will seek to build on success, redirect failed efforts, and collaboratively build systems capable of rapid adjustment to student needs.

Often, achievement gaps and opportunity gaps are considered in the macro. Comparisons of national test data and trends are useful to consider what is happening with students, but for the purposes of this study, a micro approach will be used. It is one thing to consider why, nationally, students in low performing racially homogenous schools are performing differently than high performing racially homogenous schools, but for this study one school will be considered, where high achievement and a large achievement gap exist. This study will further seek to identify and address the various factors which may be contributing to this gap in our context.

Current Context

Central Intermediate School is a fifth and sixth grade school in the Central School District in Central, Mississippi. Central Intermediate had a student population of 613 students in 2016. The school building was initially built in 2000. In 2010, a new wing was constructed and nine classrooms and a physical education gym was added. All classrooms are currently occupied, but the school should be able to accommodate growth up to about 700 students. The building was constructed as a middle school for seventh and eighth graders. Central Intermediate also utilizes an older facility adjacent to our primary building. The older facility houses band and orchestra programs. The Central School District is in one of the most rapid growing counties in Mississippi. The district is currently revising its strategic plan to address this growth as well as other long-term issues.

Central Intermediate's student demographic profile is approximately 55 percent white, 35 percent black, five percent Hispanic, two percent Asian, and the rest of mixed races or ethnic backgrounds. About 45 percent of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. This 45 percent represents 286 students who are considered our ED population. A large portion of the 45 percent also are African American students. The reality of economic struggle and race are pressing concerns in our community, district, and state. The Central School District is situated in an area with a strong local tax base and the schools typically have more than adequate resources to deliver high quality academic and extracurricular programming. For example, the Central School District was highly rated based on the results of the 2015-2016 state accountability results. Also, the Central School District had double digit state championships in the 2016-2017 school year in athletics. The students at Central Intermediate have access to high quality academics and over one dozen after-school extracurricular activities.

Central Intermediate has strong community and parental connections through the PTO, community connections, and a Mississippi university. Central Intermediate has an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The PTO annually contributes in excess of fifteen thousand dollars to assist in school improvement efforts. Central Intermediate's PTO also volunteers numerous hours to classroom support and teacher encouragement activities. Events held at the school are well attended. Parents respond favorably about most aspects of the school in an annual parent survey. It is relatively easy to obtain guest speakers with varied expertise from our local community. The community has a multitude of resources and opportunities for students. Many students participate in recreational programming through Central Park Commission. The public library has various programming for students after school and during the summer. A nearby university offers a multitude of learning and creative opportunities to the Central Intermediate community. Students often walk off campus for field trips at the local university. Central Intermediate currently has 14 student teachers serving in the building from the university as well.

Central Intermediate's teacher pool is strong and committed. Central Intermediate has 40 certified personnel, including a counselor, intervention coordinator, two part-time English Learner (EL) tutors, a part-time behavior therapist, academic teachers, and a librarian. While Central Intermediate is a relatively new school the teachers have on average 12 years teaching experience. Of the 40 certified professional staff, 23 percent are National Board Certified and 68 percent hold advanced degrees. Several faculty members are currently enrolled in graduate programs. In the past two years, teacher retention has exceeded 93 percent. Of the teachers who have left, two were retirements, one left the profession, one moved to another town, and one took a job at a neighboring school district to pursue a new career goal. Teachers exhibit high morale and indicate high satisfaction with their jobs and with school administration on annual surveys.

Central Intermediate's teachers have a 96 percent attendance rate. OIS has a student to teacher ratio of 26:1 for core academic subjects. Central Intermediate also has a support staff of 13 individuals.

Central Intermediate is working to build a culture of collaboration, compassion, and high expectations. Every teacher in the building participates within a professional learning community (PLC). Teachers and students are assigned to mentor groups who meet regularly during a biweekly character education time. Students are afforded an opportunity to participate in afterschool clubs. Currently, students have seventeen clubs to choose from in activities ranging from art to fencing. Approximately 50 percent of the student population participate in at least one after school club. Students are encouraged to set personal learning goals and meet with their teacher at different points through the year to monitor their progress. Every student has been given the opportunity to interact with a college planning tool to help develop realistic expectations about their future. The average daily attendance rate is 95 percent for students.

Central Intermediate is a "B" rated school as determined by 2015-2016 state of Mississippi accountability ratings. Based upon these accountability scores, Central Intermediate lacked one point from becoming an "A" school. In the 2016-2017 school year Central Intermediate also scored a "B" in accountability ratings. The school showed overall growth in proficiency from year to year. While Central Intermediate has shown growth in the past two years, there is a clear achievement gap which falls soundly on economic lines. Currently, there is 6.5 percent of the student population who are Tier III for math, and 7.13 percent Tier III for reading. Since some of these students are tiered for both math and reading, the overall Tier III population is 10.62 percent of school. This represents 67 students who are significantly behind in their learning and who have not been identified as having a learning disability.

Justification of Central Issue of Concern

The academic achievement gap of over 10 percent of the student population pointed to factors which raise a clear concern. These 67 students represented the focus for this study. The identified problem at Central Intermediate was the discrepancy in achievement between economically disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers. The school had approximately 45 percent economically disadvantaged students. Of the 10.62 percent who were Tier III, 78 percent were economically disadvantaged. Since a majority of Tier III students were economically disadvantaged, there was a need to discover the relationship between these two and what school based remedies might mitigate these factors. Another issue arose with the lowest performing students involving disciplinary issues. Of the 67 students who are tier three, 12 have served 53 days of suspension. This information was critical since struggling students have no chance of growth if they are not in school. It also raised questions about the relationships between teachers and the most at-risk students.

Central Intermediate has consistently applied remedial efforts with Tier III students. Students who are identified as Tier III in reading, math, or both were provided remedial instruction, daily for no less than 30 minutes per subject. Students were progress monitored weekly. Reading interventions were facilitated using the i-Ready program. I-Ready is an online intervention program tailored to the individual needs of students as determined by a screening assessment. Central Intermediate had remedial reading teacher who delivered instruction and monitored i-Ready. If students did not master content within i-Ready, they were referred back to the teacher for individualized direct instruction. Students took weekly progress monitoring assessments to track their growth after the interventions were applied. Math remediation was a shared responsibility model. Students were assigned weekly to different teachers. Teachers

utilized Accelerated Math, an online remediation program and monitored the students' progress using STAR Math. STAR Math is a companion product to Accelerated Math, which assesses student math growth and achievement. Even with consistent remediation, only six of 67 students on Tier III were approaching grade level competency on reading as measured by North West Educational Agency's Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP). Using North West Educational Agency's Measures of Academic Progress to measure Math proficiency, only three of 67 students were approaching grade level competency.

Other aspects of the ongoing struggle to raise student achievement were connected to school and home relations. While Central Intermediate had an extremely active PTO, it did not see diverse participation in this group. Very few low income parents participated actively with the PTO. It was also a struggle to get parents to attend meetings related to poor academic performance. Parents of low performing students often failed to even respond to an invitation for a meeting with teachers or the on-site intervention coordinator. The school has failed to discover a consistent methodology to gain parental trust and participation when discussing low academic performance. While there was a strong level of parental involvement in some aspects, the area of building strong parental relationships was of key concern and was taken into account with any effort to address student learning.

Tier III students were not performing at an acceptable grade level. Most were not showing substantial growth. Thirty students were on Tier III for at least a calendar year and some as many as three years. While there was evidence for growth for some students, a large number of students were not growing and were actually falling further behind. While reasonable efforts were attempted, there was failure on the part of the school to ensure all students were learning at high levels. Without a marked change in the school's efforts, it seemed likely the

pattern of students who are habitually unsuccessful, and likely becoming dropouts in their later school life would continue. Also, consideration was given to the economics of these students because we desired to promote social justice for those who historically have been the most oppressed and afforded the fewest opportunities in our society.

While the central problem of this study was the disparity in achievement between students, there were other factors which complicate the problem. Central Intermediate's context presented a different research context than typically found in existing research. There is much research available about the achievement gap. Much of this research deals with issues of inequity between schools which are effectively segregated (Gaynor, 2012). There is also research around equitable application of best practices (Cowan Pitre, 2014). There is also ample evidence to demonstrate the opportunity gap in education is a national problem with long term implications (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). These samplings of research studies are merely a scratch on the surface of both the documentation and the suggested remedies for a national problem. There is far less research and guidance about the very real dilemma faced at Central Intermediate. In Central Intermediate's case, the school was high performing, but a select group of students were not realizing the benefit of this perceived high quality school.

It appeared, Central Intermediate had an opportunity to address the critical learning needs of an at-risk population of students. This opportunity required asking difficult questions related to our beliefs and expectations. Strategies which are "one size fits all" were unlikely to be successful since the needs of the targeted students were extremely diverse. Some students likely had latent learning disabilities. Some students may have had developmental delays which had not been addressed or overcome. Some students may have simply been more concerned about getting a good meal and being in a clean, safe environment, thus making learning secondary to

them. Understanding the reason behind our target students' deficits was the first step in developing a strategy to assist them in attaining greater gains in their learning.

Audience

This study was designed to address the needs of students who had not fully realized their academic potential. Through a collaborative process of identifying needs, suggesting and implementing strategies to address those needs, and evaluating the outcomes of these strategies this study proposed to engage teachers, parents, students, and the local community. This study sought to understand perceptions and beliefs held by stakeholders. Further, the study strived to address misconceptions about the root causes of low achievement and possible implementation issues with the proposed action plan. The desired impact on students was to see substantially improved student achievement for those students who have not grown adequately in the past. In addition to student growth, teacher professional growth is a desired outcome. One of our school's professional learning community (PLC) goals was to be reflective professionals. Teachers were challenged to maintain a growth focus for themselves as well as their students. A growth focus emphasized continuous improvement for all stakeholders and building institutional capacity for change. The complexities of the achievement gap issue demanded parent and community engagement. This research effort sought to develop relationships with parents and community members which will hopefully lead to long term partnerships.

This study required extensive collaboration and participation by all of our stakeholders. We began the process by looking internally first. A logical first step was to talk with the school leadership team. The school leadership team was comprised of members of all PLC groups. Input was sought to determine underlying beliefs and causes for our achievement gap. Grade level subject area professional learning communities were engaged through data analysis,

professional study related to achievement gaps in similar contexts, and in all phases of the action plan implementation, prescribed in this applied research study. The professionals within our building were challenged to self-reflect about current beliefs and practices. While the desired outcomes included improved practice, building organizational capacity to address problems was an equally high priority. Professionals also had to collaboratively develop implementation, evaluation, and revision strategies specifically designed to impact a positive change relative to the achievement gap.

Students and their families were engaged on multiple levels as well. Parents and students needed to be full participants in this applied research. The inevitable outcome of this research was asking people to do things differently to see if achievement gaps can be closed. A goal for our lower achieving students was to see them attain grade-level achievement. This attainment was contingent on hard-work and determination from the students and their families. This study sought to build relationships with families in a shared responsibility approach to student success. Also, since the data clearly suggested inequity in educational outcomes, our partnerships were purposefully designed to promote social justice in our community. Social justice, in the context of our community, entailed increasing access and participation in all aspects of school life for ED students. This included both school-day and after-school activities.

Our community has a vested interest in student success. Our students are the future employees and entrepreneurs of our community. If students are ultimately unsuccessful in their education, then we may expect many of those same students to become unsuccessful in their adult endeavors. Our proximity to a university and to a highly educated populous will be a ready resource to participate in our efforts. Again, the key is a collaborative problem solving relationship. While the evidence for the problem is clear, it will be essential to bring outside

experts and willing participants into our shared goal of closing the achievement gap in our community, and thus creating a more stable future through an educated citizenry.

The engagement of all stakeholders represented a significant element of desired outcomes. Engagement meant more than soliciting input. While hearing the voices of our stakeholders was important it was not an end unto itself. Rather, the intended outcome of this study was to build organizational strength through diverse partnerships, skills, and viewpoints. Ideally, this study will enable Central Intermediate School to develop a network of resources which will not only positively impact the stated achievement gap problem, but also allow us to expand in our capacity to address other growth opportunities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied research study was to address the achievement gap at Central Intermediate School and to implement an action plan to significantly close this gap. Within this stated purpose the organization developed collaborative systems for building organizational health and strength through expanding the school's capacity to respond appropriately to student needs.

The intent of this applied action research was to consider the achievement gap within the context of Central Intermediate School. It was also necessary to examine the existing body of research around the causes and means to address this issue of disparity in achievement. As previously stated, the process for this study was collaborative in nature, involving our stakeholders in disaggregating school level data and considering existing research to develop the action plan. As our team developed this applied action research plan we also developed clearly stated goals and check points. Initial implementation of this applied research action plan took place in the Fall of 2017 until the Summer of 2018. Before implementation, during the study,

and at the conclusion of the study we used established evaluative processes to examine effectiveness.

In this applied research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. Initial data collection helped to determine the realities of the current practices and beliefs. This data collection included surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups collected primarily qualitative data centered on beliefs and perceptions. Parents, students, teachers, and community members were included. Qualitative classroom observations were used to analyze instructional practice and student engagement. Other open-ended questionnaires polled stakeholders for their attitudes and ideas about the achievement gap and its causes. Student achievement data from multiple sources was examined throughout the study, from a quantitative approach, to understand the trends and changes in student achievement.

Evaluation of this program happened from the earliest stages. We implemented process evaluation techniques and impact-based evaluation strategies. As data was collected, team members analyzed results and suggested implementation implications. As student achievement data was disseminated, the school leadership team was able to adjust program methodologies to address deficits and areas of growth. Throughout the evaluative process a primary objective was to build organizational capacity in the area of school growth and improvement. As program goals were met, then opportunities for expansion were considered. If program goals were unmet, then collaborative decisions were made about what caused the failure and how to correct our missteps.

This study examined the implementation of the Advancement Through Individual Determination (AVID) processes at Central Intermediate School. AVID is a company whose stated purpose is to help schools close the achievement gap. AVID is implemented through a

series of strategies arranged around four core pillars. The pillars of AVID are structures, leadership, culture, and organization. Specifically, AVID processes develop organization, deep literacy, and foster a college going mindset. In our situation, AVID was implemented school-wide. While the goal was to see a closing of the achievement gap for ED students, all students were exposed to the strategies and allowed to benefit from the processes.

Since AVID was a whole school model, and both ED and Non-ED students were given access to the AVID processes, our point of reference for improvement was based upon historical performances of the same cohort of students from one year to the next. One of AVID's underlying concepts is marginalized students will benefit from the AVID strategies to a greater extent than their more affluent peers. While not explicitly stated, it seems AVID strategies do attempt to allow the school to supplement the "cultivated childhood" mentioned by Lareau (2003). Lareau's position would argue, students from a more affluent home-life are better equipped to thrive in the institutional environments of school and work than their less affluent peers. AVID allows the school to create opportunities to assist ED students to better access resources which should help ED students to achieve at higher levels. The premise in this study was while both ED and non-ED students may have benefited from AVID, ED students benefited more. For example, one AVID strategy is to promote self-sufficiency by becoming organized. If students from higher affluence were more likely to have home supports to ensure organization, then the AVID strategies for organization were apt to have a more profound effect on a student who has no such home support.

This action research used a mixed methods approach to understand the implications of AVID implementation. Initially, we sought to determine the impact on student achievement in reading. We also sought to know, if after implementation was there a significant difference in the

size of the achievement gap between ED students and Non-ED students. Further we sought to understand the implementation from the perspective of our processes. We explored which aspects of the implementation were particularly meaningful to our stakeholders. We also wanted to better understand how our implementation was successful and how it could have been improved.

Research Questions

Central Intermediate School is considered a high performing school as measured by the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP). Although the school is high performing, a large gap in achievement has been noted between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-economically disadvantaged (non-ED) students. In an attempt to address this disparity in achievement, Central Intermediate's leadership team, along with district leadership, developed an initial set of questions to discover key information about the gap and the students who comprise this gap. The first question related to perceptions of students, parents, and teachers as to the school level processes most influential in impacting student achievement. Next we considered the question of what practices and processes have the most impact on student achievement. Finally, a question was developed to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the AVID processes for addressing the achievement gap.

After the initial research, a district and school level decision was made to implement AVID as a tool to close the achievement gap. A determination was made to transition the school leadership team into the AVID site team. This AVID site team is comprised of administration, representatives from every academic department, and instructional support staff. This collaborative body's role is to ensure appropriate implementation of the AVID program. The AVID site team collaboratively created goals for each of the four pillars based upon our shared

understanding of multiple data points and relevant research. As a program, AVID is unique in how individual sites determine their own priorities, goals, and action steps. AVID provides recommended processes and strategies to implement toward meeting the site's unique goals.

Since the implementation of AVID is the the method chosen to address the achievement gap at Central Intermediate School, the school level site team collaboratively determined priorities for implementation in order for the initiative to be deemed successful. These priorities are stated as follows in terms of research questions. These questions were formed through a collaborative process with the school leadership team to determine the greatest areas of need. These questions will ultimately form the basis for the evaluation of the proposed action plan.

1. Did the implementation of the AVID processes by the school site team contribute to a 15 percent increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring proficient in reading on MAAP at Central Intermediate School?
2. Were 80 percent of economically disadvantaged students effectively engaged in the implemented AVID instructional strategies?
3. What are the observed limits and problems to successful implementation of the AVID processes?
4. In what ways did organizational culture develop an increased capacity for stimulating positive change in student outcomes?

Overview of the Study

This applied research study sought to address the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students at Central Intermediate School. This presentation will attempt to explain the problem behind and the purpose for this research. Research questions guided the study in order to keep the research focused. Further, the problem was examined through thoughtful analysis of

relevant research. Chapter two developed an analysis of research related to others' efforts to close achievement gaps. Literature related to practices included in this research's action plan will be examined as well. In chapter three, the action plan will be fully explained including timelines, budgets, goals, responsible parties, and evaluation questions. Chapter three will also detail the qualitative and quantitative process and measures which will be used to evaluate the action plan. Chapters four and five will provide detail about data collected and conclusions drawn related to this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Students learn and achieve at different rates. Nationwide there is a recognized gap in achievement levels between students of different cultures, races, and economic status (NAEP-2015 Mathematics & Reading Assessments. n.d.). Much time and money is spent within schools, districts, and state departments of education devising plans and policies to address students who are not achieving at a desirable level (Ushomirsky, N., & Williams, D., n.d.). Some students do not respond to applied interventions and these students represent a group who seem to be falling further behind their high performing peers.

The concern and purpose of this literature review is to present and discuss key research about student achievement and the gap which exists between groups of students. There is substantial research available about student achievement and addressing the achievement gap. The research on student achievement can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Some research is focused on what factors contribute to low student achievement including opportunity gaps. Other research attempts to address the context in which disparities in student achievement exist such as economics. Finally, other studies examine potential factors which may positively impact student outcomes. This review of literature seeks to primarily look at the factors which may improve achievement outcomes and close achievement gaps, while being ever mindful of correlation and context.

School Structures

Some studies focus on school structures in addressing the achievement gap. For the purpose of this literature review, structures refer to internal workings of the school related to structures such as staff assignment, student groupings, class size, and professional collaboration. Primarily, the research considered in this section has little to do with actual instruction but rather how schools are organized and equipped to deliver instruction.

Hamilton (2013) studied the impact of professional learning communities on student achievement. The study considered 136 school districts in California using data provided by the California Department of Education. Schools were surveyed to ascertain if they had implemented professional learning communities as a regular practice of the school. Data was analyzed for elementary, middle, and high schools. Data was disaggregated to look at specific subgroups. The results of the study showed significant positive achievement differences for English Learners and Hispanic students at the elementary and middle school level. The researcher suggested other subgroups may not have been adequately represented in the survey. The implication of this research indicates collaborative teacher teams may hold a key role in lifting lower achieving students to greater success.

Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015) examined a large data set of third through tenth graders from the Florida Department of Education. Nearly 3,000,000 students and 92,000 teachers were represented in this study. Researchers were attempting to find a correlation between achievement and the matching of student and teacher race. The outcome was significant but the effect size was small when students were taught by teachers of their same race for black and white students. The impact was highest for lower performing black and white

students. While this study emphasized the impact of same race instruction, other implications may really be about cultural identification and whether students find their teachers relatable.

A study was conducted to observe achievement gaps within subgroups rather than the more traditional approach of looking at gaps between subgroups (Davis-Kean & Jager, 2014). The study was conducted using a prior longitudinal group which is a representative of students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. The research looked at how achievement within a subgroup, and what conclusions could be made about impact of schooling. The study concluded there appears to be heterogeneous achievement between students within all subgroups and thus an achievement gap is present in all subgroups. Within all subgroups significant gains were made which demonstrated a narrowing of achievement disparity by the fifth grade. The study concluded the single effect which had the most significance was simply consistent quality schooling. This study focused on whether the cultural differences of students impacted achievement when all students were equally afforded the same quality of education. Again while there may be some lingering questions about why a particular subgroup performs below another, the evidence suggests quality schooling outweighs any other factor.

Bosworth (2014) conducted research on students from the fourth and fifth grades from the North Carolina public school system using data from the North Carolina Department of Education. The purpose of this study was to analyze class size, class composition, and what significance could be attributed to these factors as it relates to student achievement. This study made connections related to how students were assigned to a particular class. Students are either assigned in a random approach or a non-random approach. Classes which are assigned non-randomly are less likely to show smaller class size to be effective in increasing student achievement. The research indicates lower performing students benefit more from smaller class

size than do higher performing students, particularly when students are assigned to classes in a random basis. The study further stipulates any effects observed are statistically significant but have a small effect size.

Salcedo-Gonzalez (2012) studied the effects of ability grouping on outcomes in state assessments. The primary concern of this study was to determine if ability grouping produced increased achievement on the students studied. The research considered seven elementary schools and focused on fourth grade students. The researchers grouped their data based upon whether school classes were formed with students of heterogeneous or homogeneous prior academic performance. The researcher further considered ethnicity, race, and socioeconomics in the analysis of the data. Based upon the researcher's data analysis there was no significant difference in achievement or achievement gains for students who were in homogenous classrooms versus those in heterogeneous classrooms. If the findings in this study are consistent with other research, then it would stand to reason ability grouping would not be a desirable approach to closing the achievement gap. Considering this research, heterogeneous groupings may provide stronger collaborative opportunities for student learning.

In a qualitative study of two high performing elementary schools, the study sets out to compare principal leadership behavior (Brown, 2015). The two schools researched are both high performing schools from the same district but with a different socioeconomic makeup. The first school is seen to be affluent while the other school is considered to be high poverty. The study relied heavily on student and teacher surveys and principal interviews. The researcher concluded it was inconclusive the principals' behaviors contributed to student success. There was at least an implication, since the principals these high performing schools exhibited similar behaviors and strategies, student achievement gains might be connected to these behaviors.

The research does indicate school structures play a role in improving student achievement. These elements are clearly important to student outcomes, but the aforementioned research does little to suggest a clear pathway to closing the achievement gap. Fortunately, many of the structural elements are best practices which can be implemented with little monetary cost. While structural elements bear enough evidence to be important, this review will now turn its attention to actual instructional practice. In this section, research on different instructional techniques and strategies will be analyzed for their impact on improving student outcomes.

Instructional Practice

Keengwe and Hussein (2014) studied the impact of two charter schools who utilized technology enhanced instruction with English Learners. The study sought to determine if the use of technology enhanced instruction would boost student achievement for this subgroup of students. English Learner samples were selected from two schools to compare gains in student achievement between students who were exposed to computer assisted instruction versus students who were teacher taught only. The results indicate students taught with computer assisted instruction showed marked gains above students who did not receive this instruction. The study further suggested emphasis should be placed on teacher development on how to appropriately implement computer assisted instruction.

Researchers studied cognitive issues within students who show a math learning disability or who exhibit persistent low math achievement. (Geary, Hoard, Nugent, & Bailey, 2012) This was a five year study of 288 students from twelve schools. Students were in grades Kindergarten to fifth grade. The results of the study demonstrate students with persistently low achievement exhibit cognitive issues in the area of central executive functioning which relates to working memory and in-class attention. A focus on addressing these cognitive issues might lend

itself to improvement in student outcomes. The following study picks up on the research related to cognitive based instruction.

Kearns and Fuchs (2013) performed a meta-analysis of over 39 separate research studies related to the topic of cognitively focused instruction and if it improves student achievement. This analysis looked at a variety of programs and approaches. Some approaches were a blend of cognitive instruction along with skill development, while some were strictly cognitive instruction to improve brain function. The study concluded there was no evidence of positive significance in cognitive instruction as relates to student achievement. The researchers did suggest there is warrant for further research as some methods show promise.

Pol, Volman, Oort, and Beishuizen (2015) studied the impact of scaffolding instruction on student achievement, task effort, and student appreciation of support. This study was conducted analyzing 30 teachers and 769 students ages twelve to fifteen. Researchers used observation, surveys, and test data to reach their conclusions. Observations were conducted with a specific set of guidelines used for coding purposes. Levels of support were labeled contingent or non-contingent. High contingent support was demonstrated to be effective where independent working time was high. In these situations, the teacher provides support based upon a measure of understanding of the student's current level of need. Non-contingent support is providing guidance independent of first assessing student needs. The overall conclusion of this report is scaffolding is shown to be effective in conjunction with contingency and high levels of student independence.

Common sense and research both agree, sound instructional practice leads to higher student achievement. While it is true students need sound instruction, it is also clear from the greater body of research, sound instructional practice alone may not address all concerns.

Another important element uncovered in the research is the role of perceptions, beliefs, and expectations. As will be shown, perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of all stakeholders contribute to student learning. Interestingly, the research indicates the largest impact comes from what students believe to be true about themselves, above what others believe.

Perceptions, Beliefs, and Expectations

Renth (2014) studied the achievement gap of a rural elementary school in terms of perceptions of low-income parents. This study utilized mixed methods relying on interview and survey data while also utilizing student achievement scores for comparison purposes. The researcher studied a single elementary school of grades three, four, and five comprised of 289 students. Overall achievement was compared to achievement of low socioeconomic students. Parents of identified low socioeconomic students were chosen to participate in the parent surveys and interviews. The results of this study indicate rural schools with similar demographics would benefit from strategies to improve cultural awareness and stronger efforts at parental inclusion in the educational process. The study also concludes schools may have to address hidden or unintentional discrimination in order to build meaningful relationships with parents of lower socioeconomic students.

Niepel, Brunner, and Preckel (2014) conducted an examination of relationship between self-concept, setting achievement goals, and academic achievement. This study considered 769 students in grades fifth through eighth grades from a German secondary school system. Students were given questionnaires to assess self-concept and achievement goals. Achievement for this study was measured by course grades. The results indicate, setting attainment goals have no significant impact on achievement. Conversely there seems to be a strong link between self-

concept and achievement. The results of this study may give rise to studying how to improve student self-concept.

A study was conducted of third, fourth, and fifth grade African American students from urban and rural schools in the southeastern United States. (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013) The study sought to identify relationships between students value of education, behavioral engagement, and achievement in an at-risk sample of African American students. The study included standardized measures for achievement, and subjective assessments for behavioral engagement and achievement values. The study found evidence for students' valuing of education as not significant in relation to actual achievement scores. The researchers further found behavioral engagement shows the most direct correlation to overall student achievement scores. The study suggested teaching self-regulation skills at an early age may have a positive effect on behavioral engagement in later years, and thus increase student achievement outcomes for at risk students.

Fentress (2014) conducted this study as her dissertation to determine the impact of teacher beliefs on student achievement. This study was conducted as a mixed methods study with student achievement being considered quantitatively and teacher beliefs being addressed qualitatively. This study was conducted in an elementary school with approximately 900 students. The entire staff was surveyed and several selected staff were interviewed. Student achievement data was considered to determine if a relationship was present. Conclusions of the study lend itself to a position of teacher actions, attitudes, and bias have a significant impact on student achievement. The researcher suggests teachers would benefit from cultural training to improve student outcomes.

In this facet of the research studied, teacher beliefs, student engagement, and student self-perception are the most significant factors in student success. While some areas such as principal actions and student cognitive function still need further research, but also show a link to student achievement as well. In the next section, external factors which are exerted on students and schools are considered. The following studies provide insight on how addressing culture, economics, and politics can have a positive impact on student achievement. Further, this section shows how contextual factors heavily contribute to enlarging or closing achievement gaps.

Community, Economics, and Politics

Research was conducted to consider the impact of economics, school attendance, and academic achievement in elementary school (Morrissey, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2014). The study examined school records for 35,419 students from a large Florida school district. All students were elementary aged. Researchers looked at income status, school absences, and academic achievement. While researchers were able to observe poor attendance related to students having poor grades, they could not find a clear link between attendance and achievement as measured by state assessments. Also, this study did not find conclusive evidence of a link between poverty and school attendance. While a link between attendance and poverty were not clear, this study raises further interest in the questions around achievement and economics.

In a study tied to community resources and culture, Telfer and Howley (2014) presented two case studies of rural schools showing promise in raising achievement for students with disabilities. The authors presented unifying strategies in their comparisons which may provide focus in helping other schools close achievement gaps for this typically underserved demographic. The two schools studied represent rural schools from two distinct parts of the country. One school is in rural Ohio and one is a rural area outside of Los Angeles, California.

The common elements both schools used to promote achievement include: using data effectively, maintaining instructional focus, shared implementation of practice, ongoing assessment and feedback, and fostering an environment of inquiry. In this study, the prescribed treatments carry a low monetary cost. A low cost indicates treatments which even poor schools can implement.

A study was conducted to compare the impact of family background and school resources on fourth grade students' math achievement (Nonoyama-Tarumi, Hughes, & Willms, 2015). The study was conducted using international data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Student scores were analyzed on the basis of multiple factors which impact family background and school resources. The study concluded family background and income outweigh the level of school resources. The study further concluded as a nation's gross domestic product increases the number of at-risk students decrease. This study has implications for further dialogue about strengthening parental engagement to support the efforts of raising student achievement. Also, another important consideration which is developed from this study is the importance of economics in student achievement.

Do school facilities play a critical role in student achievement? Lumpkin (2016) conducted a causal-comparative study to determine the effects on student achievement as it relates to students being in a new school structure versus in older schools. This research looked at a variety of factors in the state of Florida. The researcher studied student achievement for students in the fourth, eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. Students were examined by subgroups for reading and mathematics. The study found student achievement showed significant growth for every subgroup when students transition from an old school building to a new one. Obviously this study has major economic and political implications. Building schools requires large

amounts of money and typically involves bond issues and tax implications, which poorer areas are less able to support.

A study was conducted to analyze two nationally representative data sets of American children to determine the demographics for who are at greatest risk for persistent math difficulty (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2016). The study divided children by multiple subgroup categories which provided very specific results about risk factors. The researchers concluded students without access to early childhood education are the most at risk for persistent math difficulty. Students who enter school with low vocabularies also comprise a high risk group for persistent math difficulty. Further consideration is warranted when considering the economics of the students who have limited access to early childhood education, and who enter school with low vocabularies. Again, there is an implied link to economics which must not be ignored.

In a study of South Korean schools which focused on a program to provide incentives for student growth while not becoming punitive if desired growth was not obtained (Woo, Lee, & Kim, 2015). Researchers examined national test data and focused on schools having been identified as underperforming. These schools were included in an incentive program which focuses monetary resources on human capital. Government funds were directed toward lowering class size and providing targeted professional development. Further, there were no governmental-imposed negative consequences for failure to demonstrate growth. The researchers frequently reference the differences between this approach and the United States reward/punishment approach. The overall results of the study indicate the under-performing schools which participated in this low-stakes incentive program, students demonstrated growth on all measures. The total percentage of students representing underperformance dropped by

half in one school year. The researchers conclude these types of low-stakes programs were highly effective in improving student outcomes and closing gaps between underperforming students and their peers. This study highlights the impact of external politics on student achievement. If political actions have the ability to impact student learning, the question could be raised: what role should government play in enhancing quality education for all?

External factors, which most often are beyond the school level, do impact student achievement. The research indicates when economic resources are adequate, student achievement increases. Further, the research suggests communities with the economic ability and political will, can enact strategies to impact student learning and by extension aid in closing the achievement gap. Within the body of research related to external factors it becomes more apparent how cultural and social standing afford or limit opportunities for individuals to access high quality education. In the next section some important ideas and research will be discussed which may have practical application for narrowing both opportunity gaps and achievement gaps. While schools may never be the sole instrument in enacting social justice for all students, the following concepts do hold promise in addressing greater opportunities for all.

School Based Processes

The research examined points to complexity. Disparities in student achievement have underlying social, cultural, and institutional implications which are not easily addressed. What can an individual school do to address such large scale problems? There is research available which, at least infers, schools can make a difference through process based systemic change. Hattie (2009) points to student self-reporting of grades as having the greatest effect size to improve student outcomes. Self-reporting of grades is basically allowing students to tell the teacher how well the student will perform on a given assessment, prior to taking the assessment.

How can an action as simple as a student identifying their own understanding, or lack thereof, make any impact of achievement? Further Dweck (2006) tells us mindset about one's ability to grow and learn matters more than an intellectual achievement scale. Duckworth (2016) uses a grit scale to determine a person's willingness to do the hard work required to gain mastery in an endeavor. While these ideas have to do with beliefs as referenced in an earlier section of the literature review, these ideas also point to areas where schools may have sway. Schools can adapt and change their processes of how students are expected to learn and show mastery. While most public schools have no control over what students are expected to learn, they do have some control of how students are expected to learn. This section will look at the processes of schooling and learning and how these may provide positive impacts towards closing gaps.

Hattie (2009) conducted meta-analysis of multiple factors which historically have been held to impact student learning. Through this meta-analysis he assigned weights to each factor based upon multiple research studies. Of over 800 factors listed, student self-reporting of grades, came out as the single largest effect size in impacting student learning. The significance of this information for schools lies in the ability to influence student self-perception and to assist students in goal setting. Hattie's work suggests, if students believe they are capable of higher achievement, then they will work towards the goal despite obstacles. Schools and teachers can be participants in this activity by creating a culture of high expectations for all students.

Along this same path, Dweck (2006) introduces the concept of mindset. Dweck's argument is individuals have either a growth or fixed mindset about various aspects of their lives. According to Dweck's work, a fixed mindset means a person may believe intelligence or talent is innate and cannot truly be developed. For the fixed mindset person there is not intrinsic motivation to put forth great effort because the person believes they are limited due to lack of

talent or intelligence. Conversely, growth mindset is the belief things can be learned and intelligence and talent are not fixed but rather can be cultivated. Dweck would argue, a growth minded individual will pursue learning with more vigor because they believe in their ability to master new challenges by application of effort and with patience.

Duckworth's (2016) work on grit continues this theme of internal motivation and the impact schooling can have on ensuring all students achieve at high levels. For Duckworth, grit is a measure of passion and perseverance. In one study, Duckworth looked at the factors which contributed to why cadets were able to successfully complete their time at West Point Military Academy. Prior to Duckworth's study, no single rationale could be found why some cadets survived the grueling demands of West Point and others did not. Intelligence, physical stamina, nor psychological evaluation could explain who and who would not endure. Duckworth's grit scale provided an accurate prediction. This study was replicated with other cohorts of cadets to further validate her findings. The importance of this work for schooling comes into play by questioning how passion and perseverance is transmitted to students. Certainly students must be shown the relevance of school activity for it to be worth sustained effort. Another implication is for schools to provide ongoing systems of support for students to aid in their perseverance despite significant challenges.

Summary

The research finds numerous factors contributing to an achievement gap. The research also has demonstrated a multitude of approaches have been attempted with mixed success in closing this gap. Other questions still remain. What can be done to mitigate external factors, such as poverty, to help improve achievement outcomes? How do schools create meaningful partnerships with their communities and with parents? Are there parameters found in the

research which indicate best practices to be applied in all or most situations? It seems the questions and contributing factors related to the achievement gap are almost too complex to address, but address we must. The ideal of public schooling suggests we must attempt to find answers to allow all of our citizens to have access and opportunity to become highly educated. The noble goal of giving the gift of education to the masses cannot be realized if our system is not equitable. The achievement gap points to a flaw in our plan. The research further illustrates how the gap in achievement really is about inequity in opportunities. To recognize this flaw and attempt to correct it, means we believe in our children's ability to learn and learn at high levels.

This research study will seek to build upon the established research to find practical methods to effect change and to build organizational capacity toward swift response to student needs. An underlying theme of the current research seems to indicate collaborative systems, high expectations for students, and high levels of engagement with stakeholders yield the most promise in making a positive impact on student learning. The next chapter will detail the research methods and evaluation process. Utilizing the AVID model, as an action plan, this study will attempt to approach equity in educational opportunity for all students through a school-wide approach.

The next section will discuss the action plan implementation. Attention will be provided to the decision to use AVID, how the plan was created, the implementation process, and how the plan will be evaluated.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

This chapter describes the applied research design and the methods used in this research to address the problem of an achievement gap between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-economically disadvantaged (non-ED) students at Central Intermediate School. The intent of this applied research action plan was to contribute to an improvement in achievement for economically disadvantaged students. An equally important aspect of this applied research plan was to examine and develop the school's capacity to enact systemic organizational changes for the benefit of students. This section of the research seeks to address how the action plan was created. The collaborators, timeline of events, existing research surrounding achievement gaps, and internal data examined to create the action plan will be discussed.

A second integral part of this section is a full description of the action plan. The foundation of the plan was based upon the research questions previously delineated in chapter one. Each action item within the plan corresponds to one of the identified research questions and as such also forms the basis for the program evaluation. Long and short term goals are explained in terms of what they are and how they will be measured. Each action item is discussed in terms of timelines, resources, personnel, and the systems utilized.

The concluding section of this chapter focuses on evaluating the success of the implementation of the action plan. In evaluating the action plan and its goals, each item had at least one baseline assessment or measure and one summative assessment or measure associated with the goal. These assessments were a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. Through

the evaluation process, each research question was answered through the data collected in the implementation of the action plan.

Development of Action Plan

In the fall of 2016, Central School District was recognized as one of the highest performing school districts in the state. This news was quickly tempered by the reality of the fact of Central School District having one of the highest achievement gaps in the state as well. The difference between the proficiency rates of ED students was 47 percentage points lower than for non-ED students. This sobering news led the district and Central Intermediate to ask serious questions about the equity of education for all students. In the winter of 2016, the Central Intermediate School leadership team, along with parents, community members, and district officials considered the need to implement a plan of action to address the identified achievement gap. Multiple community forums were held along with school level meetings to discuss strategies to close the achievement gap. Through the process of discussion, attention was also given to relevant research. One study, (Niepel, Brunner, & Preckel, 2014) points to factors such as improving student self-conception as a means to increase student achievement. Studies related to specific strategies were also considered. In our situation where high achievement and a large achievement gap overlap, Carol Dweck's (2006) research on mindset proved insightful about student and teacher self-perception. Morrissey, Hutchison, and Winsler (2014) also connected cultural concerns to student achievement. These and other relevant research studies contributed to a decision regarding a plan to address the achievement gap.

In March of 2017, a group from Central Intermediate School visited an AVID showcase school in Alabama. This experience proved important in helping the school and the district in deciding which model would be most appropriate. The team was able to visit classrooms, talk

with site team members, and hear from AVID representatives. One of the more enlightening parts of the visit was a panel discussion which included students, teachers, and administrators who had experienced the AVID processes. These individuals shared stories of improved student organization, a vibrant school culture, higher student engagement, and fifth and sixth grade students who seemed to be making a connection between their current schooling and their future plans for college. The experience did not answer all questions but certainly gave the team reason to be hopeful.

Ultimately a decision was made in the spring of 2017, by the school district and Central Intermediate School to utilize the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) system to address the achievement gap. AVID is a company whose purpose is to help schools raise achievement and close the achievement gap. The rationale to choose the AVID system is because AVID is not formulaic. It allows a school to be self-reflective to determine the most needed interventions for the school, then AVID suggests strategies to implement these changes. The Central Intermediate School developed a local AVID site team, in the summer of 2017, which then collaboratively developed a plan to implement AVID. Prior to development of the implementation plan, the site team participated in an AVID prescribed self-study. The site team also participated in AVID summer institute. During the summer institute, site team members were trained on specific AVID strategies. Site team members were trained based upon their role in the school. Administrators received specific training about leading the implementation. Teachers spent most of their time learning classroom-based activities to support a successful implementation.

The AVID site team was a critical component of implementation of the action plan. This team served as the collaborative body to lead the implementation of the action plan and to

evaluate its success. The site team was formed of teachers, administration, and other instructional staff. The members of this team were selected across the school's departments. Every professional learning community (PLC) in the school had at least one site team member. By having this type of structure, the site team had a direct connection to every teacher in the school and was able to influence ongoing processes and activities with students.

The self-study, conducted by the site team, led to the creation of the research questions for this study and then to the action plan for closing the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students. These questions and action items were designed to address the central area of concern for this study and to address the supporting elements of the factors associated with closing the achievement gap. The final question dealt with organizational capacity to collaboratively grow and change to address student needs.

The Action Plan

The action plan for Central Intermediate School was centered around the following research questions. AVID provided a toolbox of ideas and strategies which the school implemented through the action plan. In the description which follows, the research questions are restated along with the action items related to these questions. Supporting details about goals, structures, resources, and responsible personnel are also discussed.

Research Questions

1. Did the implementation of the AVID processes by the school site team contribute to a 15 percent increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring proficient in reading on MAAP at Central Elementary School?
2. Were 80 percent of economically disadvantaged students effectively engaged in the targeted AVID instructional strategies?

3. What are the observed limits and problems to successful implementation of the AVID processes?
4. In what ways did organizational culture develop an increased capacity for stimulating positive change in student outcomes?

AVID Domains and Indicators

AVID employs a system which permitted the school to identify key goals and action items, but the fidelity of the process was also closely monitored through the AVID certification process. The AVID certification process allows schools to monitor their progress in the four key domains of instruction, systems, leadership, and culture. In the implementation of AVID at Central Intermediate School, the AVID certification rubric was utilized for the measurement of fidelity of implementation of core processes (AVID, 2017). The rubric also allowed the school to identify relative areas of strength and weakness. For purposes of program evaluation, the rubric provided insight into process data and short term goals.

Instruction. AVID's schoolwide domain of instruction is summed up in writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR). WICOR can be further broken into subparts which are monitored by the rubric. There are 12 indicators related to WICOR and they are as follows:

- writing to learn;
- writing process;
- focused note taking;
- higher-level thinking;
- structures for inquiry;
- access digital information;

- structures for collaboration;
- organizational methods;
- AVID organizational tools;
- critical reading process; and
- WICOR strategies.

The first 11 indicators were measured for students in terms of the portion of the student body which could be said to be engaged. For the purpose of the rubric, this measurement is viewed as none, students in one grade, students in two grades, and students throughout the school. The final indicator is a measurement of the AVID site team and all teachers in the school. AVID recognizes not all teachers in a school are necessarily trained in implementing WICOR strategies and as such expects a minimum standard of all AVID site team members to implement WICOR in their classrooms. AVID also provides guidance on what evidence to collect in order to demonstrate WICOR implementation. Some examples of this evidence were the use of organizational tools, use of AVID provided resources, evidence of professional learning related to WICOR, observation of classes where WICOR is being used, lesson plans, grade appropriate technology integration, and use of AVID note-taking strategies.

Systems. AVID references systems as those things which “support governance, curriculum and instruction, data collection and analysis, professional learning, and student and parent outreach to ensure improved academic performance for all AVID Elementary students on their pathway to college readiness” (AVID, 2017). The 15 indicators on the systems rubric are as follows:

- site plan;
- collaboration on access to rigorous curriculum;

- quality of implementation;
- grade-level vertical and horizontal articulation;
- academic support structures and rigorous instructional practices;
- grades of proficient or better;
- performance, enrollment, and/or staffing data;
- standardized test data and/or outcome data;
- AVID elementary SMART goals;
- AVID elementary assessments;
- training in AVID WICOR methodologies;
- AVID instructional methodologies;
- leadership training; and
- professional learning in AVID strategies and structures.

These 15 indicators were divided up into four areas of responsibility. The areas of responsibility are management of elementary implementation, access to rigor and appropriate supports for students on different academic levels, assessment of student progress, and professional learning. Management of elementary implementation was the responsibility of the AVID site team and was comprised of the first three indicators. Access to rigor and student support were the responsibility of the AVID site team and the principal and were indicators four and five. Assessment of student progress are indicators six through 11 and were measured in terms of the entire instructional staff. Lastly, professional learning was divided into two areas of responsibility. Indicators 12 and 13 belong to the AVID site team whereas 14 and 15 belong to the principal and other school administrators. Examples of evidence collected include student

report cards, student schedules, school strategic plan, common assessments, SMART goals, and AVID elementary assessment data.

Leadership. “Vision and tone that promote college readiness and high expectations for all students is the AVID definition of leadership” (AVID, 2017, p15). The leadership section of the rubric is parsed out into seven indicators. The indicators for leadership are:

- school mission and vision are aligned with AVID;
- communicate school mission and vision to stakeholders;
- school leadership team composition;
- AVID site team composition;
- leadership team and AVID site team collaboration;
- AVID is included in school/district budget; and
- barriers to access and equity.

Indicators one and two were related to the sub heading of college readiness and mission and vision. The third through fifth indicators are a measure of school progress of implementation as it relates to representative governance. Indicators six and seven are connected to a pathway to college readiness. All of the indicators in the leadership domain were measures to assess the school’s implementation of the AVID system. Sources of evidence for this domain were school mission and vision statement, master schedule, school/district budget, staff development logs, AVID site team documents, school leadership team documents, and school/district strategic plan.

Culture. AVID promotes a culture of “beliefs and behaviors which result in an increase of students continuing on their pathway to college readiness” (AVID, 2017, p.20). There are six indicators measured in the rubric for culture. The indicators are as follows:

- WICOR scaffolding and rigorous instructional practice;

- collaboration through PLCs;
- community activities;
- college awareness;
- college pennants and banners; and
- teacher expectations.

Rigor, community activities and college awareness, and college going environment are the three subdivisions of the culture rubric. Indicators one and two in the rigor sub-category are issues of what the school values. Indicators three and four in the community activities and college awareness sub-category are centered on promoting or sustaining a culture of college readiness. Finally, indicators five and six are in the college-going environment sub-category, and are tied to promoting or sustaining a college going culture. For this domain, PLC meeting agendas, classroom observations, school photos, student work samples, and classroom observations provided evidence to support effective implementation of the culture domain.

By using the AVID certification rubric, the school had a tool by which to examine its processes and short term goals. This rubric will also prove useful in providing information to answer many of the research questions. While considerable data was collected, only certain pieces were utilized in the overall program evaluation. For the purposes of the evaluation, it was necessary to dig deeply into a few critical pieces of data to attempt to show relationships and to be able to qualitatively describe how the implementation answered specific research questions. The rubric is used twice per school year, once at the beginning of the year and in the spring. For the purposes of this research, this rubric data was included in the evidence used to help answer the previously stated research questions.

For each domain, the AVID site team created goals, specifically for Central Intermediate School. These goals were determined by the school level team and were created collaboratively to address specific areas of need. These goals were created using the format of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time specific (SMART). Along with the AVID certification rubric, these SMART goals will provide measures of successful implementation.

Each goal is delineated according to the domain for which it connects, why the AVID site team selected the goal, and how and when goal attainment was measured. While these were initial goals, goals could have been added throughout the year as the AVID site team recognizes goal attainment, and realizes additional goals need to be established.

Instructional Goal

The AVID site team decided 80 percent of all students would be appropriately utilizing a binder and planner system by the spring of 2018. The binder system was modeled on AVID suggestions for best practice for organization, responsibility, and note-taking. AVID provided a rubric which was used to assess student binders three times over the course of the school year. The reason the team chose to have binders as a primary instructional goal was because of a recognized deficit in student organization, preparedness, and note-taking. Students were all informed prior to the start of school, regarding the requirements for their binders. Binders and binder supplies were also purchased by the school for any student who could not acquire the materials independently. The key components of the binder were pocket folders, dividers for each subject, paper, pencil pouch, pencils, highlighters, and a school supplied planner.

The idea behind the binder system was to streamline the process of student organization, planning, and note-taking. These skills are easy to take for granted but are essential to success for many students. In the past, it was assumed students would ultimately figure out a system

which worked for them. By leaving these basic but foundational systems to chance, the school essentially was setting some students up for failure. The AVID instructional goal of improving organization, planning, and note-taking was an intentional effort to give all students better access to high quality instruction. The thought process was, if a student can keep track of their learning materials, they have removed an obstacle from the studying process. Students were specifically taught how to use and organize their binder. The AVID site team created a video to show students how to organize their binder. This video was shown on the first day of school and was archived for use as students enroll later in the year. Students were also provided direct instruction about how to use their planner to daily record assignments and to keep track of when things are due. An important part of the binder process was the school-wide model for note-taking. Students were shown how to take simple two-column notes. These notes could vary from subject to subject in the information gathered, but in all cases an identical model was followed. At the top of the notes page, the course subject along with an essential question was written. In the left hand column an important concept or term was written. In the right hand column, the student could have recorded definitions, key attributes, or examples. Students were taught how to organize and take notes so they would have the necessary information to study and strengthen their learning.

The instructional goal of having 80 percent of students effectively using their binder was measured with an AVID provided rubric (Appendix B). The binder was assessed three times per year by an assigned teacher. For fifth graders, their science teacher checked the binder. For sixth graders either the student's social studies or gifted teacher checked the binder. While the binders are assessed three times per year, monthly checks were also encouraged to help students reorganize. The data from the binder assessments was tabulated in May of 2018 to see if the goal

was met and to also see the growth of efficient binder use throughout the year. This data was also useful in the broader research to understand how well the overall AVID system was implemented.

Systems Goal

The goal for the systems domain at Central Intermediate School was to have weekly PLC meetings to introduce and subsequently reinforce an AVID instructional strategy. The team decided, PLCs should begin the implementation of this goal after the first week of September. The intent of this goal was to carry the AVID strategies beyond those individuals who were trained during the summer by AVID. The structure of PLCs at Central Intermediate facilitated the implementation of this goal. All grade-level departments shared a minimum of 45 minutes of daily common planning time. Some departments have as much as 90 minutes daily and were able to meet as a school-wide department. School norms mandated all PLCs to meet at least two days per week for a minimum of 45 minutes per session.

Each PLC had at least one AVID trained individual who is a part of their team. The AVID site team, in their monthly meeting, set the priorities for the following month and helped provide training materials to the PLCs. Strategies from all of the four core domains were to be a part of the PLC training sessions. This goal was measured using PLC minutes and agendas, administrative observation, and reporting out during AVID site team meetings. Additionally, the goal was not considered successful if the discussed strategies were not present in the classrooms and through-out the school. To this end, classroom observation notes were also evidence for successful attainment of this goal. All data was reviewed by the AVID site team in May of 2018.

Leadership Goal

Leadership within the AVID process was not just about personnel, but rather about the idea of clear direction. The AVID site team determined the primary goal for the leadership domain was to revise and update the school's mission, vision, and core beliefs. The goal was attained if the school has a revised and fully articulated mission statement, vision statement, and statement of core beliefs by the end of May 2018. The intent of this goal was to rethink what the school was trying to accomplish and how the school could best serve all students. Since the overarching goal was to close the achievement gap, there needed to be a conscious consideration of the things the school values.

The AVID site team created an ancillary team specifically charged to work on this revision and restatement process. The mission/vision team's purpose was to take the lead in gathering information from multiple stakeholders and to craft a draft statement which can be shared with the faculty, students, parents, and community for input and further revision. The mission/vision team had access to previously administered student, parent, and faculty survey data. Also, the mission/vision team had the ability to create simple polls or questionnaires to elicit perceptions and feedback of various topics of concern. The team was comprised of the principal, an AVID site team member, and four other teachers from various disciplines.

The goal to revise the school's mission and vision statement was aligned with AVID's certification process. The process to achieve this goal also revealed some valuable information into the larger research question about the school's capacity to collaboratively address student needs. Minutes from the mission/vision team meetings along with the finished products were used as evidence in answering this research question.

Culture Goal

School culture has much to do with the interrelatedness of all things within the school. A school can do many things but the culture is driven by the things which are truly believed and practiced. The AVID site team believed a key component of students being successful at school would be having stronger relationships with parents and caregivers. The goal for the culture domain was to have two meaningful school to home events to help build relationships between families and the school. This goal was adding two additional events over and above any normally scheduled events like open house or awards day. The intent of this goal was to think creatively about how to connect with parents in a different way than the school has typically done and to specifically target parents who have been resistant to attending school activities.

By the end of May 2018, the school should have had at least two events, beyond regularly scheduled events, to connect school to home. These events included a variety of themes and information, but were relation-building in nature. The AVID site team created a home to school team to coordinate these events. This team was made of AVID site team members as well as several other teachers, and staff from throughout the school. The home to school team also collaborated with the school's PTO to have additional support and resources. The data collected to support goal attainment included sign-in sheets, agendas, photographs, notes from conversations, and observation notes. The AVID site team analyzed all of the available data related to this goal to determine effectiveness and to discuss improvements for further engagement with families.

Goal Summary

While the AVID site team goals are not the primary research questions, they do provide great insight into what the school is hoping to accomplish as it relates to the implementation. It

will be meaningful to consider if meeting the goals has a significant relationship to being able to answer the research questions. The processes to address the goals will provide data which can be used in attempting to evaluate the program as a whole. The following section on program evaluation will attempt to bridge the AVID site team's goals with the overarching questions stated which guide this research study.

Action Plan Implementation Costs

There are significant monetary and time commitments in implementing this action plan. The AVID system, while provided by the Central School District, costs \$14,000 for the initial year of implementation. This cost is broken down in training costs of \$9,000 including travel, a \$3,500 yearly program fee, and a \$500 one-time AVID library purchase. Other ongoing direct monetary costs include office supplies for production information to be disseminated within the school, and copies of assessment materials. These other costs will total approximately \$500 over the course of the school year. Time and labor costs are broken down by action item and goals. The school-wide implementation goals involve fifty-five professional staff for a minimum of 60 minutes per week. This is based upon a weekly PLC meeting to be trained on implementation strategies and time devoted to actual classroom implementation. Based upon 35 weeks of school, this totals 1,925 labor hours. Assuming a \$25 per hour labor rate, the labor cost for implementation is \$48,125. This brings the economic cost for implementation to \$62,625.

Evaluation Plan

At the end of ten months of implementation the following plan will be used to evaluate the action plan to implement AVID at Central Intermediate School. This implementation will be conducted to address the significant achievement gap between economically disadvantaged

students and non-economically disadvantaged students in this fifth and sixth grade school. The evaluation will be guided by the following questions:

1. Did the implementation of the AVID processes by the school site team contribute to a 15 percent increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring proficient in reading on MAAP at Central Elementary School?
2. Were 80 percent of economically disadvantaged students effectively engaged in the implemented AVID strategies?
3. What are the observed limits and problems to successful implementation of the AVID processes?
4. In what ways did organizational culture develop an increased capacity for stimulating positive change in student outcomes?

Question one is the primary evaluation question as it addresses the identified problem at Central Intermediate School. Questions two and three are supporting questions for the first question. Question four is an overarching question about the school's capacity to respond to student needs. While the primary research question seeks to know if achievement improved for ED students, the final question seeks to understand how the school grew in its collaborative capacity to enact change. From the standpoint of importance, all questions are interrelated and viable. Questions one and two are primarily outcome oriented. Questions three and four are very much process centered. Questions one and two are what happened while three and four are how it happened. For the purposes of this evaluation plan the evaluation questions can also be considered categorically. Question one is about improved student achievement. Question two is about effective student engagement. Question three relates to successful implementation.

Finally, question four deals with organizational capacity for growth. These categories will be utilized in the logic model for simplicity.

The evaluation will be discussed in terms of process, outcomes, and impact. In order to clarify what specifically will be considered in the evaluation, a logic model will be provided to visually illustrate what the intents of the action plan are for process, outcome, and impact. Further a chart of indicators of successful implementation will be provided with clarification of expected outcomes and data sources. The goal of this evaluation plan is to be a useful tool in clearly answering the evaluation questions as well as being easy for stakeholders to interpret the results.

Logic Model

The following is a description of the logic model for this evaluation plan. This model is broken down into four parts. First, are the stakeholders. For the purpose of this evaluation, the stakeholders are responsible for specific elements of the action plan. For this plan, the stakeholders being considered are teachers, students, site team, and administration. Next, are the processes. Processes are the activities engaged in by the stakeholders. These activities will be described briefly in the logic model, with a fuller explanation to be found in the action plan itself. Next, in the logic model, are the outcomes or the short-term goals. Outcomes are the expected results of the processes. A greater understanding of the outcomes can be seen in the indicators chart which follows the logic model. Lastly, impacts will be shown on the logic model. Impacts or long-range goals are the major results of the implementation of the plan. Since the overarching question is about student achievement, this impact will be shown outside the logic model. The other impacts which will be included within the model are effective student engagement, successful implementation, organizational capacity for growth.

Before displaying the logic model in table format, a description of each part of the plan will be discussed. There are four major groups of stakeholders or active participants being considered as a part of the action plan: students, instructional staff, AVID site team, and school administration. These groups also comprise the major stakeholders identified in the AVID certification process. During the implementation, each of these groups will be monitored in some way to determine participation, growth, and/or engagement with the action plan. The primary long-term goal or impact is for student achievement in reading, as measured by MAAP, to increase for ED students. The intent of this goal is to close the achievement gap with their non-ED peers. A secondary long-term goal for the implementation is to see 80 percent of the student population effectively engaged with the AVID strategies. Another long-term goal is to determine the fidelity of implementation by identifying the limits and problems encountered during the implementation process. Finally, the last long-term goal to be addressed is in what ways did the school grow in its collaborative capacity to enact positive change for student betterment. The logic model will seek to illustrate the connection between each of the stakeholder groups and the goals of the action plan by showing the processes implemented and their outcomes or short-term goals.

The specific processes identified in the logic model are representative of the suggested areas of implementation by AVID. The outcomes listed are the desired ends of the implementation of individual processes. For example, the process of students using an agenda planner daily to write down assignments is expected to help students be more responsible for keeping up with their assignments and better prepared for assessments. The logic model follows can be viewed in Appendix A.

Design of Plan

The evaluation plan for Central Intermediate School's implementation of AVID was designed to address the previously stated evaluation questions. The primary stakeholder groups addressed in this plan were the students, teachers, AVID site team, and school administration. These stakeholders were chosen because they formed the primary group involved in the implementation. Others such as parents, community members, and district administration also play a role but they were not considered in this evaluation, in an attempt to stay focused. The evaluation sought to answer the primary evaluation question related to student achievement and the closing of the achievement gap for ED students. The secondary questions were considered in relation to the primary question.

Outcomes were evaluated in relation to their stated impact areas. Did the desired outcomes actually happen? If they did not happen, then a deeper look into the processes needs to occur. So essentially this evaluation plan was established to work backward from the desired impact down through the outcomes to the processes. Upon a full analysis of the evaluation data, the information will be compiled into a report. This report will disseminate answers to the evaluation questions and provide detail about processes and outcomes in terms of recommendations for next steps.

Data Collection

The indicator chart (Figure 2) shows the types of data which were collected as a part of this evaluation plan. Some of the data was quantitative in nature while other will be qualitative. Meeting minutes and agendas was used as evidence for some outcomes. Classroom observations and time-on-task reviews were used to document effective engagement. Surveys were used to determine if students are engaged with the specific instructional activities related to a college-

going culture. Focus group data was used to consider the success of implementation and the organization's capacity for growth. MAAP reading scores were the means to answer the primary evaluation question. In addition to these artifacts, AVID also provided some data collection tools which were utilized. Specifically, the AVID binder checklist and the AVID certification rubric were considered.

The data was organized and compared to determine relationships and to describe how it answers the research questions. The change in achievement for a single cohort of students was measured with a simple *t*-test to determine if a significant difference exists in test scores from before implementation of AVID to after implementation. To determine if a relationship exists between the variables, MAAP scores were analyzed in relation to the level of observed student engagement with AVID strategies. Pearson's product moment correlation will be used to determine the correlation coefficient between these two variables. The focus group data for students and teachers will be categorized and coded to determine trends and to develop descriptions of stakeholders' beliefs about the implementation. Observation data was analyzed for trends and patterns to be coded for dissemination. Operational definitions and data sources can be seen in Appendix B.

Timeline

While the evaluation was summative in nature and commenced upon the completion of the action plan in August of 2018, information was being collected throughout the implementation process. Once IRB approval was obtained, collection of data, which was not specifically mandated by the school's normal protocols, began. The evaluation report was generated in February 2019. The following sections detail the results of data collection along with a summary of results and conclusions about the answers to the stated research questions.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Overview

The implementation of this applied action research study yielded a large amount of data related to the stated purpose of this plan, evaluation of the implementation of the action plan, and providing answers to the research questions. This chapter will provide specific examples of data collected and how the data was analyzed. Further, much data will be summarized to provide a greater understanding of how the action plan was evaluated. Summarization will be used where the data is extensive but deep discussion will not serve to clarify the outcomes of the implementation. Specific examples will be given when it is deemed essential to answering the research questions or establishing validity or reliability of the implementation.

The chapter is organized to refresh the reader's understanding of the purpose and process of this applied action design. The central tendency, purpose statement, and research questions will be revisited briefly in the first part of this chapter. Next will follow a discussion of program evaluation goals and measures along with an introduction of the data collected. In this section is where much of the data will be summarized with specific references included as deemed necessary for clarity. Next, a more exhaustive and detailed discussion is included to illustrate the data collection and analysis related to specifically answering the stated research questions. Finally, a general summary is provided for reference to provide a synopsis of data collection and analysis.

Purpose of Applied Action Research Plan

The implementation of the AVID processes at Central Intermediate School was primarily an attempt to address the persistent achievement gap between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-ED students. Further the action plan was implemented to support the school's capacity to quickly address needs for change. These joint purposes were addressed through four primary research questions. They are as follows:

1. Did the implementation of the AVID processes by the school site team contribute to a 15 percent increase in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring proficient in reading on MAAP at Central Intermediate School?
2. Were 80 percent of economically disadvantaged students effectively engaged in the implemented AVID instructional strategies?
3. What are the observed limits and problems to successful implementation of the AVID processes?
4. In what ways did organizational culture develop an increased capacity for stimulating positive change in student outcomes?

For each of these questions there are relevant data sets. Each piece of data collected reveals either direct quantitative information or it provides context for a greater narrative through a qualitative lens. This chapter will reveal the data collected with an objective analysis of how this data answers the primary research questions.

Research Question One

The first question asks whether the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students was closed by 15 percent during the first year of the AVID implementation. As the MAAP data reveals, there was no overall change in student proficiency for ED students in a single cohort

from year to year. Actually, the data shows the gap increased slightly in the first year of AVID implementation. The percent of ED students scoring in the proficient or better range stayed flat while the overall proficiency rate for the school increased slightly. There were modest gains for ED students scoring in the advanced range. This movement, it should be noted, is only within a group of students who were already scoring proficient. In the 2017 testing cycle, 33 percent of the 134 ED students tested were Levels 4 or 5. This third of the population represents the students who were considered proficient or better in reading. In the 2018 testing cycle, 33 percent of 130 students were Level 4 or Level 5. The primary difference seen between 2017 and 2018 was the shift of a greater percentage of students scoring a Level 5 in 2018. Nine percent (n=12) of students scored Level 5 in 2017 and 13 percent (n=17) scored a Level 5 in 2018.

Research Question Two

Question two seeks to know if at least 80 percent of ED students were effectively engaged in implemented AVID strategies. To answer this question several data sets were examined. While the question itself is a definitive quantitative question, the answer will include both quantitative and qualitative information. The primary data for answering this question came from data collected around usage of organizational binders, information gathered a college awareness survey, focus group interviews with students and teachers, and through teacher lesson plans and classroom observations.

AVID binders. All students in the school were expected to have and maintain a prescribed binder which were assessed three times via a rubric. The rubric was broken down into content, organization, and academic sections. Teachers looked at each student's binder and assessed the three primary categories to determine if students were effectively utilizing the binder system. The rubric was scored from three to zero. A three represented exceeding full

expectations. A two indicated the student met expectations. A one indicated some progress or effort but improvement was still needed. A zero indicated a missing component or no effort. All students, regardless of economic status, were expected to keep and utilize a binder system. All three binder checks were completed on a single rubric sheet. Rubric sheets were collected at the end of the year and divided, by administration, into ED and non-ED students. Teachers who graded the rubrics were not provided information as to the economic status of any student. In the following table (Table 1), data is provided to illustrate how ED and non-ED students alike participated in using the organizational binders.

Table 1

Count, Percent, and Average score on binders for ED and non-ED students for Fall, Winter, and Spring Assessments

<u>Assessment Period</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>% of N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall ED	251	78	2.74
Fall non-ED	271	83	2.76
Winter ED	258	80	2.72
Winter non-ED	258	79	2.75
Spring ED	271	84	2.72
Spring non-ED	268	82	2.71

This study examined how many ED students were effectively engaged with the binder system. Since the rubrics had been disaggregated by economic status, it was relatively simple to determine the results for ED students independently of their non-ED peers. In the fall of 2017, 251 ED students presented binders to be scored. In the winter, 258 ED student binders were

assessed. Finally, in May 2018, 271 ED student binders were assessed. During the year of implementation, the total count of ED students was 323. In the assessment periods there were respectively 78, 80, and 84 percent of ED students engaged enough with the binder system to have binders to be scored. The mean score for the binders, in the spring assessment for all categories combined was 2.72.

By May 2018 of the action plan implementation period, over 80 percent of ED students were effectively engaged in the binder organizational system. No student scored below a two on their overall binder rubric when all three categories were averaged. Students showed the most trouble with the organization element of their binder assessment with the mean score being 2.5. There was no difference between scores on the content and academic sections. Both means for these areas were 2.8. The mean scores were further analyzed to determine if there was any significant change between assessment periods. An analysis of variance demonstrated there was no significant difference between scores from fall, winter, or spring.

The primary consideration of looking at the rubric scores for each category was to see if students grew or at least remained stable in their usage of the binder system. Knowing the differences between ED and non-ED student scores was helpful in understanding if the AVID implementation was consistently applied. There does not appear to be any significant difference between ED and non-ED student scores for any assessment period or on any specific category of the rubric. Table 2 shows comparative data between ED and non-ED students for each rubric category.

Table 2

Breakdown of Binder Assessment Rubric Score by Category and Economic Status for Fall, Winter and Spring

<u>Assessment period</u>	<u>Academic Sections</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Content</u>
Fall ED	2.87	2.51	2.88
Fall non-ED	2.87	2.50	2.90
Winter ED	2.81	2.51	2.84
Winter non-ED	2.82	2.51	2.86
Spring ED	2.83	2.53	2.81
Spring non-ED	2.81	2.51	2.85

College awareness survey. A survey (Appendix C) was administered to inventory student awareness, understanding, and perceptions about college. One of the primary AVID implementation goals is to create a college going culture. To stimulate this goal there were activities and presentations organized around the theme of college awareness. This survey was offered to all students in the school without regard to economic standing. The survey was given anonymously and asking questions about economic standing was not deemed appropriate. The survey provided information for the school site team to ascertain areas of relatively high and low awareness around college issues. This survey was made available for all students, but it was voluntary for students to participate. A total of 568 students started the survey. The mean response rate per question was 550 students. At the time the survey was given, there were 650 students in the school producing an 85 percent response rate of the overall student population. Since there were 323 ED students in the school, it can be assumed a minimum of 69 percent of

all ED students participated. This assumption is predicated upon all non-participants being ED students. It is actually assumed the percentage of ED students participating is closer to the school-wide rate of 85 percent.

Lesson plans and classroom observations. Lesson plans and classroom observations were also evaluated to measure student engagement. Teachers were provided a lesson plan template to use during the implementation period which allowed teachers to specifically indicate specific AVID strategies to be included in their weekly lessons. Teachers worked within their PLCs to create team lesson plans and to discuss strategies to be included. Observation of lesson plans indicated teachers consistently planned to include AVID instructional strategies into their lessons. Classroom observations then were made to specifically look for planned activities. During the implementation period 91 classroom observations were conducted to look for implemented AVID strategies. In 91 percent of observations, either the previously planned strategy or another recognized AVID strategy was observed being utilized with students. In nine percent of the observations no recognizable AVID strategy was being used.

Student focus group. In order to get a good cross-section of students for the student focus group the following protocol was utilized. A list was generated of all ED students from the sixth grade at Central Intermediate School. The population size for this list was 167 students. Each student was assigned a number from one to 167. An online random number generator was used to select ten numbers from the total population. These ten students then became the sample group who represented the ED sub-group population. Within the sample group there was demographic diversity. There were three boys and seven girls in the focus group. Two students were Caucasian, seven were African American, and one was a Latino. During the focus group

interview all students contributed at least one response. Questions were centered around student engagement with the AVID processes.

Students were questioned about the implemented AVID processes. All students in the focus group noted knowledge and use of the organizational binder system. All students indicated an awareness of what AVID is. One student responded AVID was a program to help students go to college. Another student indicated AVID was a help for students to make better grades. One other student stated AVID helped her be more organized. Students were asked to discuss what they had seen or experienced related to the AVID implementation. Students were asked specifically about implemented strategies related to organization, instruction, and college/career awareness. Students discussed how the binders helped keep them organized. One student indicated he did not use the daily planner portion of his binder. He stated the reason for not using his daily planner was because sometimes he forgot and because he felt as though he could remember his assignments without writing them down. All other students stated they used the daily planner each day to write down assignments and upcoming projects and tests. Students were asked about the use of classroom management, note-taking, reading instruction, collaborative work, and formative assessment. Themes emerged from the student responses. Students were most aware of and able to identify classroom management strategies and note-taking processes being used by their teachers. Students seemed less clear about collaborative work and formative assessment. All students acknowledged teachers having students work in groups but only two would provide specific examples of collaborative work. Again when given a list of examples, all students said their teachers use formative assessments frequently. No student was prepared to give specific examples of when these formative assessments occurred in his/her

classroom. All students remembered at least one example of college/careers being a focus of either their classroom or of the school.

Research Question Three

Research question three involves looking at the observed limits and problems related to the implementation of the AVID processes. This question is a key element in understanding the program evaluation and will help in refining the implementation in subsequent years. Much of the data already discussed will be reintroduced here along with a bit of discussion from conversations, meetings, and observations. The limits and problems with this implementation deal mostly with limited training, unclear goals, and fidelity to the processes.

Training issues. As a school-wide initiative, there was a need for all stakeholders to be engaged and participatory in the implementation. There was substantial communication about the implementation and the rationale for it, but only a select group of faculty were able to be formally trained. Prior to beginning the action plan in the fall of 2017, nine teachers and two administrators were sent for formal training on AVID processes. These nine faculty members represent 20 percent of the teacher population at Central Intermediate School. This left 80 percent of teachers without formal training. The summer training was not completed until late July with the implementation to begin in early August, as school started. The nine trained teachers were a cross-section of the school and represented most PLCs in the school. Conceptually, the trained teachers would go back into their respective PLCs and train the other teachers on the AVID processes. This concept was supported by a goal of having weekly PLC meetings with the explicit purpose of AVID training.

PLC agendas, leadership meetings, and informal conversations all pointed to a similar problem. Everyone had good intentions, but AVID training in PLCs was sporadic at best. The

most often cited reason for a failure to teach AVID processes within the PLC was because “we have so many other things to do.” These other things included creating assessments, data analysis, conversations about students, and planning instruction. According to the teachers who participated in the focus group, faculty members were having a difficult time seeing AVID as a support to their instruction and saw it more as an additional duty in their workday.

Unclear goals. During the summer training, before the fall implementation, the school leadership team developed specific goals for the first year of implementation of AVID processes. These goals were shared with all stakeholders through faculty meetings, parent engagement nights, and in classroom conversations with students. A problem arose because while goals had been articulated, they were not repeated and reinforced after about a month into the implementation process. There was an absence of discussion of AVID goals in PLC meetings, leadership meetings, and school-wide faculty meetings. Most of the discussion recorded in meeting minutes had to do with implementation of strategies without a clear tie to a specific goal. In the faculty focus group each person was asked about the school-wide goals for implementation and only the AVID coordinator knew in detail what those goals were.

Fidelity to processes. A final major implementation problem was the lack of consistent application of prescribed AVID strategies and processes throughout the school. Though classroom observations, lesson plans, conversations, and focus group interviews indicated most teachers were using AVID strategies in their instruction, there was also evidence of inconsistency in how these processes were being implemented and utilized. One of the school goals during the implementation was to have 80 percent of students effectively utilizing the organizational binder by the spring. Teachers were given rubrics to assess student binders. Binder checks were scheduled and to be administered school-wide during a specific time-frame.

When binder rubrics were collected at the end of the year there were significant discrepancies in how the process was administered. There should have been a binder assessment sheet collected for every student in the building, but eight percent of students did not have an assessment sheet in the final count. The rubric sheets were inconsistently assessed. Teachers had different methods of marking the rubric. This inconsistency created some frustration in compiling the data from the rubrics. Further the inconsistency pointed to mixed messages students likely received about their effective use of the binder.

There were other areas where lack of fidelity was also noted. As mentioned earlier, PLCs were not conducting weekly training sessions on AVID processes. Small teams were created to address specific areas of the action plan. These teams were to meet regularly to address their specific concerns. The agendas and minutes for these teams show an irregularity in meeting dates and times and failures to follow-up on their assigned tasks. One team was the college-going culture team. This team was assigned the task of developing activities and ideas to promote students to start thinking about college. By winter, this team had not implemented any activities around a college-going culture.

Training issues, unclear goals, and inconsistency rose to the top as the primary factors which led to implementation problems and limitations. In focus group interviews, teachers pointed to a lack of training as being the primary limitation to successful implementation of the action plan. Through observation, review of meetings, focus group interviews, and conversations it became apparent how obscure goals and infidelity to the processes also limited the success of the action plan.

Research Question Four

In what ways did organizational culture develop an increased capacity for stimulating positive change in student outcomes? The data collected to inform the answer to this research question is qualitative. Certainly there are quantitative elements and underpinnings, but this particular question requires the most narrative to answer. Focus groups, analysis of observation data, PLC agendas and minutes, personal observation, outcomes from implementation goals, and anecdotal evidence contribute to answer this question.

Focus groups. The faculty focus group was comprised of the school's leadership team. The school's leadership team is also considered the AVID site team. This focus group was non-random in its selection because these individuals were trained in AVID processes and were the primary persons responsible for ensuring the school-wide implementation of the processes. For this study, these individuals would be closest to the data, decisions, and changes made. Three primary themes emerged related to organizational culture from the faculty focus group. The first theme was an improved shared decision making model. Next, the group discussed greater teacher ownership of impacting school-wide change. The final theme which emerged was the idea of the need for continuous improvement.

Shared decision making. Prior to the implementation of AVID there was a school leadership team, but it lacked focus or a clear vision of its purpose. In the interviews with the AVID site team, each member stated their role of personal involvement in setting school-wide goals and truly having a voice. There was discussion around how one of the goals had been to create a new mission and vision statement. One member of the focus group stated "It makes me proud to know we are going to create a new mission statement, because I feel like it will help us keep a focus on where we want to go with our school." The group talked about the importance

of their site team meetings in sharing successes and pushing out information to PLCs. The group also discussed the formation of smaller teams throughout the school which involve all faculty members. There was consensus, as to how the AVID implementation had encouraged more people within the school to assume leadership over something. One person noted how for them AVID, “encourages me to be involved and not just let everything just happen to me.”

Teacher ownership. This theme shares some similarity to shared leadership, but also some distinct differences. The focus group discussed how every teacher is a member of some support team. While not every person is active in leading, all are involved. There were reoccurring words and phrases like, “owns, involvement, engagement, knowledge, awareness, and responsible.” The focus group respondents shared feelings about how much more “cohesive” the school felt because of the implementation of AVID.

Observational data. Data was gleaned from both classroom observations and observation of the school environment. Classroom observations focused primarily on instructional strategies being implemented. Over the course of the implementation period there were several types of classroom observations. Classrooms were observed in traditional walk-throughs and formal evaluations utilizing the Mississippi Educator Performance Growth System rubric. Classrooms were further observed using a national accreditation company’s student engagement rubric. Finally, observations were conducted with a school created tool to check for implementation of specific AVID strategies. The use of different rubrics allowed administrators to capture different types of data. While only one tool was specifically designed to capture data around the action plan implementation, the others allow for scripting of classroom interactions. The scripts of classroom interaction also provided some valuable information and helped identify trends.

Classroom observations yielded evidence of implementation of AVID strategies. The strategies can be broken down into categories. Instruction, and college and career awareness are the major categories of data collected. Instruction was broken down into writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading. College and career awareness involved in-class and whole school activities designed to promote a college-going culture.

Data Summary

Quantitative analysis was the primary focus of answering research questions one and two. Qualitative data formed the foundation of questions three and four. Individual pieces of data were examined for insight into the program evaluation. Since the implementation had many different components, it was critical to look at data both in aggregate and in its disaggregated form. The disaggregated data revealed critical areas of related to goal attainment. The aggregated data provided an overall picture of the entire AVID implementation and its perceived success.

As discussed in chapter three, some pieces of data were reviewed but not specifically mentioned in the final analysis because those pieces did not serve to clarify the program goals or answer the research questions. It is important to note though, no data was withheld which would have discredited this research or created a different set of conclusions. The following chapter will seek to establish the conclusions and recommendations associated with the data collected.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The primary purpose of this research was to implement an action plan to improve the academic outcomes for economically disadvantaged (ED) students. The intent was to implement AVID processes and systems to reduce the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students by 15 percent. As the data demonstrated, the primary goal was not achieved. There are reasons though to be optimistic. Although there was no statistical improvement in ED students scoring proficient or better, there was movement within the ED subgroup of students moving from proficient to advanced. Also, the final research question dealt with growth in organizational capacity for change. The school showed great growth in a number of areas which, if continued, will likely lead to improvements in the areas of academic achievement. This chapter will discuss the impact of the implementation of the action plan, the overall gains, and recommendations for continued implementation. As in chapter four, focus will be given to the primary research questions and the conclusions made about each.

Closing the Gap

There is no argument to be made for success in closing the achievement gap by 15 percent with the implementation of this action plan, at least not in a single year. The purpose of implementing AVID was to address the achievement gap. The data indicated flat growth for student achievement in reading during the first year of implementation. Although this can be seen as failure of the implementation, there is also reason to see it as a win. First, often there is an implementation dip for achievement scores associated with new program initiation (Fullan, 2010). There was no dip with the implementation of AVID. Secondly, while the achievement

gap did not show any change from 2017-2018 it is important to note some ED students grew beyond a year's worth of growth. From year to year it is expected and normal for students to show a year's worth of growth in their tested content. This is because a year's worth of new content has been taught and as such the students should be able to demonstrate a year's worth of progress on their end of course assessment. Since nine percent of ED students were Level in 2017 and 13 percent were Level 5 in 2018, it can be concluded the higher percentage of students in 2018 actually grew beyond one year. Essentially, had the percentages of Level 4 and Level 5 remained the same, it could be said all ED students simply experienced a year's worth of growth. Some students within the sub-group grew from Level 4 to Level 5 this means their growth exceeded normal projections of a single year. It appears the goal for a 15 percent reduction in the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students was simply too ambitious for the first year of implementation. Conclusions and recommendations for future goals and actions will be discussed later in this chapter.

Engagement with Implemented Strategies

The data collected seemed to indicate students were engaged with the implemented strategies. The research question asked if 80 percent of ED students were actively engaged with the implemented strategies? Since the implementation was not limited to ED students some data sources were not discriminant of economic status. Observations, lesson plans, and the college awareness survey were not segregated by any sub-group. Organizational binders and student focus group were separated into an ED sub-group. Since students are arranged in classrooms in heterogeneous groups, there was a desire to attempt to ensure best practices were being equally administered to all students. Central Intermediate School does not make it a practice for teachers

to know who their ED students are. The intent is for teachers to hold the same expectations for all students without regard to economic standing.

School-wide data implications. Students were definitely exposed to AVID strategies and processes during the implementation process. The question focused on students being effectively engaged. The question at hand centered around a quantitative analysis. Were 80 percent of ED students effectively engaged? Classroom observations, lesson plans, and the college awareness survey all seem to indicate an affirmative answer. Since teachers were expected to use a prescribed lesson plan template, there is ample evidence for most lessons being created with AVID instructional strategies in mind. Teachers indicated their intent to use no fewer than a dozen different strategies during the implementation period. The classroom observations verify the use of these strategies. Every classroom observation did not provide evidence of a prescribed AVID strategy. Of the 91 observations conducted, primarily to look for AVID strategies at work, roughly 91 percent of the time these strategies were observed. This is remarkable considering the observations were unannounced walk-throughs and typically lasted less than 15 minutes. In a short walk-through observation, it is entirely possible the administrator simply was not present in the classroom when an AVID strategy was being utilized in the other nine percent of classes.

For the college awareness survey, 85 percent of the student population participated and answered questions about their knowledge and perceptions about college. Our target was to have at least 80 percent of ED students engaged. Since this was an anonymous survey, there is no way to be certain 80 percent of the ED student population participated. If it were assumed all of the non-respondents on the survey were ED students, it could then be concluded 69 percent of the 323 ED students participated. There is no real reason to think all non-respondents were ED

students. It is more reasonable to conclude, since the survey was administered voluntarily and anonymously to all students, the participation rate for ED students falls closer to the school-wide rate of 85 percent participation. It is the position of this research, the willingness for students to voluntarily participate in the college awareness survey at a rate of 85 percent indicates effective engagement.

Segregated ED data. The data collected from the student focus group and binder rubrics was separated according to economic standing. This separation was done in such a way so students, their response, or their rubrics were not treated any differently because of their economic status. Teachers nor students were made aware of any intentional distinct observations of data related to economic status. Teachers were instructed to teach all students and classes the exact same way and to assess binders based upon a standard rubric for all students. Students were exposed to AVID strategies and binders in heterogeneous settings. The separation of groups came after exposure to the implementation of the action plan. Assessed rubrics were separated by the primary researcher into ED and non-ED groups. The focus group of ED students was selected after students had been exposed to the implemented action plan. Students were only told they were going to be asked about AVID. There was never any mention of economic status.

The binder rubric assessment revealed strong evidence of effective engagement with ED students. With three assessment periods, there were over 80 percent of ED students who had binders scored in the third and final assessment period. In addition, the binder assessments not only showed a large percentage of ED engagement, but actually showed considerable growth in students presenting binders to be scored. There were 20 more ED students in the spring than in the fall who had binders assessed. Of these, the mean overall score was 2.72 for the spring

assessment. A score of three indicated exceeding expectations and a score of two met expectations. So a mean score of greater than 2.5 indicates a very high level of engagement and utilization. Further, the mean scores for all binder assessments showed no significant difference between assessment periods. On first blush, this may seem to indicate a negative factor, but the contrary is actually suggested by this data. First of all, the mean scores for the binder assessment were consistently over 2.5 for all three assessments. Secondly, students were explicitly taught how to use and utilize their binder prior to the first assessment. Apparently, according to the high rubric scores, student's set-up their binders appropriately prior to the fall assessment. Since the scores did not dip and actually increased slightly by the spring assessment, there is strong evidence to suggest students continued to maintain and utilize their binders appropriately.

Student focus group. The ED student focus group yielded specific information about aspects of the implementation which were most engaging and effective. When asked about what AVID is or what it is about, students responded with answers about it helping to go to college and helping students be organized with their school-work. These responses were repeated by multiple respondents in the focus group interview. All students indicated they had and used their organizational binder. Nine of ten students responded affirmatively when asked if they use their agenda planner regularly. Students were asked about instructional strategies such as one-pagers, word walls, philosophical chairs, close reading, and call and response. All students indicated they were familiar with these classroom strategies.

Not all implemented strategies appeared to have equal effect in engagement. When asked about college and career awareness activities ED students were more likely than not to respond of being unaware of such activities. Once the questions were more specific, such as about a career fair held during implementation, all ED students indicated they remembered this event.

From the interviews it was concluded ED students were less engaged with activities which were viewed as being non-instructional. Special events, special days, teacher bulletin boards, and classroom door displays were mentioned less by students as being impactful on their school experience.

In summary, the ED student focus group provided insight to the areas students perceived connection to the implemented plan. Activities which were classroom based, directly related to instruction, or centered on their organizational binder appeared to have effective engagement from students. Those activities which were one-time events or designed to impact school culture were less mentioned by students as being engaging. The perceived lack of significance of certain activities could be the result of an implementation failure or simply because of the way the activities were designed. Activities related to school culture or college awareness were created to be integrated into ongoing school processes and functions. It will be worth exploring further if these activities truly become a part of the school's identity or if they fade because of a lack of connectedness to stated values. This particular question leads well into the next section related to implementation problems.

Recognized Implementation Problems

According to the data gathered, three main themes emerged as problems with the implementation of this action plan. Limited training, unclear goals, and lack of fidelity to processes appear as the fundamental issues limiting success. Each of these items were intertwined and impacted one another. Identification of these issues was critical in developing ideas and strategies to improve this and future implementations. These problems can be further linked to limited resources available at the time of the implementation. As with every school and district, Central Intermediate had limits on how much time and money could be allocated to the

implementation of AVID. Resource limitations certainly played significant factor in the number of trained individuals. Also, since AVID was implemented rather rapidly, there were limitations on the time available to “sell” the implementation to the larger school community. With more time, more buy-in could have occurred and thus greater understanding and greater fidelity.

Training issues. Ten people from Central Intermediate were sent to Denver, Colorado for training in AVID processes at the end of July of 2017. This training exposed the team to AVID fundamentals, AVID success stories, and practical ideas for implementation. Focus group participants, who attended the summer training indicated how important it had been for them to be taught by AVID experts. The idea had been to send a strong cross-section of teachers to the summer training and then have those teachers train others through our professional learning communities (PLCs). Differences were seen between the formally trained teachers and those who were secondarily trained. These differences were noted in classroom observations, PLC discussions, and site team meetings. Teachers who were formally trained were quicker to implement instructional strategies, were more likely to remind students about their organizational binder, and were the primary speakers in PLCs in discussing the AVID implementation.

Unclear goals. While the AVID site was in training they began working on the school-wide implementation goals. These goals were brought back and shared with the school about a week and half later. School started approximately three days later. The timing of the training did not allow for much opportunity to communicate goals and priorities before faculty and staff were immersed in the activities of the start of school. There is evidence through emails, faculty meeting minutes, and PLC agendas of communication of the implementation goals. When the site team participated in their focus group, they were questioned about the goals. Only the site

team leader could fully articulate all of the goals. Once she stated the goals, others began discussing how these things had been happening in the school.

After a month into the school year, as the evidence suggests, PLCs stopped talking about the over-arching goals of the AVID implementation. There was continued discussion about specific strategies, but no discussion about goals. The ramifications of failure to focus on the stated goals continued to foster inconsistency in the message communicated to students. Classroom observations varied in how teachers talked about AVID strategies. The biggest issue with a lack of clear focus was the danger of the AVID implementation simply becoming a list of things to do versus the pursuit of well-defined goals.

Lack of fidelity to processes. Since the goal focus was not strong and training for faculty/staff was limited, AVID processes were administered and taught inconsistently. In classroom observations and PLC agendas there was substantial evidence to suggest teachers had good intentions in their efforts to implement AVID. What often transpired was different approaches and focuses when implementing instructional strategies or school-wide plans. For example, when analyzing binder assessment rubrics different teachers took different approaches. One teacher provided substantial feedback to students about their binder while another teacher simply indicated a score. Another example is how teachers implemented specific instructional strategies such as word walls. One teacher demonstrated a concerted effort to ensure students were engaging with the strategy by including vocabulary in their bell-work. Another teacher simply had the word wall posted and referenced it occasionally. Both of these examples seem to flow from a lack of deep training and failure to provide enough emphasis on goals. Teachers did not always seem to understand how specific strategies contributed to the greater goals of the AVID implementation.

Building Organizational Capacity

While the overarching goal of this action plan was to improve student achievement, there was also an understanding of the need for an organizational culture shift. Central Intermediate School had demonstrated the capacity to move some students to the highest levels of academic achievement. What was needed was an increased capacity to move all students to the highest levels of achievement. The fourth research question specifically asked, “how did the implementation of AVID increase organizational capacity to improve student outcomes?” The answer to this question may be the most important part of this study. The evidence seems to indicate the implementation of AVID created a high level of student engagement, a high level of engagement with faculty and staff, and marked changes in the school culture. From previous discussion, research question two gave insight into the level of student engagement. It was concluded, at least 80 percent of ED students were effectively engaged with AVID strategies. Faculty/staff were engaged as well. Beyond the 10 members of the AVID site team who were formally trained, there were multiple ways other faculty/staff were involved in the AVID implementation. There is strong evidence to suggest all faculty/staff were at least moderately involved in the implementation, with most being actively engaged. Due to the high levels of student and faculty/staff engagement, there were notable culture shifts within the school. Culturally speaking, the school began to feel more relational and focused on students’ futures. It became particularly evident the school had become more focused on exposing students to college and future careers.

Faculty/Staff engagement. The evidence around student engagement has been discussed, but what about teachers and support staff? First, it is important to understand, student engagement did not happen by accident. Teachers, administrators, and other support staff were

the primary implementers of AVID processes. PLC minutes, site team minutes, and observational data all reveal a great deal of purpose and discussion around the AVID implementation. There were specific goals set for systems, leadership, instruction, and culture. The AVID system goal was to have a weekly PLC meeting dedicated to introducing and reinforcing an AVID instructional strategy. The leadership goal was to develop, implement, and articulate a new mission and vision for Central Intermediate School. The instructional goal was to have 80 percent of students appropriately utilizing the organizational binder system by Spring of 2018. Finally, the cultural goal was to have two meaningful school-to-home events to build positive relationships with families. The only goal which was not fully attained was the AVID system goal of weekly PLC meetings with an AVID training focus. Agendas and minutes from PLC meetings showed inconsistency in introducing and reinforcing AVID instructional strategies. PLC data from all departments did show evidence of discussing AVID strategies, but it seems this is a specific example of where implementation problems around goals and training effected success.

The full attainment of three out of four goals, indicates a great deal of faculty/staff engagement. A new mission, vision, and core values statement was created and implemented. Elements of the core values are announced regularly over the intercom during morning announcements. The development of this statement came through the work of a dedicated team comprised of teachers, administrators, students, and parents. As with the mission and vision, meeting the goal of 80 percent of students appropriately using their binder organization system required a collaborative effort. There was a team created to develop a video and a document detailing proper initial organization. All first period teachers dedicated time during the first week of school to ensuring every child had a binder and the proper contents. Administration and

office staff ensured adequate supplies were available to provide students with supplies if needed. Throughout the year, as new students arrived, the counselor and office staff would provide the binder and supplies along with instruction on how to utilize the system. The organizational system expectations were shared through the school website, social media, and email so parents were kept involved in the process. Keeping parents involved and engaged was the heart of the cultural goal. Having after-hours activities with families required commitment from our faculty/staff. There were several events held during the year which met the cultural goal. There was a family game night, an AVID family night to share what AVID looks like at the middle school and high school, and there was a summer camp showcase night. Each of these events were coordinated by a team dedicated to home and school connections. Multiple faculty/staff were involved in development and execution of these events. These events also involved community partnerships.

Faculty/staff engagement was demonstrated throughout the first year of AVID implementation. There were breakdowns at times related to consistency, but there is evidence of all faculty/staff being involved in the implementation on some level. For example, at the start of school in 2017 every classroom and office door was designed to represent a mock Facebook wall. The design was to allow faculty/staff to create a door which introduced themselves to students. The door design was to include background information like college, past jobs, and family. While this door design project further illustrates faculty/staff engagement, it also points to the cultural shifts which occurred.

Culture changes. The cultural changes involved the school starting to move in one direction. Having consistent door designs may seem a small step, but it was indicative of a subtler and more impactful change. Through intentional and purposeful planning, the school's

AVID site team started providing more guidance on specifics around collective school-wide activity. Door designs were a small step but it was a step toward a unified direction. Instead of every teacher just doing what they felt best, the site team provided leadership and vision around common goals. While the goals were at times unclear to some teachers, the activities and actions led by the site team were more clear and intentional. The primary evidences of cultural change were instructional unity, shared responsibility, and college and career awareness activities.

Instructional unity. Instructional unity is meant to represent the attitudes and intents of teachers to implement and utilize a common set of instructional practices. Being unified in intent did not always result in uniformity in application or results. Each of the following examples demonstrates how there was a collaborative intent to follow a unified approach to teaching and learning. Teachers were provided with a new lesson plan template which included a place to indicate AVID instructional strategies to be included in the lesson. All teachers started using this template immediately at the start of the school year. Classroom observations yielded evidence of utilization of planned strategies. During the implementation, teachers were provided instruction on the implementation of a specific strategy for each quarter. These strategies were observed being implemented throughout the school irrespective of subject or grade-level. During a specific quarter, a prescribed note-taking method was implemented. During classroom observations, the method was observed in a math class, a music class, a reading class, and a science class. Finally, the implementation and utilization of the organizational binders was school-wide. All of these efforts demonstrated a willingness to move toward a collective agreement on implementation of instructional best practices.

Shared responsibility. Instructional unity only reveals part of the changes observed at Central Intermediate School. Prior to implementation there was a leadership team who served

and met at the discretion of the principal. The AVID site team was selected by the principal, but the team was empowered to develop its own agenda and priorities. The principal still served on the site team but delegated leadership to all team members. The team determined it was necessary to meet every two-weeks for the first quarter of the school year and at least monthly thereafter. The site team established its own agenda with input from all members.

The site team created smaller teams centered around the school's primary goals for systems, leadership, instruction, and culture. These teams varied in function from working on the school's mission to being in charge of college awareness activities. The site team decided every faculty/staff would be a member of at least one team. A Google form was created and distributed school-wide for people to choose their own area of interest. All faculty/staff were then assigned to a team or teams. Each team had a least one site team member on it so monthly reports could be made to the site team about actions and progress. Site team members stated in their focus group interviews how the school-wide teams had contributed to a greater buy-in for the AVID implementation. It was further discussed how having everyone being part of a team made the AVID implementation ingrained in the culture of the school versus just being a program.

Another way shared responsibility impacted the school culture was evidenced by the desire of those who wished to be sent to further training in the summer of 2018. Teachers and support staff seemed to see the value of the AVID implementation as the requests to be sent to summer training exceeded the available spots. The school was able to send eight new individuals to be officially trained, but many more requested to be included in subsequent years. Through conversations and PLC meetings, it was discovered teachers and staff felt the AVID implementation had brought the school together with a more unified purpose. It was also

conveyed, how AVID made everyone feel important in the process of making a positive impact on student outcomes.

College and career activities. Central Intermediate School is a fifth and sixth grade school. Prior to AVID implementation, there had been little to no intentional thought given to exposing students to college. There had been occasional career days but these were done in isolation from other educational activities. With the implementation of AVID, the school began thinking and talking about college and careers differently. The site team created a dedicated team to develop a college-going culture. Evidence of this shift was demonstrated in school-wide displays, teacher-initiated college and career instruction, and a student-led college fair.

The college going culture team worked with the school's social studies teachers to have students from these classes find different colleges and universities from across the country and then have the students create college banners. The banners were then hung around the school. The purpose of this activity was to create interest and awareness of various options. Other displays were visible on classroom and office doors. These door displays varied from the mock Facebook displays, colleges teachers attended, and spotlights on a career. Students were observed, on multiple occasions, standing outside a teacher's classroom reading their door display. Throughout the year, it was college t-shirt Tuesday. On every Tuesday, teachers and staff wore college t-shirts and jeans. Jeans seemed to build morale with teachers and the college t-shirts were to spark discussion. From the time someone walked through the front door of the school it was obvious college was a major theme. The rationale for this emphasis was primarily to reach ED students whose outside exposure to college is most likely limited.

One of the more notable demonstrations of the impact of a change in culture around college and career came from a fifth grade science teacher. This science teacher approached the

principal with the idea of incorporating some college and career curriculum into her prescribed science curriculum. The teacher used the rationale of teaching the whole child. Her argument centered on preparing students for their future not just a state assessment in science. She further presented a plan and subsequent measures for accountability. The agreement reached included, allowing the science teacher to teach college and career themes on Fridays for 45 minutes of her 90-minute class. The teacher included topics around college admissions, ACT, different types of post-secondary education, job applications, interviews and career pathways. There were two culminating events which were to demonstrate student growth in these areas. First, the students participated in mock job interviews. Second, the students attended a student led college fair to explore colleges.

The job fair was a joint endeavor with the fifth grade science teacher and the sixth grade intellectually gifted teachers. The science teacher reached out to the gifted teachers and asked if the gifted students would put together a college fair for the science teacher's students.

Approximately 100 intellectually gifted sixth graders researched about 50 colleges and universities. Students discovered information about colleges such as entrance requirements, predominate fields of study, costs to attend, and athletic opportunities. The sixth graders then created displays of the information. Students wrote to their selected school and obtained promotional materials which could be shared during the fair. The college fair was held during a regular school day with students coming to the library during regular instructional time to either present their information or visit the fair. Fifth graders who attended the fair were required to gather specific information from a minimum of five colleges.

From the standpoint of culture change, the college and career emphasis of Central Intermediate School was very impactful. College displays were evident throughout the building.

Teacher led initiatives were meaningful in introducing students to themes never before seen in the school. These initiatives were also successful in creating cross-curricular partnerships which had not happened before. Finally, the impact of peer to peer interaction and collaboration cannot be underestimated in its ability to engage learners.

Increased instructional unity, a greater sense of responsibility for shared leadership, and strong evidence for a shift toward college and career focus all indicate a cultural change at Central Intermediate School. While it could be argued, AVID implementation was not the sole reason for this change, it seems clear the processes and structures of AVID contributed to a growth in organizational capacity for improved student outcomes. These changes for school-wide improvement need to be fostered and cultivated through a continuation of the good things which have been started.

Suggestions for Continued Growth

For growth and improvement to continue, it is recommended the school and district continue with the AVID implementation. It is further recommended for the school to look closely at the areas which were successful and those areas which presented problems. Success areas are springboards to more success. Problem areas can be targets of focused improvement. It is suggested the school focus on continuing the emphasis on the organizational binder system, college and career awareness, and instructional strategies associated with the best practices of AVID. In addition, the school should look to provide more formal training for faculty/staff, ensure school-wide goals are clear, and seek to deliver AVID strategies with fidelity through-out the school.

Teacher and staff training appeared to be critical to helping AVID to be implemented appropriately. In the year subsequent to the initial implementation, eight more teachers were

trained. Unfortunately, three of the previously trained teachers left the school for various reasons. Currently, there is a plan in place to bring training on-site in the summer of 2019. This will allow a vast majority of teachers and staff to be formally trained. With this training there should be a refocusing of goals. If goals are set during the training program, then there is a much higher expectation of clarity by all. Further, if goals are set collaboratively during training it will be easier to establish normative behavior, or norms, for goal attainment. This establishment of norms can be the foundation of ensuring fidelity to processes going forward.

As new goals are established, it is recommended to continue setting goals related to systems, leadership, instruction, and culture. Due to the collaborative nature of the goal setting process, it does not seem appropriate to recommend goals. This decision needs to be derived from an assortment of stakeholders and settled by the AVID site team.

Conclusion

The implementation of this action plan based on AVID processes had a primary goal of closing the achievement gap between ED and non-ED students. In the first year of implementation the gap did not close, but this implementation was far from a failure. ED students were highly engaged with AVID strategies. Implementation problems were identified and recommendations were developed to address these problems. The greatest gain in the implementation of AVID was growth in organizational capacity for positive change to improve student outcomes. The opportunities for lasting change will come with persistence and time. Teachers working toward common instructional goals means students will have greater opportunities to be impacted by instruction. The idea of all students being held to high expectations, while all teachers are utilizing instructional best practices makes sense when thinking about an ideal model to instruct children. The AVID implementation at Central

Intermediate School provided the tools and techniques to begin a continuous cycle of improvement in the pursuit of seeing all student learn at the highest levels.

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List of Appendices

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

PRIMARY IMPACT: CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR ED STUDENTS

STAKEHOLDERS	PROCESSES	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Students	Possess and use agenda planner daily	Assignments are turned in on-time Students are better prepared for exams	Successful implementation & effective engagement
	Possess and use organizational binder	Students are organized. Materials are available for studies and homework	Successful implementation & effective engagement
	Participate in class with AVID instructional strategies	More time on task. More engagement with instructional content. Less off-task behavior. Reduced disciplinary incidences for	Successful implementation & effective engagement

		negative classroom behavior.	
	Participate in career day activities	Increased awareness of career choices	Effective engagement
	Participate in college awareness activities	Increased awareness of colleges and college choices.	Effective engagement
	Participate in Focus Groups	Share thoughts about school processes and Implementation of AVID	Success of Implementation
	Take MAAP reading assessment in Spring	Measure reading achievement	Success of implementation
Instructional Staff	Participate in PLC and faculty meeting training sessions on AVID instructional strategies	Learn new strategies for engagement and instruction to reach all learners	Success of implementation & Organizational capacity for growth
	Serve on a team to address either culture,	Every teacher serving with other teachers to	Organizational capacity for growth

	leadership, instruction, or systems	address needs and or problems in the school	
	Utilize AVID instructional strategies	Use instructional strategies in classroom to improve engagement, organization, literacy, and college awareness	Effective engagement
	Attend summer training	Develop greater capacity in the AVID processes and be able to lead other teachers	Organizational capacity for growth & successful implementation
	Administer MAAP	Measure student achievement	Successful implementation
Site Team	Conduct regular meetings to discuss implementation	Ensure a unified approach to	Successful implementation &

	goals, processes, and needs	implementation. Share concerns Share victories Develop plans for deeper implementation	Organizational capacity for growth
	Create a weekly email for an AVID update	Share information about strategies and upcoming events	Successful implementation
	Organize special events	School to Home nights College days Career days Recognition events	Effective engagement & successful implementation
	Lead professional development in PLCs	Teach and train on specific AVID strategies. Answer questions of teachers. Provide additional resources	Successful implementation & Organizational capacity for growth
Administration	Reinforce AVID principles	Use AVID strategies in faculty meetings.	Organizational capacity for growth

	Conduct PD in AVID strategies. Attend site team meetings	
Conduct classroom observations	<p>Look for student engagement</p> <p>See if AVID strategies are being used</p> <p>Script classroom content for documentation of implementation</p>	<p>Successful implementation and effective engagement</p>
Consult with district and AVID coordinator	Share growth areas and successes. Ensure funding is in place for continuation of program.	Successful implementation

APPENDIX B: LOGIC MODEL INDICATORS

<u>Process</u>	<u>Operational Definition</u>	<u>Data Source</u>
Possession and use of planner.	Students will have planner in their binder. It will be used daily to record class assignments	Teacher observation, AVID binder assessment, and student/teacher focus group data
Possession and use of organizational binder	Students will have binder daily. It will be organized according to the prescribed method. Notes will be taken in every class within the appropriate section of the binder	Teacher observation, AVID binder assessment, and student/teacher focus group data
Participate in class with AVID instructional strategies	Students actively engaged in learning process when AVID instructional strategies are being employed	Teacher observation Administrative observation Focus group data
Participate in Career Day activities	Student will choose 3 areas of interest, attend sessions led by professional in the field	Spreadsheet of student choices and attendance logs

Participate in college awareness activities	Students will use NWEA's college navigator tool	Teacher observation and student follow-up report
Take a college awareness survey	Students will take a college awareness survey to assess their current level of college awareness	Survey created by the College Board
Participate in focus groups	Students will be selected randomly to participate in focus group questioning	Focus group data
Take the MAAP reading assessment	Students will take the Spring reading assessment to assess their grade-level achievement	MAAP rosters
Participate in PLC training on AVID instructional strategies	Teachers will participate in bi-weekly training sessions conducted by an AVID trained site team member	PLC agendas and minutes
Serve on a school improvement team	Teachers will all participate with a team to address school	Team meeting agendas and minutes

	needs as identified by the site team	
Utilize AVID instructional strategies	Teachers will plan for and implement AVID instructional strategies in their classrooms at least once a week	Lesson plans and classroom observations
Attend summer training	A group of teachers will be selected annually to attend summer AVID training	Registrations and reimbursement forms
Participate in focus groups	Teachers will be randomly selected to answer questions about the AVID implementation and their own	Focus group responses and recordings
Conduct Regular Meetings	Site team will conduct monthly meetings to plan, share, discuss, and evaluate AVID implementation	Site team agendas and minutes

Create a weekly email for AVID update	Site team will share new ideas, adjustments, and success stories via a weekly email	Copy of emails
Organize special events	Site team will serve as the coordinator of events and special days consistent with the overall school wide goals	Agendas of events
Lead professional development in PLCs	Site team members will visit with PLCs at least bi-weekly to train or reinforce AVID strategies	PLC agendas and minutes
Reinforce AVID principles	Administration will reinforce the implementation of AVID by using AVID strategies in faculty meetings and in other appropriate meetings	Faculty meeting agendas and minutes
Conduct classroom observations	Administration will conduct regular classroom observations looking for	Classroom observation rubric

specific use of AVID
strategies as prescribed in the
teacher's lesson plans

Consult with school district
personnel and AVID director

Administration will
participate in monthly
meetings to discuss the
implementation of AVID and
keep district leadership
abreast of any anticipated
needs

Meeting minutes and agendas

APPENDIX C: COLLEGE AWARENESS SURVEY

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly disagree (7)
I plan to go to college when I graduate high school (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not want to go to college after I graduate high school (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not think I CAN go to college after graduating (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have not even thought about college (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel my teachers believe I can go to college (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My teachers
talk about
college issues
like entrance
requirements
(6)

I know what
the ACT is (7)

I have heard a
presentation
about
attending
college (8)

My classes
are
challenging
(9)

My parents
talk about
going to
college (10)

I know at
least 5 people
who
graduated
from college
(11)

My family
cannot afford
college (12)

I wish my
school talked
more about
college (13)

I can make
more money
if I have a
college degree
(14)

Q2 List five colleges and/or universities of which you have heard:

VITA

PROFILE

A proven educator with a strong academic and Career and Technical Education (CTE) background who strives to be a strongly collaborative servant leader.

EXPERIENCE

Principal, Oxford School District; Oxford, MS — 2013- Present

Hired in 2013 as an assistant principal to plan for the opening of a new school. Opened Oxford Intermediate School in 2014. Served a student body of 700 5th and 6th graders and 70 faculty and staff.

Assistant Principal/Principal, Tate County School District; Coldwater, MS 2011 - 2013

Worked to build a stronger school culture by being a change agent during a transition period for the school and district.

Teacher/Assistant Director, Oxford-Lafayette School of Applied Technology; Oxford, MS —

2004-2011

Taught construction for 7 years to 10th - 12th graders from Lafayette and Oxford high schools. Served in a dual role as assistant director for the final 2 years at the school.

Owner, Steve Hurdle Repair and Painting, Oxford, MS 38655 — 1999-2004

Started and grew a successful home repair and painting business. Established a reputation for quality and dependability. Learned much about personnel management, budgeting, customer service, and quality control.

EDUCATION

University of Mississippi — BA recreation, 1992

University of Mississippi — MA educational leadership, 2007

University of Mississippi — Ed.D educational leadership, anticipated May, 2019