An Investigation of the Implementation of the Child Study Committee Initiative in a Rural County in Virginia

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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October 24, 2011

Key Words: Prereferral Intervention Team, Mainstream Assistance Team, Child Study Team
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ABSTRACT

The referral of a student for a psycho-educational evaluation is one of the most important responsibilities of school-based personnel, in particular for the general education classroom teacher (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2003). A referral for evaluation or intervention is also one of the most important predictors of future special education eligibility.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has traditionally used Child-Study Committees (CSC) to address the provision of supportive interventions within regular classroom settings to students prior to referral for special education eligibility. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the support given by CSCs to those students who were referred for academic and/or behavioral concerns. Effectiveness was measured by the alignment of the referral concern(s) with the assigned intervention to address this concern(s) as well as the notion that a referral was not delayed which would have delayed needed services for students. This inquiry addressed the intervention assistance given to elementary grade students who were referred in order: (a) to determine the outcomes of the CSC process by grade level, and by race and gender of students; and (b) to determine if the CSC process facilitated or delayed appropriate referral for special education services prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) approaches in the state. Methods of quantitative descriptive content analysis were utilized. The findings of this study indicated that of the students (n=136) referred to the CSC, 62.5% were recommended for a complete evaluation and determined eligible for special education services. In addition, 77.2% of referrals were related to academic concerns, and 17.6% were for behavioral concerns; only 5.1% of the referrals were made for both academic and behavioral concerns. The percentage of students who recycled through the process was insignificant and there was not a delay in the referral for special education services, suggesting that the initial interventions were appropriate for the given student. Results further indicated that the retention and promotion status of the referred students was not affected by the process. As it relates to implications for
practice, the CSC provided a systematic approach that school divisions may be able to utilize to
determine the efficacy of interventions that address the current academic and/or behavioral needs
of students in the classroom. It is recommended that future research in this area be conducted
with a larger sample of the country, thus allowing more generalizability to other populations. In
addition, as the CSC process develops, it would be interesting to examine the evolution of the
process and the modifications made.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

There is a journey involved in arriving at the world of special education. Before most students are referred for special education services, they have experienced difficulties within the general education learning environment. Despite their difficulties, most of these students cannot be considered for special services until documented empirical evidence of interventions to address their academic and/or behavioral deficiencies has been presented to a multidisciplinary team of school and non-school personnel referred to as a Child Study Committee (CSC) (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). The committee must also consider and compare the students’ performance to other peers in the same setting, further emphasizing the importance of the CSC process and the fidelity of implementation of the intervention process.

The Importance of the Child Study Committee Process

According to state policy in Virginia, during a CSC meeting the interventions utilized by general education teachers are reviewed and additional recommendations are made based on the effectiveness of the attempted interventions for a particular student (Virginia Department of Education, 2007). At the conclusion of the initial meeting, the team determines another meeting date. The scheduling of this subsequent meeting date should allow enough time for teachers and other school personnel to implement systematically the recommended interventions and to measure their effectiveness for the student. During this process, the fidelity of implementation of the interventions is imperative to the success of the student’s progress.

At the follow-up meeting, if the collected measurable data indicate the student has made insignificant progress, assuming that the recommended interventions were implemented faithfully, the team may then decide to refer the student for a complete psycho-educational
evaluation. This phase of the process allows educational professionals to utilize a battery of culturally non-biased assessment instruments that are normed by using a representative sample of the student’s ethnic or racial background to evaluate the presenting concerns of the student. The results of the evaluation process are discussed during a meeting to determine eligibility for special education. At this stage it may be determined by consensus of the team that the student requires additional services beyond the scope of a traditional general education program. In this case, special education services would be recommended and an individualized education program (IEP) would be written for the student outlining specific services to be offered by the school system.

Statement of the Problem

In an effort to provide more effective instruction to students, an investigation of the implementation of the CSC was conducted. The work of the CSC needed to be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of prescribed school-based interventions. Effectiveness, for purposes of this study, was defined as the alignment of the general educator referral concerns with the appropriate and corresponding interventions, resulting in positive outcomes for the referred students.

Design of the Study

This study was designed to explore the effectiveness of the support given by members of CSCs to those students who have been referred for academic and/or behavioral concerns. Specifically, this inquiry addressed the intervention assistance given to those students who have been referred in order: (a) to determine the outcomes of the CSC process for students; and (b) to determine if the CSC process facilitated or delayed the need for special education services.
Research Question: Was the assistance given by the CSC to students referred to them for academic and behavioral concerns effective?

The main research question is supported by the following sub-questions:

1. Were students who participated in intervention assistance referred for needed services?
2. Did students who received intervention assistance recycle into the process?
3. Did students experience delays in referrals for special education?
4. What was the end of year disposition of students following intervention assistance?

The units of analysis for this study included: (a) the reasons for referral, (b) the outcomes for students, and (c) the outcomes of the CSC initiative.

Overview of Methodology

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of the CSC, cross-tabulations were conducted resulting in descriptive statistics regarding the outcomes for elementary-aged students (K-5). Data were analyzed longitudinally over a 2-year time period from a selected school system. The data for this study included the CSC records of all students who were referred for intervention assistance during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. Data were collected and recorded at the selected site from each student’s file and entered into a database application designed specifically for the study.

Figure 1 illustrates the policy levels from which data were reviewed: examining federal and state policies, considering the units of analysis, reviewing the data sources, analyzing the data, reviewing the outcomes, and considering the conclusions and implications.
Figure 1 - Policy Levels from Which Data Were Collected and Reviewed
Limitations and Delimitations

This study involved document analysis of records made during CSC meetings; therefore omissions and lack of details made during these meetings were reflected in the data. In addition, the study was conducted in one school division and considered CSC outcomes for students in grades K-5. This approach allowed for a thorough review of documentation of data from multiple elementary schools across one division, but may have limited the generalizability of the results to other school systems and to a wider range of grade levels.

The timeframe of the study was limited to a two-year period ranging from the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. This strategy was intended to allow the researcher to consider issues of recidivism and the value of retention at grade level. In addition, at the time of data collection, this was a relatively new process and the data available were from those particular years. Additionally, the data were collected by selected school personnel.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study. Listed below are the specific definitions for these terms as they apply to this particular study:

*Child Study Committee* (CSC) is a committee designed to develop evidenced based interventions such as additional instruction or small group instruction, and then systematically evaluating the child’s response (Virginia Department of Education (2007)).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* is a special education law with the purpose to “ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living” (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(A)).
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a detailed description of the educational goals, assessment methods, and educational performance of a student requiring special education services.

Effectiveness is defined, for this study, as the alignment of the referral concerns with appropriate and corresponding academic and/or behavioral interventions that result in positive outcomes for the referred students.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 consists of the introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, an overview of the methodology, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and definitions needed for the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of the literature of policies and practices related to providing intervention assistance to struggling students within the general education environment. Chapter 3 consists of a description of the methodology utilized in addressing the research questions. Chapter 4 reports the results of the data analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions, implications, and recommendations that resulted from this analysis.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with background information on the developmental nature of the pre-referral process. Additional issues are discussed related to intervention assistance, selecting students for intervention assistance, supporting teachers in providing interventions, factors affecting minority students in the CSC process, and examining the outcomes of the CSC process.

Background Information

Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) spoke to the relevance of advocating for all students and how administrators must approach this issue: “We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply ‘the way it is.’” (p. 167) To some, these words may not convey a significant meaning, however, one interpretive view suggests that one must be aware of one’s strengths, weaknesses, and hidden biases. This is valuable information for any educational administrator, and for any professional making life decisions for students in their charge. This passage also stresses the value of listening, as we tend to be creatures of “communicentric bias” (p. 170), which limits our understanding of those with whom we come in contact. In addition, Darling-Hammond spoke to the notion of human understanding: “The capacity to understand another is not innate; it is developed through study, reflection, guided experience, and inquiry.” (p. 168)

From a special education administrator’s perspective, this speaks to the belief of appreciating human differences and understanding the population with whom we work. We, the few, literally hold the educational lives of many in our hands. Therefore it is essential that administrators and other educational professionals investigate and seriously consider the process
by which intervention assistance and special education referral are provided to students at risk for school failure.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the notion of the pre-referral intervention process was utilized in the general education setting to address academic and/or behavioral needs of students (Lane, Mahdavi, & Bothwick-Duffy, 2003). Prior to conducting this study the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, thus signifying the need for Virginia to modify special education policy related to this process (Virginia Department of Education, 2002). As with previous reauthorizations, recommendations and suggestions concerning the changes were gathered from various sources including parents, consumers, and the State Special Education Advisory Board. The final draft of the regulations was adopted by the Board of Education on October 19, 2001 with additional changes effective on March 27, 2002. These changes were made in Virginia policy, as they were in other American states, to address the increasing amount of students qualifying for special education services (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). The intent of these changes was to provide a proactive intervention-assistance reform with a focus on more effective instruction from the general educators, thus allowing more students to remain successfully in the general education setting.

During the 1997 reauthorization process of IDEA, it was noted that the referral of students for special education services continued to be problematic. Also, researchers were able to determine that the referral of a student for a psycho-educational evaluation is one of the most important responsibilities of school-based personnel, in particular the general education classroom teacher (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Researchers have also noted that a referral for evaluation or intervention is one of the most important predictors of future special education eligibility and a student's educational career.
(Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Referrals for psycho-educational evaluations have been influenced by a student's lack of response to instruction, success or failure in school related tasks, and failure to make sufficient growth in a given content area (Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang, & Algozzine, 1983; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Naquin, 2003).

It appears that children from families and communities with low incomes are at a greater risk for special education referral, classification, and subsequent placement (Moore, 2002). The absence of learning opportunities or active engagement in responding to instruction has also been reported as a contributing factor to minority disproportion in the referral process (Ysseldyke, 2001).

Cultural differences are also shown to be a variable influencing minority representation in special education. Because teachers' opinions of appropriate and atypical behaviors are culturally defined (Hosp & Reschly, 2003), once teachers misperceive student behaviors and consider students as incompetent, this perception negatively influences their instructional patterns and subsequently increases the probability that such students will be referred for special education services (Reilly, 1991).

In a study portraying students with similar academic profiles, ethnicity played a central role in teachers' decisions to refer. Children, when described as Black or Hispanic were more often judged as appropriate for special education placement than were their White counterparts (Macmillan, Gresham, Lopez, & Bocian, 1996).

Although academically related problems such as lack of achievement were found to be the primary reasons for referral, student misbehavior has been reported as the most influential factor in a teacher's decision to refer a student for evaluation (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Further, it was noted that if the teacher had reliable information related to the
actual behavioral concerns, the actual result of an assessment was not deemed as important (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, Christenson & Thurlow, 1983). Because of the aforementioned issues, Virginia emphasized and funded an initiative for the use of the CSC which enabled school personnel to meet the needs of children experiencing problems in the general education setting before referral for a special education evaluation (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). According to this initiative, “a child study committee was established in each school to review records and other performance evidence of the children referred through a screening process, or by school staff, the parent or parents, or other individuals.” (p. 30)

In addition the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), effective in January 2002, provided additional incentives directly related to the effectiveness of interventions such as those recommended during a CSC review. The NCLB has a long term goal of having all students scoring in the proficient range on standardized tests by the school year 2013-14 and most students who receive special education services must be included in the testing process. Schools that consistently score below the proficient range received sanctions. The contemporary emphasis, response to intervention, relies on accountability for student achievement increases and the need for educators to increase their knowledge and skills in providing effective evidenced based academic and behavioral interventions.

Issues Related to Providing Intervention Assistance

A majority of referrals for special education come from general education teachers and occur primarily during the primary grades of elementary school (Drame, 2002). These referrals have been linked to a number of sociocultural, sociopolitical, teacher, and student variables (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Drame, 2002) some of which are thought to be gender, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, race/culture, language, parental background, and the notion of
teacher self-efficacy. Therefore, the following section will discuss teacher self-efficacy, the relevant dimensions of self-efficacy, factors associated with self-efficacy, and how self-efficacy affects the referral process.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy theory (e.g., Bandura, 1986) posits that personal self-efficacy is an important teacher variable in the referral process (Meijer & Foster, 1988). Following this theory of self-efficacy, Meijer and Foster suggested that, dependent on their level of personal self-efficacy, teachers would respond differentially to similar behaviors and thereby affect referral chance for pupils. These researchers also suggested that higher teacher self-efficacy scores were consistent with lower problems and referral chances. Therefore, identification of teacher characteristics that differentiate behavior tolerance levels of teachers is essential to understanding the referral decision-making process.

A teacher’s self-efficacy consists of multiple beliefs about his or her ability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task within a particular context as well as to engage students in the learning process, although there may be students who are difficult to manage and teach or students who do not respond to instruction in an appropriate manner (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). These beliefs influence individuals’ outlook, judgment, behavior, amount of effort they expend on any given task within a particular context, and the extent of their persistence when addressing an adverse situation (Bandura, 1986). In that vein, teachers with a high level of efficacy tend to exhibit a willingness to experiment with and implement new ideas, master skill performance, exhibit augmented effort to prepare and organize lessons and activities to meet the needs of students (Bandura, 1977; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). In addition, teachers with a high sense of efficacy would also exhibit a
greater commitment and enthusiasm towards teaching; foster a healthy, organized, orderly climate; spend longer proportions of time in instruction; demonstrate greater concern and commitment to their students' achievement; and utilize greater classroom-based decision making strategies (Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

When teachers with a high sense of efficacy encounter students with learning or behavioral difficulties, they often perceive this as a positive challenge to them as teachers rather than perceiving the student as problematic. This challenge gives such teachers a desire to learn more innovative techniques to address the needs of this student (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Therefore, the greater the teacher efficacy, the less likely that teacher would promote an environment critical of a student who was struggling, and the less likely that the teacher would be inclined to refer a difficult student to special education services (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

In making judgments about efficacy, teachers must assess what will be required of them in the anticipated teaching situation. This is an assessment about the level of difficulty presented by the task, and the requisite skills, and competencies necessary for success within this context (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Judgment considerations for beginning teachers differ from those of more experienced teachers on such factors as the ability level of the student, the motivation of the student, and the utilization of appropriate teaching strategies to address the needs of the student. Other contextual factors found to impact on a teacher's self-efficacy beliefs include the leadership style(s) of the principal, the school milieu, as well as the supportiveness of other teachers and professional colleagues (Tschannen-Moran et al.).
The Related Dimensions of Teacher Self Efficacy

A teacher's sense of efficacy consists of two independent dimensions that can operate interdependently. These dimensions are a teacher's sense of personal teaching efficacy and sense of general teaching efficacy (Smylie, 1988).

What are personal teaching efficacy and associated effects? Personal teaching efficacy/competence is the teacher's belief that students benefit from educational experiences (Allinder, 1995). Personal efficacy is determined by the individual's comparative judgment of whether his or her current abilities are sufficient for the teaching task in question. Basically, this represents an assessment of his or her own teaching competence (Ashton & Webb, 1986). The level of perceived competence to meet the demands of a particular teaching task is what influences an individual's functioning in that context (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Personal teaching efficacy can also be influenced by the characteristics of school environments; school based decision-making processes, interactions with teaching colleagues, relationships with administrators, composition and size of the class, feedback from students, assessments, and interactions with parents and the greater school community (Smylie, 1988).

What are general teaching efficacy and associated effects? General teaching efficacy is the teacher's belief that he or she has the skills necessary to influence student learning/performance or affect change in students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Smylie, 1988). Teachers' perceptions of their own ability to affect student learning have been associated not only with their choice of classroom management style and instructional strategies but also with the change in practice related to school and district initiatives (Smylie). Teaching efficacy beliefs, therefore, suggest that teachers are more likely to adopt and implement new classroom strategies if they have self-confidence in their own ability to manage their classrooms effectively and affect
student learning. Both self-perception of teaching competence and beliefs about the task requirements in a particular teaching situation affect teacher efficacy, according to Tschannen-Moran et al., (1998) and the consequences that stem from efficacy beliefs (e.g., referral).

Factors Associated with School and How They Affect Self Efficacy

Various factors of the classroom environments and school contexts have been found to influence the development of both personal and general teaching efficacy (Smylie, 1988). Among these dimensions are class size, class composition, and concentration of low achieving students, which may directly and/or indirectly influence individual behavior and change.

According to Smylie (1988) the proportion of low achieving students in a teacher's classroom can have a negative effect on personal teaching efficacy. Smylie also noted that interactions with one's colleagues about instructional matters could have a positive indirect effect on personal teaching efficacy. More efficacious teachers show a preference for collaborative work and are more likely to adopt change proposals associated with formal initiatives and staff development programs (Smylie, 1988). Similarly, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) observed that school level measures of academic emphasis, institutional integrity, and principal's influence each correlated positively with either personal or general efficacy.

Teacher efficacy has also been linked to parent involvement in school activities. Efficacious teachers have been described as being: (a) less likely to regard teacher-parent relations as a source of stress; (b) more inclined to be fair and to exhibit greater organization and planning; (c) able to present lessons with great enthusiasm and clarity, and (d) willing to experiment and to implement innovative and progressive instructional techniques (Allinder, 1995; Smylie, 1988). When compared with income and school climate, Coladarci (1993) reported that teacher efficacy was the strongest predictor of a teacher's commitment to the
teaching profession. In addition, Coladarci and Breton (1997) determined that personal and general efficacy was higher among elementary level teachers when compared with high school teachers.

**How Self Efficacy Affects the Referral Process**

Meijer and Foster (1988) examined the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and referral chance. Utilizing correlational methodology, these researchers found significant noncausal relationships between teachers’ self-efficacy and referral chance. Higher teacher self-efficacy scores were correlated to lower referral chance; and class size was significantly associated with referral chance and student problem types. When academic difficulties were correlated with behavioral problems, they found that a combination of factors was more strongly correlated to the referral chance than with a single factor (academic or behavioral problems). Meijer and Foster also reported that when pupils were described as having an academic difficulty they received higher ratings on both behavioral problem and referral chance than did the pupils described as having a behavior problem only. They established that teacher self-efficacy influenced the recognition of student problem type, and directly affected referral chance. Researchers have also found correlations among the socioeconomic status of students and referral chance (i.e., higher socioeconomic status related to lower referral chance). These findings have revealed that teachers with high efficacy were more likely to maintain a student of a low socioeconomic status in a regular education setting and less likely to refer students for special education (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Henson, 2001).

In a study conducted by Soodak and Podell (1993), the teachers’ sense of efficacy was shown to significantly influence their judgments concerning the general education placement of students with learning and/or behavior problems. Utilizing a combination of Likert type rating
scales and descriptive analysis, Soodak and Podell also found relationships between student problem type and both dimensions of teacher self efficacy (i.e., general and personal teaching efficacy). In addition, their results suggested that teachers were more likely to refer students with a combination of academic deficits and behavioral problems as opposed to students demonstrating only one deficit. Their findings further suggested that both personal teaching efficacy and general teaching efficacy needed to be relatively elevated for some teachers to make decisions about placements for students who do not fit into cultural and classroom norms (Soodak & Podell, 1993).

Meijer & Foster (1988) noted that the interaction between a student’s socioeconomic status (SES) and teacher efficacy influenced the referral decision-making process. As suggested by Podell and Soodak (1993), a student with a non-significant learning problem and who is from a low SES, will more likely be considered for the referral process from a teacher with a low personal efficacy. Personal efficacy, however, had no influence on judgments about high-SES children. Based on this evidence, it was theorized that students from impoverished communities (low SES) are at greatest risk for referral as a result of the teacher, rather than student factors. This finding is important in understanding the overrepresentation of low-SES children, particularly minority students, in special education.

Teachers’ motivation to work with more challenging students may be incumbent upon their beliefs in their ability to effectuate change, in effect their sense of general teaching efficacy (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Because teachers initiate the vast majority of referrals for psycho-educational evaluation, and referral almost invariably leads to placement (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Christenson, 1983), efforts to thwart the inappropriate and disproportionate placement of children must center on teachers’ referral decisions (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Thus, research on
the referral-to-placement process suggests teacher decision-making as the critical component in determining which students are placed in special education. Figure 2 illustrates the components associated with the referral process and the possibilities associated with student progression via the CSC, i.e., eligible or ineligible.

Selecting Students for Intervention Assistance

Factors influencing referrals for special education services have long been the subject of research in the psychoeducational literature (Abidin & Robinson, 2002). Decisions to refer students were found to be influenced by students’ grade level and gender, size of school system, attributions of students, success or failure on specific tasks, locus of control, perceived control, expectancy of success, achievement motivation, self-esteem.

Lane (2003) examined the issue of identifying young children who exhibited high rates of aggressive and coercive behaviors that could be classified as antisocial behavior to determine the academic, social, and behavioral profiles of students who were and were not being identified by teachers as being at risk for antisocial behavior. Her second purpose was to determine the extent to which academic, social, and behavioral variables could discriminate between at-risk children and children exhibiting typical youth behaviors. The final purpose of the study was to identify the correct classification rates for children selected by their teachers as being at risk for the aforementioned behavior patterns relative to children exhibiting typical youth behaviors.
Figure 2 - Possibilities Associated with Student Progression Via CSC
The participants in Lane’s (2003) study included 55 first-grade students from two year-round elementary schools in a small Southern California school district. Forty of the students were selected by their teachers for being at risk for antisocial behavior and 15 of the students were selected as typically developing students not at risk for behavior or learning problems. Of the 55 students, 72.73% were Caucasian, 23.64% were Hispanic, and 2% were Native American. The age range was from 6.96 years to 8.83 years. The externalized behavior used to identify the students as at risk was low reading performance relative to other children in their class. This at-risk status was determined more specifically by administering a modified version of the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD). This instrument included both academic and behavioral indicators.

To further delineate between at risk and typical behavior, a variety of sources were utilized. Teachers completed the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) and the Critical Events Index (CEI) to provide empirical data regarding the perceived functioning of the selected students (Lane, 2003). In addition, the students’ prior academic performance, results of The Test of Phonological Awareness (TOPA), and the word attack subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT-R) were reviewed to assess phonological awareness skills. A descriptive discriminant function analysis was calculated utilizing student status as the criterion variable and academic competence, hyperactive behavior, cooperation, critical events, self control, externalizing behavior, and internalizing behavior as predictor variables (Lane, 2003). Results of a cross-validated classification analysis suggested that 77.50% of the selected at risk students and 66.67% of the typically developing students were identified correctly. Lane’s findings indicate that teachers were accurate in selecting those students who may be at risk and in need of interventions to curtail behaviors.
The effectiveness of the pre-referral process has been a long-standing concern in the research literature. In some cases, the process has been implemented more successfully in university than in school-based settings. Burns and Symington (2002) conducted an empirical meta-analysis of research related to prereferral intervention teams to determine student and systemic outcomes as well as to identify areas in need of future research. According to the authors of this document, the PsyINFO, ERIC, and Education Abstracts databases were searched utilizing terms such as: prereferral intervention team, maintstream assistance team, and child study team, among others. As a result of the search, 72 articles and technical reports were selected. To further narrow the pool of articles, the following criteria were utilized:

1. The study included some outcome measure for prereferral intervention teams as the dependent variable (DV).
2. The study included at least one between-group comparison and/or least one within-group comparison of the outcomes. Between-group analysis involved schools that have implemented a CSC model compared to those that had not, and within-group analyses examined pre- and post-implementation of a CSC.
3. The study presented quantitative data that could be used to compute effect sizes. Means and standard deviations for both experimental and control groups, or pre- and post- implementation was necessary. (p. 3)

Based on the selection criteria, the articles to be reviewed were narrowed to nine. From this point, the articles were separated into two groups based on systemic outcomes (Burns & Symington, 2002). Outcomes based on student performance were placed in one group and outcomes based on systemic variables were placed into another group. Student variables included observations of time on task, student task completion, and scores on behavior rating
scales. Systemic variables included referrals to special education, new placement in special education, number of students retained in grade, and percentage of referrals that are diagnosed with a disability.

An analysis by demographic variables was attempted, however, because of the homogeneity of the sample of studies, this was not possible (Burns & Symington, 2002). Examples of this cited by the authors included the fact that some of the participants ranged in grades from first to seventh, there was no secondary student involvement, and only four studies gave information regarding setting.

As noted by Burns and Symington (2002), the most significant finding of the study would be the noted distinction between effect size coefficient for university based (1.32) and field-based (.54) interventions. This appears to suggest more consistent implementation of interventions and strategies when the CSC had the availability of university assistance. This theme has long resonated with educators, as teachers feel more comfortable with implementing recommended strategies for students, after professionals have modeled the strategies.

Supporting Teachers in Providing Interventions

Lane, Mahdavi, and Borthwick-Duffy (2003) investigated teachers’ initial perceptions about receiving direct assistance in implementing interventions that were recommended by the CSC. The participants in this study consisted of 80 general education teachers at four suburban elementary schools, two in southern California and two in southern Arizona. The protocol utilized consisted of a brief 15-item, anonymous survey on the CSC process. Sixty-six percent of the teachers were primary grade teachers and 33.75% of the teachers taught the upper elementary grades. Each of the schools had an established CSC with the distinct mission of better serving the general education students and preventing the
inappropriate placement of students in special education. The study did not delineate students by
gender, race, or grade level. Data were analyzed utilizing descriptive analysis.

Findings from this study suggested that the majority of teachers who completed the
survey determined that in-class demonstrations of the recommended interventions from the CSC
would be “highly desirable,” indicative of the important nature of the fidelity of implementation
of the suggested interventions to the elementary students involved (Lane et. al., 2003). In
addition, as noted earlier, the importance of the elementary level referral cannot be overstated, as
there is a positive relationship between referral by a teacher and the student being found eligible
for special education services. Another interesting finding suggested that teachers were in favor
of having follow-up assistance from a behavioral or academic expert in the classroom to assure
continued fidelity of implementation of the recommended interventions. This type of follow-up
could provide value in that it might increase the teacher’s perceived effectiveness with the
student and with the CSC process in general.

From the results of these studies, common themes emerged. First, these studies stressed
the importance of the fidelity of implementation of the recommended interventions as a
determining factor in who would ultimately be selected for the special education referral process.
In addition, teachers were able to significantly improve their identification of typical youth
behavior when empirically based measures were utilized. Lastly, it is encouraging to note that, in
some instances, teachers welcomed the input from behavioral experts to ensure that students’
needs are met within the general classroom setting.

Factors Affecting Minority Students in the CSC Process

Numerous reasons have been offered to account for the disproportionate minority referral
rates for special education services. Among them are lack of teacher preparation to work with at-
risk students, lack of knowledge or experience with the referral processes, and lack of other sources of services. Political or economic motivations such as federal incentives to identify children with disabilities, system or school failure to accommodate individual differences in heterogeneous populations, and the power of parents and lawyers as child advocates are also factors affecting referrals (Algozzine et al., 1983). However, VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Naquin (2003) established teacher judgment as a significant component in the actual referral process and validation of that referral. Teachers typically refer students who demonstrate behaviors that are considered troublesome for a classroom setting behaviors in the classroom (e.g., slowness in work), and the referral is typically an excellent precursor to placement in special education. (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1983).

Referral for special education evolves from multiple factors, including personal variables, teachers’ patience, intervention choices, perceptions of individual students, and student characteristics (Algozzine et al., 1983). Teacher’s judgment and attitudes are very important in determining eligibility for special education services (Abidin & Robinson, 2002). Reportedly teachers are less likely to refer students for special education who have the same cultural background as they do.

In concert with these findings, the United States Department of Education (1998), indicated that there was a “disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 19) that was being served under the IDEA. From a statistical perspective, from 1980 to 1990 the rate of increase for White American students who were found eligible for special education services was approximately 6%. However, in contrast, the increase noted for minorities was noticeably higher. For example, Hispanic Americans increased by a rate of approximately 53%; African Americans increased by a rate of approximately 13.2%; and Asian Americans increased by a rate
of approximately 107.8%. Oswald et al. (1999) noted that in 1994, more than 1.1 million minority children were receiving special education services. These authors also noted that beyond high school, minority students with disabilities were more likely to be unemployed, with about 75% of African American students compared to 47% of White students unemployed two years after high school.

To further bolster this assertion, Osher, Woodruff, and Sims (2002) cited data that were indicative of the current social and educational position of those African American students within the special education system. According to their findings, African American students comprised approximately 16% of the school population and approximately 21% of the students receiving special education services; more specifically, African Americans comprised about 25.1% of those students classified as students with emotional disturbances. An even more vivid picture presented by Osher et al. were data that suggested 66% of African American students classified as students with an emotional disturbance received failing grades. Approximately 58.2% of those same students left school without receiving a diploma, thus further exacerbating the problem encountered when the transition is made from school to searching for employment opportunities. The number of students affected and their negative outcomes emphasize the importance of examining the factors related to the overrepresentation of African-American students, particularly those with emotional disturbances in special education.

**Recommended Practices to Address the Issue of Overrepresentation**

Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) provided a comprehensive review of research addressing the issues of disproportional numbers of African-American students being identified for special education services and possible solutions for this significant issue. Salend et al. examined extant data from the Office of Civil Rights from a cultural perspective, realizing that a
“variety of educational, sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical factors contribute to the disproportional representation” (p. 290) of African-American students. The definition adopted by these authors as it relates to disproportional representation is “the extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category” (p. 289). This is a common definition being employed by other authors in the special education field.

Although poverty appears to be an underlying theme in the classification of these African-American students, it is not the primary contributing factor. For example, Salend et al. (2002) noted that when African-American students from affluent communities were studied, they were “more likely to be identified as being emotionally disturbed than African-American students residing in poor communities” (p. 290), conversely, living in poverty appears to diminish the number of Caucasian students classified as students with specific learning disabilities.

In addition, Salend et al. (2002) noted that the lack of diversity among those who assess African-American students contributes to the disproportionate representation of these students in special education. Further, the authors noted that “institutional racism” (p. 290) permeates what might be considered the gateway into special education, the assessment tools. Some “norm-reference standardized tests are culturally and socially biased and do not give accurate measures of some students’ abilities and potential” (p. 290), thus adding to the number of African-American students being identified improperly. Salend et al. also discussed the issue of disparity of funding in the school divisions that serve African-American and other minority students. Insufficient funding limits the access to superior services needed to provide the necessary interventions within the general classroom setting.
Because significant issues have contributed to the disproportional number of African-American students in special education, Salend et al. (2002) systematically provided measures that can be taken by school divisions to “improve educational services for all students” (p. 291). According to their analysis, the first step would be to create a database that includes the following components:

1. a confidential code to identify the student referred;
2. demographic information relating to the students referred (e.g., date of birth, gender, race, ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic status, grade, school);
3. the title(s) of the individual(s) making the referral and the reason(s) for the referral;
4. the types, duration, and outcomes of the pre-referral strategies and supportive services implemented as well as the titles of the individuals involved in the pre-referral process;
5. the outcome of the referral including the assessment instruments and procedures employed, classification and placement, the reasons for the placement, and the titles of the individuals involved in the placement;
6. the extent to which the student participates in the general education program and the reasons for limiting the students’ participation;
7. the testing modifications and related and transitional services the student receives;
8. the results of subsequent reevaluations, including changes in classification, placement, and services provided as well as the individuals involved in the process; and
9. the nature of students’ behaviors and the disciplinary actions taken by the school district (p. 291).
Salend et al. (2002) suggested that the utilization of this database could provide local school
divisions as well as state education departments with the ability, if done properly, to
identify patterns of over-representation and under-representation and could provide these
agencies with the ability to intervene with appropriate corrective actions.

Other valuable information offered by Salend et al. (2002) was related to the notion of
diversifying the makeup of the multidisciplinary team. The authors noted that more inclusion of
family members during the assessment process and cultural sensitivity training for members of
the team would be helpful in allowing for awareness of “dialectical background and have an
understanding of the impact of socio-cultural perspectives” (p. 293).

Lastly, Salend et al. (2002) noted that the members of the assessment teams should: (a)
have a knowledge of instruction, behavior management, and mental health interventions
appropriate for the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse
backgrounds; (b) understand the problems associated with the assessment of students
from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and (c) possess expertise in
selecting and adapting assessment instruments for students from cultural and
linguistically diverse backgrounds (p. 293).

Salend et al. (2002) realized the necessity for a comprehensive approach to address the
issue of disproportionate numbers of African-American students receiving special education
services and outlined a plan to address this issue from a dual perspective, before a student is
identified and after the student enters into the special education system.

*The Relevance of Extant Data to Address the Issue*

In a comprehensive view of the overrepresentation of minorities in special education,
Oswald, Coutinho, and Singh (1999) also defined disproportionate representation as “the extent
to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category” (p. 198). In a similar vein as Salend et al. (2002), their purpose was to provide a description of this disproportionate representation as reflected in the emotional disturbance category. Oswald et al. also examined relationships between predetermined variables such as economic, demographic, and educational variables with respect to the disproportional representation of minorities in the mild mental retardation (MMR) and severe emotional disturbance (SED) categories.

The study analyzed existing data on “ethnicity, special education identification of students with MMR and SED, and educational, demographic, and economic factors that were available at the district level for a representative national sample of school school divisions” (Oswald et al., 1999, p. 197). The sample was composed of students from “school divisions selected for the fall 1992 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report” (p. 197). The research design “involved the construction and testing of predictive models to describe the variation in disproportionate representation [of minority students] among U. S. school school divisions” (p. 197). The seven predictor variables that were determined to be significant with regard to the ethnic representation of African-American students with MMR and SED were:

1. Housing (Median value housing);
2. Income (Median income for households with children);
3. Poverty (Percentage of children below poverty level);
4. At Risk (Percentage of children enrolled in school who are “at risk”);
5. Dropout (Percentage of adults in the community who have 12th grade education or less and no diploma);
6. LEP (Percentage of children who are Limited English Proficient)
When analyzing these data utilizing logistic regression relative to the selected factors, it was determined that the African-American students were classified as MMR at an approximate rate of 1.4% (Oswald et al., 1999). Those non-African-Americans were classified at a rate of approximately 0.6%; an odds ratio of 2.4, suggesting that “African-American students were approximately 2.5 times as likely to be identified as MMR, compared with their non-African-American peers” (p. 198). In addition, it was determined that “African-American students were approximately 1.5 times as likely to be identified as SED, compared with their non-African-American peers” (p. 198). These data lend support to the notion of Salend et al. (2002) as related to providing more effective interventions for students before the referral process begins and having a more diverse group of personnel during the assessment process to provide academic support prior to the referral and culturally sensitive support during the process.

As with all articles and case studies reviewed for this study, Zhand and Katisyannis (2002) acknowledged that the issue of minorities in special education has been an ongoing concern for more than 30 years. However, they took the approach of examining national data sources in an effort to:

(1) examine minority representation (by minority group) across states and regions for all disabilities, along with high-incidence disability (learning disabilities, mental retardation, and emotional behavioral disorders), and

(2) address such variability in light of minority representation in the total student population and poverty rates. (p. 3)

The data were taken from three federal government publications including the 22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, the National Center for Education, and a
1999 report addressing Poverty in the United States. The extant data utilized by the authors included:

1. the number of students in each racial group for all disabilities by state;
2. the number of students with learning disabilities (LD) by racial group and state;
3. the number of students with mental retardation (MR) by racial group and state;
4. the number of students with emotional-behavioral disorder (EBD) by racial group and state (p. 3).

Differing from the previous articles, these authors decided to be more detailed in their identification of racial groups as evidenced by the following delineation: “American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/Alaskan), Asian/Pacific Islander Asian/PI), African-American, Hispanic, and White” (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002, p. 3) with data from the 50 contiguous United States and Washington D.C. being utilized.

The data were analyzed using three statistical methodologies. Initially, a descriptive statistic was computed to examine trends regarding which racial groups were over-or underrepresented; next, correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between representation by race and state poverty rates; and, finally, “analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine regional variations in racial representation, using state poverty rate as a covariate” (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002, p. 3).

As with previous findings, the results of the overall trends indicated that African-American and AI/Alaskan students were more represented in special education programs than other racial categories (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). In the actual categories examined for prevalence of racial representation, African-American and AI/Alaskan students were more represented in the EBD category. Interesting and not found in the previous studies, within LD
and MR categories, African-American students were most represented, while White students were consistently represented third most prevalent in the three categories examined. Although the correlation data suggested that “in states with higher poverty rates (i.e. poorer states), fewer students from AI/Alaskan, Asian/PI, and African-American, and White groups are identified as EBD”, (p.4) however, the ANOVA suggested that these results varied significantly by region. For example, African-Americans in the West North Central region exhibited a significantly higher representation in the EBD category then did those in the West and South regions. Opinions offered for the regional variations range from racial bias to limited state funding on education; however what is known is that if causal factors can be determined for such discrepancies, the state is required to take action.

The next study was particularly interesting because of the two-fold purpose. Hosp and Reschly (2002) designed a study that was to identify specific variables and patterns of variables that are related to the restrictiveness of a student’s placement and to determine if these variables and patterns differed for African American and Caucasian students. When considering placement, one must consider the least restrictive environment (LRE). As defined by Hosp and Reschly, the least restrictive environment refers to the idea that “students with disabilities must be educated with nondisabled children ‘to the maximum extent appropriate’ (cited from 34 CFR 300.550).

Participants selected were part of a database for the defense in a civil rights lawsuit against four school school divisions in Delaware (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). There were 230 usable cases, approximately 56-60 participants from each of the four school school divisions. The data were disaggregated into African-American and White males, 115 were African-
American males. Placements of the participants ranged from full mainstreaming to full-time self-contained classroom within the special education system.

Prior to coding of the data for confidentiality, any reference to the race of the student was removed from the confidential folders. However, after coding was completed, the race of the participant was returned into the statistical database (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

The data were analyzed using a series of two-way ANOVAs that would evaluate the main effect for each variable as well as an interaction with the race of the students in the study (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). The dependent variable utilized was minutes per week spent outside the general education classroom. In a contrast to others’ findings, Hosp and Reschly found no significant interactions between the demographic variables and race. This finding suggested that all males spend more time outside the general education classroom than females. However, younger students when initially placed in special education, spend more time outside the general education classroom than do older students. In addition, students who exhibit less desirable social skills, when initially placed, spend significantly more time outside the general education classroom than do students with more adequate social skills. Lastly, students who have been in special education longer spend significantly more time outside of the general classroom setting than students who have just entered special education.

However, as indicated by Hosp and Reschly (2002), collected data suggested that African-American students tend to be placed in more restrictive settings more often than their White counterparts. Consistent with the previous authors, these findings indicated that the placement of African-American students in these settings is more prominent in higher incidence categories such as MMR and ED. However it is interesting to note that in the lower incidence categories such as physical impairment and visual impairment, the placement issues represented
a disproportionate figure, even though identification rates generally are not disproportionate in these categories. Overall the data indicated that African-American students tended to be placed in more restrictive settings more often than their White counterparts. The authors suggested that these data may be the result of the “lack of consistent identification process; bias in assessment instruments; and social factors, such as poverty.” (p. 1)

**Teacher Expectation and the Exceptional Learner**

Lastly, Obiakor (1999) took a different approach, utilizing case studies to examine the effects of teacher expectation on the exceptional learner, as he views this issue as a possible cause for the overrepresentation of minority students in special education. This author suggested that teacher expectations play a major role in the performance of exceptional minority students. Consequently, this study sought to understand the importance of “teacher expectation on the . . . self-concepts of minority exceptional learners”(p. 40).

In contrast to the other studies, Obiakor (1999) approached this issue from a qualitative perspective. Obiakor analyzed a series of case studies and two of the most relevant are presented here:

Mrs. Johnson had been teaching for many years. Because of her years of experience, she was assigned to teach a particular class. She did not quite get along with Jerome, an African-American male in her class. On one occasion, Jerome came late to class. He was wearing a pink shirt. Mrs. Johnson made fun of his pink shirt, and he got upset because his masculinity was challenged. He asked: “Teach, are you crazy?” and followed this with additional insults. Mrs. Johnson could not handle the insults and reported Jerome to the principal who did not hesitate to suspend him. Mrs. Johnson spent time in the
teachers’ lounge talking about Jerome’s behavior and the kind of home he came from. (p. 45)

Obiakar (1999) noted that for this particular teacher, the notion of “cultural valuing translated to absolute negativism” (p.45) and a perceived lack of respect by the student. This may be a student who would, based on suspensions resulting from discipline problems, be referred for significant behavioral concerns. Another interesting case study analyzed by Obiakar was as follows:

A university supervisor, Mr. Arnold, visited Ms. Basckstong, a student teacher in a resource room in one of the inner-city elementary schools. The cooperating teacher was an African-American female with an Educational Specialist degree in Special Education (Ed.S.). During her conversation with the university supervisor, she proceeded to tell Mr. Arnold that many of her students were criminals. She pointed out one of her students in particular. She told him that the student’s mother was a prostitute. When he asked Ms. Basckstong why she was telling him this awful story she noted that everybody knew. (p. 46)

Again, Obiakor (1999) utilized a vivid case study to suggest how information regarding a student, that may not affect a student’s educational performance, may be utilized to formulate opinions and/or stereotypes, thus lowering teacher expectation of that student. This, too, is a path that may lead to a referral for additional concerns related to the teacher’s perceived notion that there must be some type of emotional concerns relating to the student’s family/social history. As a sidebar regarding ethical concerns, it should be noted that the information reported by the teacher should have been kept confidential, as it did not appear to be affecting the student’s educational performance.
As a result of his analyses of the case studies, Obiakor (1999) suggested that it is the responsibility of the teacher to motivate minority exceptional students and be prepared to “answer the following pedagogical questions:” (p. 52)

(1) What characteristics do I bring to my classroom and how do they create problems for my students?

(2) Do I misjudge appropriate behaviors because of my cultural values?

(3) Do I interpret individual differences on the basis of cultural values?

(4) Do my interpretations affect my intervention/instruction? (p.52)

To answer these questions, and provide the necessary motivation for minority exceptional learners, Obiakor (1999) noted the following:

(1) A person’s environment contributes to his or her growth and development, and this environment can be positively manipulated;

(2) Behavior problems do not occur in isolation—they are based on our personal idiosyncrasies;

(3) A problem behavior is not always a disordered behavior;

(4) A behavior is a disordered behavior when (a) it departs from acceptable standards considering age, culture, situation, circumstance, and time; (b) its duration is well-documented (p.52)

Obiakor’s (1999) different approach led to distinctly different answers regarding how to address the notion of overrepresentation of exceptional minority learners acknowledging that educators must “understand that they come to school with unique strengths and weaknesses.” (p.52) In addition, Obiakor indicated that educators must consider the contextual issues associated with the student without making unwarranted assumptions.
Examining the Outcomes of the CSC Process

The previous sections have considered aspects of teacher efficacy and student selection in the pre-referral process, and issues related to inappropriate special education referrals. However, a study conducted by Rock and Zigmond (2001) speaks to the notion of the importance of the proactive nature of intervention-assistance in providing more effective instruction for students in the general education setting. The theoretical and methodological aspects of this study were utilized to provide guidance for the present study. Rock and Zigmond (2001) designed a study with a two-fold purpose: to examine the outcomes experienced by students two years after they had received intervention-assistance services, and to determine whether referral for special education had been avoided or simply delayed. In this study, the CSC was referred to as the Instructional Support Team (IST). This team operated under four guiding principles:

(a) to ensure effective use of general education services for all students prior to referral for special education services,
(b) to establish building-based, teacher problem-solving teams to assist teacher,
(c) to screen students systematically prior to referral for special education services using assessment and instructional techniques, and
(d) to provide support and assistance to general education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (p.153).

The participants in the study were students in grades K-5 and they attended nine different elementary schools in an urban area of Pennsylvania school district. The selected sample of students included 140 children who had been referred for intervention assistance. The student records indicated that 64 of the students were referred for academic problems, 22 of the students were referred for behavioral challenges, 17 of the students were referred for a combination of
academic and behavioral concerns, 2 were referred for academic and life-skills issues, and 1 for only life skills difficulties. There were 34 students whose records did not indicate a reason for referral.

Data collection sheets were utilized to document information from the existing student records on 13 variables, including:

(a) the student’s name
(b) the first year services were provided
(c) the student’s grade
(d) the student’s race
(e) the reason for first referral
(f) the reading levels and grades for years 1 and 2
(g) the first outcome for year 1
(h) the second year outcome (p. 155).

The researchers, with assistance from the director of the IST for the school district, recorded the necessary information from each student’s file directly into a data base utilizing Microsoft Works (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). Rock and Zigmond utilized a descriptive data analysis that was designed to answer 6 research questions:

1. What percentage of students who participated in IST was retained in general education, by grade level, across schools?
2. What percentage of students who participated in IST was promoted in general education, by grade level, across schools?
3. What percentage of students who participated in IST was referred for special education services by grade level, across schools?
4. Did the reason for IST referral influence the outcome?

5. What percentage of students who participated in the IST recycled back through IST one year later?

6. What percentage of students who participated in IST experienced a delay in the referral for special education services? (p. 155)

The results of this study indicated that the number of students referred to the IST by grade level, across schools, ranged from one fifth grader to 33 second graders (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). Of the entire sample of students referred, most students were in the first, second, or third grades. It was noted that African American students were referred in disproportionate numbers relative to their representation in the schools in five of the selected schools, however in school number 6, no African Americans were referred to the IST. Additionally, in schools 5 and 9, minority enrollment and IST referrals were equal.

The overall referral rate to special education at the end of the school year was 25.7% of the students referred to IST (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). It was noted that if all of the referred students qualified for special education services the placement rate for these schools would be 0.8%. In addition, it was found that, by the end of the first year, 74.3% of the students referred to IST for behavioral and academic concerns had their problems resolved without the need for special education services, however about 33% of those students were retained at the end of the school year.

In the second year of data collection, it was noted that 27 students were sent back through IST for additional academic and/or behavioral concerns. At the end of year two, the data indicated that seven of the 24 students were promoted; five were retained in grade; and 11 were assessed which resulted in placement in special education (Rock & Zigmond, 2001). It should be
noted that all students who were referred in year one, but not found eligible for special education services were found eligible in year 2.

Rock and Zigmond (2001) attempted to answer what they called the “proverbial question, Is the intervention-assistance glass half full or half empty?” (p. 6). This is a fundamental question that will guide the direction of the study. Rock and Zigmond offer valuable input as to the methodology and instrumentation to be utilized in studying the outcomes of the CSC process. With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, and the introduction of the RTI process approach to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education, the focus of general education and special education has become even more of a collaborative effort and it is incumbent upon all educators to refine the process that offers the most benefit to all students.

The origin of RTI is from the practice of providing and implementing intervention strategies within the general education arena with the specific purpose of evaluating the students’ responses to the research and/or evidence based interventions (Virginia Department of Education, 2007). In addition to general education teachers, interventions within the general education population may also provide supplementary instruction for the students. According to the Virginia Department of Education, successful implementation of RTI involves three important components:

- universal screening; multiple layers or “tiers” of instruction, intervention, and support, and progress monitoring (an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decision making). Implementation of these core components of RTI can build on and extend existing practices and procedures through grades and across content areas. (p. 7)
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the related literature concerning teachers’ perceptions of the CSC, issues related to the referral process, and a discussion of minorities in the special education system. The CSC process and the introduction of the RTI process provide an approach to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education with a focus on targeted interventions within the general education arena. This focus produces a more collaborative association between special educators and general educators that is designed to benefit all students.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methods to be used in conducting this study. An overview of the inquiry is presented first, followed by the procedures to be utilized in collecting and analyzing the data.

Overview of Methodology

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of the Child Study Committee (CSC), descriptive statistics regarding the outcomes of elementary-aged students (K-5), who had been referred to the CSC, were collected and examined for the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years from a school division in Virginia. In addition, data regarding the representation of minority students who qualified for special education services were analyzed. The data were entered into a database application designed specifically for the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the support given by members of CSCs to those students who have been referred for academic and/or behavioral concerns. Specifically, this inquiry addresses the intervention assistance given to those students who have been referred in order: (a) to determine the outcomes of the CSC process for students; and (b) to determine if the CSC process facilitated or delayed.

Research Question: Was the assistance given by the CSC to students referred to them for academic and behavioral concerns effective?

The main research question is supported by the following sub-questions:

1. Were students who participated in intervention assistance referred for needed services?
2. Did students who received intervention assistance recycle into the process?
3. Did students experience delays in referrals for special education?
4. What was the end of year disposition of students following intervention assistance?

The units of analysis for this study included: (a) the reasons for referral, (b) the outcomes for students, and (c) the outcomes of the CSC initiative.

Procedures

The methodology chosen for this study was quantitative descriptive content analysis. Descriptive content analysis incorporates the notion of comparison and relationships of one thing to another (Verma & Beard, 1981). Verma and Beard further indicate that descriptive content analysis may not answer all fundamental questions, however, it provides data that may be useful for future research in a more rigorous experimental designs. In addition, descriptive research is associated with an amount of interpretation of the meaning and significance of the outcome. In order to address the validity of this particular type of research, Verma and Beard suggest that it may be necessary for researchers to consider and/or adopt the following issues:

1. Recognition and definition of the social or educational problem which is being studied.
2. A decision must be made about the kind of data required, and a description of data sources would be necessary.
3. Formulation of hypotheses concerning the phenomena which are to be tested.
4. Selection and description of appropriate subjects/samples and a detailed description of the methods that are to be followed in the study.
5. Selection of the research tools, techniques or instruments that are to be used in the collection of data.
6. The results must be described, analyzed, and interpreted (p.58).

The decision as to the types of techniques or instruments to be utilized in the data collection process must be aligned with the nature of the question to be answered by the researcher (Verma & Beard, 1981). Further, it is acceptable to utilize existing and/or modified instruments as well as to develop a new instrument that addresses the questions to be considered during the research.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection procedures used in this study were guided by the methods of Verma and Beard (1981), and informed by the application of these procedures by Rock and Zigmond (2001). The collection of data involved the transfer of extant or archival data from the students’ CSC records to the data collection instrument (Appendix A depicts the data collection instrument used in this analysis). To ascertain the number of students referred to the CSC and the associated demographic information, a list was obtained from the participating schools’ guidance department or data base personnel. These students were assigned a random record number when their data were input into the electronic database.

**Gaining Access and Entry**

Before beginning research in the selected school division, a research proposal was submitted to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University’s Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. The proposal included the rational for the study, the purpose of the study, a review of relevant studies, a description of the methodology, and an indication of which data analysis techniques were to be utilized. Subsequent approval was obtained from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following IRB approval, a request for permission to enter the selected LEA was granted by the school board in which the study was
conducted. Additionally, a letter describing the purpose of the study and data collection procedures necessary to complete the study were mailed to the local school board representative and a representative for the LEA. The nature of the letter assured the participants of the legitimate and utilitarian nature of the study.

Setting Selection
The setting for this study was a school division located in the rural southern portion of Virginia with a school population of approximately 9000 students. To maintain confidentiality, the selected school division was assigned a pseudonym “Deer County School System” for the purpose of this study. Deer County School Division consisted of six elementary schools, however, only five elementary schools were able to participate in the study. The school that was not able to participate was in a physical restructuring period and was not able to provide the necessary data. The minority population of this particular division was approximately 8%.

As indicated by school system representatives (e.g., school guidance counselors, special education lead teachers) it was the goal of the school division to appropriately identify those students who needed additional help in the general education population and those students who required the additional services offered by IDEA.

The elementary schools within the selected school division were targeted because a majority of referrals for special education typically come from general education teachers and occur primarily during the early grades of elementary school (Drame, 2002). Thus it was deemed appropriate to limit the targeted schools to the elementary school levels of K-5.

Assurance of Confidentiality
Because of the sensitive nature associated with the collected data, the selected participants and school division were guaranteed confidentiality. A pseudonym was assigned to
Deer County’s CSC Process

As indicated by state policy, the selected division trained CSC teams in each elementary school to utilize uniform referral criteria (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). Initially, referrals could be made to the principal and/or designee and could be made by school employees, parents, and others.

According to applicable state policy at the time of this study, the CSC must meet within 10 business days of the receipt of a referral (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). During this meeting, documentation of recommendations made concerning the referred student are made. In addition, the CSC consists of the referring person, the building principal or designee, and a minimum of one teacher, and one specialist who may be the assigned school psychologist or educational diagnostician. Lastly, after consideration of several recommended interventions, the CSC makes a decision to refer for a special education evaluation or allow the student to remain in the general education arena with applicable accommodations.

Data were collected from the CSC student files, grades K-5, by school personnel, and transferred by the researcher to data collection forms. The collected data consisted of CSC documents from the school years of 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. The information on the referral forms included: the student’s name, race, the date of the referral and subsequent intervention services, the student’s grade and gender, and the reason for the referral.

The data collection instrument replicated the form utilized by Rock and Zigmond (2001) during their study of the effectiveness of the implementation of CSCs in Pennsylvania. Rock and Zigmond derived this instrument from earlier investigations in California of pre-referral
interventions (see Del’Homme, Kasari, Forness, & Bagley 1996). Consequently data were collected from CSC referral forms on six variables including “grade, gender, past difficulties, present problems, services prior to CSC referral, and CSC intervention” (p.11). Rock and Zigmond also utilized descriptive content analysis as a methodological approach for data analysis.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The analytic procedure chosen for this study was quantitative descriptive content analysis. Descriptive content analysis incorporates the notions of comparison and relationships of one thing to another (Verma & Beard, 1981). The collected data were coded and entered into the SPSS statistical software package. The cross-tabulation process was selected, thus providing the descriptive statistics that could be utilized for content analysis.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. This study explored the effectiveness of the support given by members of Child Study Committees (CSC) to students who were referred for academic and/or behavioral concerns. Specifically, this inquiry addressed the intervention assistance given to those students who were referred to the committee in order: (a) to determine the outcomes of the CSC process for students; and (b) to determine if the CSC process facilitated or delayed appropriate referral for special education services. The research questions and outcomes for the students who received interventions provided through the CSC process comprise the contents of this study.

Presentation of Results

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of the CSC process, descriptive statistics regarding the outcomes of 136 elementary-aged students (K-5), who had been referred to the CSC, were collected and examined for the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years. The students attended one of five of the participating elementary schools within the Deer County School System. The names of the schools were coded as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. These codings were also used in analyzing the data from each school and in reporting the results.

In the sections that follow, descriptive statistics are used to describe demographic profiles of Deer County and the elementary school students who comprised the population for this study. Following this presentation, descriptive statistics are used to report the results, which are organized by the relevant research questions and illustrated in an assortment of tables. The text accompanying each table emphasizes particular details relevant to the analysis.
Demographic Profile of Deer County

Deer County’s population during the data collection period for this study ranged from 35,127 total residents in the calendar year 2000 to 35,154 total residents in the calendar year 2004 as indicated by the United States Census information from 2004. There were limited numbers of minority students within the overall population which may have affected the ability to generalize the results of the study.

Demographic Profile of Deer County’s Elementary Schools

The population of the study consisted of students in kindergarten through fifth grade (grades K-5) in Deer County Public Schools during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years (n=1651). Cross tabulations for the population across socioeconomic status, grade level, ethnicity and, gender illustrated the distribution of students among these variables.

Socio-economic Status

A distinction is made by the school division to indicate whether a student is in a “low” socioeconomic status (authorized for free or reduced lunch category) or “not low” socioeconomic status (not authorized for free or reduced lunch category) based on the family’s financial qualifications. Per report of school division personnel, it should be noted that parents must submit an application to be considered for the free or reduced lunch program. Across all elementary schools in the division, there was a major difference between low socioeconomic versus not low, with most schools having fewer students in the lower SES category.

When considering the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students from the population, the school versus socioeconomic status indicated that for the total population of students, n=406 students were authorized to receive free or reduced lunch. Conversely, n=1245 were not authorized for free or reduced lunch.
Distribution of Students Across Grade Levels

Table 4.1, the school versus grade level Cross Tabulation, indicates that S1 had the largest student population, n=402. An examination of S1’s raw data indicated that most students were enrolled in the third grade, n=71. The fewest number of students at S1 were enrolled in the fourth, n=60. S2 had the second largest enrollment with n=340. S2 also had the most students in the third grade at n=61. However, the fewest amount of students in S2 were located in the fourth and fifth grades at n=52. S3 had the third largest enrollment with a total of n=328. However, most students of S3 were enrolled in the fifth grade at n=61. S3 had the fewest students enrolled in the third grade, n=50. S4 had the next largest enrollment of n=320. The largest number of students at S4 were enrolled in the second grade, n=60. The fewest number of students at S4 were enrolled in the third grade, n=52. Lastly, S5 had the lowest enrollment at n=261. The largest number of students at S5 were enrolled in the second grade, n=50, with the fewest number of students at S5 being enrolled in the fourth and fifth grades, n=41.

Further examination of table 4.3 suggested that overall there were more second grade students when compared to all other grade levels across all schools, n=290. The fewest number of students were in the fourth grade across all schools, n=252.
Table 4.1

Number of Students in the Population by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
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<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
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<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
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<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total  Count</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>1651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity of Students Across Schools

Table 4.2, the school versus ethnicity Cross Tabulation school population indicates that the Deer County elementary schools were not ethnically diverse. Of the total n=1651 elementary students, 1483 students were Caucasian Americans. There were n=148 African American students; n=12 Asian American students; and n=8 Hispanic American students during the time of data collection.

S1 had n=361 Caucasian American students. There were n=36 African American students; n=4 Asian American students; and n=0 Hispanic American students enrolled during the
time of data collection. S2 had n=303 Caucasian American students; n=31 African American students; n=3 Asian American students; and n=3 Hispanic students enrolled during the time of data collection. S3 had n=292 Caucasian American students; n=33 African American students; n=3 Asian American students; and n=0 Hispanic American students enrolled during the time of data collection. S4 had n=298 Caucasian American students; n=22 African American students; n=0 Hispanic American students; and n=0 Asian American students enrolled during the time of data collection. S5 had n=228 Caucasian American students; n=26 African American students; n=5 Hispanic American students; and n=2 Asian American students enrolled during the time of data collection.

Table 4.2

School/Ethnicity Cross Tabulation for the Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>.24%</td>
<td>2.18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>.18%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>.18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1483</td>
<td>1651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
<td>.48%</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within ETHNICITY</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>.73%</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
<td>.48%</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender of Students Across Population

Table 4.3, Cross Tabulation of school versus gender for the population illustrated that of the n=1651 elementary students, n=863 were male and n=788 were female. S1 had n=210 males and n=192 females; S2 had n=178 males and n=162 females; S3 had n=176 males and n=152 females; S4 had n=165 males and n=155 females; and S5 had n=134 males and n=127 females.

Table 4.3
School/Gender Cross Tabulation for the Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GENDER</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GENDER</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GENDER</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GENDER</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>9.99%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GRADE</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
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<td>15.8%</td>
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<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
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<td>52.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within GENDER</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reporting the Results of the Research

Research Question: Was the assistance given by the CSC to students referred to them for academic and/or behavioral concerns effective? This primary research question is supported by the following sub-questions:

1. Were students who participated in intervention assistance referred for needed services?
2. Did students who received intervention assistance recycle into the process?
3. Did students experience delays in referrals for special education?
4. What was the end of year disposition of students following intervention assistance?

The answers were determined by the number of students n=136 referred to the Child Study Committee during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 academic school years. The results are reported in this section in response to the articulated research questions. These referrals were made by the classroom teachers, although parents and other school personnel were eligible to make referrals related to academic and/or behavioral concerns. The purpose of the CSC is to provide teachers with interventions that are aligned with the presenting problem(s) of the referred student so as to allow the student to be successful in the general education realm without proceeding to a multidisciplinary evaluation to determine eligibility for special education.

Table 4.4 illustrates the outcomes of the students who were determined to need the intensive interventions of the CSC process. Of the total number of students, n=136; 92 students (67.6%) received a multidisciplinary evaluation and were found eligible for special education services. This indicates that a majority of the students who received the benefit of the CSC required the intensity, duration, and frequency of services that are provided in the special education setting. There were n=32 students (23.5%) who were referred for a multidisciplinary evaluation and found not eligible for special education services. Additionally, there were n=11
students (8.1%) who were not referred and were able to sustain adequate academic and/or behavioral progress with the intensive intervention services from the CSC, therefore, no multidisciplinary evaluation was required. There were no students who received a referral and the referral was discontinued as well as there were no students who had a referral in process during the data collection period.

Table 4.4

Number of Students Referred to CSC and the Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(n=136) 8% of Elementary School Population</th>
<th>Number of Referrals</th>
<th>% Of Referrals</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referred/Eligible</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred/Not Eligible</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Referred/Maintained in General Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred Again the Following Year Referral Discontinued</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral In Process</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supporting Research Question 1

Were students who participated in intervention assistance referred for needed services?
Data obtained from the CSC documentation and illustrated in Table 4.5, indicated that the reason for intervention assistance requested by the referral source was aligned with the type of intervention assistance provided by the CSC, thus the needed services were provided. Of the 136 students who received intervention assistance from the CSC, 105 students (77.2%) required academic aid and received the assistance in the academic area that was requested. The selected interventions that were appropriately aligned with the academic concerns for this study were: small group instruction, extended time for assignments, and shortened assignments.

Shortened assignments were used for those students who could demonstrate mastery of skills with fewer assigned items, typically in the area of mathematics for this study. For this study, shortened assignments were of two sorts: a complete truncation of the assigned task or dividing the material into smaller pieces over limited time periods, e.g., three to five minute intervals and expanded if more time were needed to acquire mastery. Per report of school personnel, multiple CSC meetings were held to modify the intervention assistance when it was deemed necessary based on the progress or lack thereof made by the student. This is important because it provided the opportunity for a tiered approach to the intervention process, offering more intensive assistance based on the response of the student.

There were 24 students (17.6%) who received a request for assistance related to behavioral concerns. Subsequent behavioral interventions were related to the appropriate areas of concern such as constant out of seat behavior and inappropriate language being utilized with adults. Most students’ behaviors were effectively shaped by using a Token Economy system of individual reinforcement. This system allowed the students to receive tokens (stickers, play money) as reinforcement for exhibiting appropriate behavioral responses or successive approximations toward the desired behavior. With the attainment of a previously specified
number of tokens, the students were allowed to exchange the tokens for a pre-determined reward. Per report of teachers and guidance counselors, this system of reinforcement had been successfully utilized as a part of the school wide behavior system and in this study, was most utilized to address the referred behavioral concerns.

The least number of referrals were those related to both academic and behavioral concerns; these combined requests for assistance and interventions were provided for 7 students (5.2%). The overall result of the academic, behavioral, and academic/behavioral interventions indicated that only .7% of the students who received the appropriately aligned interventions were required to be referred again during the next academic school year. This suggested that generally, the interventions prescribed by the CSC were the most appropriate and allowed the students to maintain the level of performance necessary to remain within the general education population.
Table 4.5

Interventions and Alignment with Assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Interventions</th>
<th>Number of Referrals/Types of Interventions</th>
<th>% of Total Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received Academic Interventions</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Small Group Instruction for Regrouping in Mathematics</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Extended Time for Assignments</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Shortened Assignments</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Behavioral Interventions</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Positive Behavior Support</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Token Economy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Self-Monitoring</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Academic/Behavioral Interventions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Extended Time for Assignments/Self Monitoring</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Shortened Assignments/Token Economy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Small group instruction, for this study, consisted of 4 to 5 students together at a table within the regular classroom setting with direct instruction being given by a teacher. The students were allowed to work collaboratively with the primary objective being to increase problem-solving skills in the academic area of need, mathematics. Per report of teachers, a residual effect of the small group instruction also appeared to be a more developed confidence and motivation as the students became more successful in their academic area of weakness.
Extended time for completion of assignments is a very common intervention that is utilized for students with disabilities and those without. In this study, 48% of those students requiring academic assistance were administered this intervention. To facilitate the fidelity of implementation of extended time, it was determined prior to initiation that 50% more time on task would be allowed as the intervening time factor. Students who were experiencing difficulty in the subjects that required extensive reading and difficulty remaining on task for long periods of time were aligned with this intervention.

Supporting Research Question 2
Did students who received intervention assistance recycle into the process?

As reflected in Table 4.4, of the 136 students who were requested by the referral source to receive CSC assistance, there was one student (0.7%) who did not receive a multidisciplinary evaluation during the 2002-2003 academic year. This particular student performed well for a period of time with the intervention assistance, however, as the level of academic difficulties increased in conjunction with the increase in classroom demands, the student effectively reached the frustrational level and the CSC intervention assistance was no longer effective.

Supporting Research Question 3
Did students experience delays in referrals for special education?

Of the 136 students who received intervention assistance from the CSC there was one student who appeared to benefit from the intensive academic interventions for most of the 2002-2003 academic school year. As illustrated by Table 4.4, this student could not sustain the progress that was initially observed by the CSC and he was referred for a multidisciplinary evaluation the following academic school year.
Supporting Research Question 4

What was the end of year disposition of students following intervention assistance?

The data collection form utilized during this research study mirrored the form utilized by Rock and Zigmond (2001) during their study of the effectiveness of the implementation of CSCs in Pennsylvania. Of the collected data, 67.6% of the students referred for a full evaluation were found eligible for special education services; 23.5% were evaluated, but not found eligible; 8.1% were not referred; and only .7% were referred again during the following academic school year. The 8.1% of the students who were not referred for additional evaluation, were able to maintain their performance, whether academic or behavioral, with the aligned interventions within the general education population. The .7% of the students who were referred to the CSC again for the next academic school year were not able to maintain their performance in the general education. It appeared that they would require the intensity, duration, and frequency of services that are offered in special education setting.

In addition to the descriptive analysis, teachers and other school personnel reported during the data collection process that the interventions utilized were monitored closely to ensure fidelity of implementation. According to state policy in Virginia, during a CSC process, the interventions utilized by general education teachers should be reviewed to examine the fidelity of implementation as well as appropriateness to the referral concern. Based on these criteria, additional recommendations are to be made and implemented if the student does not appear to be making sufficient progress. The scheduling of subsequent meeting dates should allow enough time for teachers and other school personnel to implement, systematically, the recommended interventions and to measure their effectiveness for the student. Additionally, as indicated by the descriptive analysis, 100% of the sample n=136 were promoted to their next academic grade level.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The guidelines that dictate whether or not a student may require special education services are determined by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, an investigation of teaching referral practices suggested that teachers usually refer students for special education who present problematic behavioral or academic concerns to them in the classroom (Ysseldyke, 2002). Some of these referrals were thought to be based on contextual, affective, or a combination of both beliefs held by the teachers. It is important that the results of this study be considered within the framework of the policy established by the legislature related to the Child Study Committee (CSC) (Virginia Department of Education, 2002). The CSC is designed to identify students who may be experiencing academic and/or behavioral concerns in the school setting and to provide research based instructional practices to address the difficulties.

Summary of Results

Results of the present study indicated that overall, the majority of the sample of students (n=136) referred to the Child Study Committee (CSC) were referred appropriately with the interventions that aligned with the referral concern. Although a smaller sample was included in this study, the overall findings coincide with the findings of Rock and Zigmond (2001). Their results suggested that the CSC transforms the methodology utilized by school systems to provide instructional and behavioral supports for all students involved in the process.

In the present study, 92 (67.6%) students of the sample n=136, from academic school years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 were referred by the classroom teachers of the Deer School Division and were found eligible for special education services. These referrals were related to academic and/or behavioral concerns and 100% of these referral concerns were paired with
related intervention strategies. However, these strategies were deemed unsuccessful by the CSC team as these students were later referred for a complete psycho-educational evaluation, a subsequent eligibility meeting, and provision of special education services.

Conversely, findings from this study suggested that 32 (23.5%) of the students from the sample n=136 that were referred to the CSC and subsequently referred for a complete psycho-educational evaluation were found ineligible for services. Although these students were not found eligible for special education services, they were able to continue to receive interventions in the general education classroom setting and were successful; as only .7% of the total referred students were referred more than once. An examination within the n=136 sample revealed that a majority of the students referred to the CSC from each of the five elementary schools were male students, as is supported by the United States Department of Education (1998) and a majority 52 (38.2%) were second graders.

Conclusions

This study addressed the issue of the effectiveness of assistance given by the CSC to students referred to them for academic and behavioral concerns. By examining the effectiveness of the implementation of the CSC, data were analyzed longitudinally over a 2-year time period from a selected school division in Virginia. In this study, the assistance provided by the CSC to students experiencing academic and/or behavioral difficulties was effective in that the alignment of the interventions was consistent with the referral concern(s). However, the individually administered research based interventions were not always the most appropriate in addressing needs of the referred students.

There was a distinction made between the appropriateness of the alignment of the interventions with the referral concern(s) and the success of the outcome of the prescribed
interventions. Although the referral concerns were addressed with the appropriate academic and/or behavioral interventions, the interventions, as implemented by the teachers and other school personnel, appeared not to resolve the concerns for 32 of the referred students. This resulted in multidisciplinary evaluations for the referred students where they were found ineligible for special education services. However, these students were able to remain and function well in general education with supports that were recommended as a result of the evaluations.

Discussion

The steadily increasing numbers of students being found eligible for special education services indicated that a shift in policy may be necessary. At the time of this study, one such shift was to aggressively pursue intervention assistance while the student remains in the general education realm. Thus, in an effort to provide more effective instruction in the general education setting, Rock and Zigmond (2001) suggested that school-based intervention teams such as CSCs operate under the following principles: (a) to ensure effective use of general education services for all students prior to referral for special education services; (b) to establish building-based, teacher problem-solving teams to assist teachers; (c) to screen students systematically prior to referral for special education services using assessment and instructional techniques; and (d) to provide support and assistance to general education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. (p. 153) These findings serve further to bolster the findings of Salend et al. (2002). The Deer County School Division, in this study, concurred with both Rock and Zigmond and Salend et al. as evidenced by the development of their CSC that was designed to address the needs of struggling students within the general education population. The CSC developed by the Deer County School Division focused on the above-mentioned areas, and although they were in
the developmental stages during the time of this study, they realized the importance of the
fidelity of implementation for the total process. In this study, n=136 students referred to the CSC
represented 8.2% of the elementary student population, a relatively low number when compared
to the national average.

As it relates to Rock and Zigmond (2001) and Salend et al. (2002) this study indicated
that although the reason for intervention assistance (e.g., academic, behavioral, life skills, or a
combination) influenced the intervention assistance outcome, the interventions were not always
the most appropriate as indicated by the 23.5% of the n=136 who were referred for a complete
psycho-educational evaluation and found ineligible for special education services. The
aggressive pursuit of research based intervention in the general education setting, by Rock and
Zigmond and Salend et al. provides the guidance needed in the development of the framework
for a CSC that would decrease the number of inappropriate referrals. The substantial number of
students who were referred and found not eligible, suggests that more appropriate intervention
strategies may have been utilized to remediate the academic and/or behavioral concerns of the
students at the CSC level. Additionally, it should be noted that the CSC in the Deer County
School Division had recently begun this process and there was ongoing training being provided
to teachers related to intervention development strategies. Although these students were referred
to the CSC and not found eligible for special education services, they were able to continue to
receive interventions in the general education classroom setting and were successful. Another
noteworthy finding in the present study was the number of students who were “late referrals” as
coined by Rock and Zigmond (2001). These were the students who were able to sustain a level
of appropriate functioning within the regular classroom setting, with the intensity of the
interventions provided, however, eventually these students required special education services.
In this study, one student, with significant academic and behavioral concerns, or 0.7% cycled back through the CSC after the 2002-2003 academic school year. Rock and Zigmond (2001) found that students who were referred for both academic and behavioral concerns represented 40% of their “late referrals.” It should be noted that these findings may not be typical partially because of the relatively small sample size. Tharpe (1996) suggested that professionals seriously consider the referral question and stay focused on the question at hand. This thesis, combined with the recommendations of Salend et al. (2002), may result in resolving the notion of more appropriate intervention strategies for those students referred to the CSC.

This substantial number of students who were referred and found not eligible, suggests that more appropriate intervention strategies may have been required to remediate the academic and/or behavioral concerns of the students at the CSC level. Additionally, it should be noted that the CSC in the Deer County School division had recently begun this process and there was ongoing training being provided to teachers with intervention development strategies. As noted by Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002), training for successful pre-referral interventions were those that included “embedding” [the student’s] culture and language into the curriculum, establishing collaborative school and community relationships, employing effective and culturally relevant instructional and classroom management practices, and involving families in school and classroom activities.” (p. 291). Perhaps including these characteristics would provide more successful interventions, thus reducing the number of inappropriate referrals. The most successful and most utilized interventions for this study were extended time and the Token Economy of Reinforcement. These interventions are researched and evidenced based.
Recommendations for Future Research

The present study was limited to a two-year window of collected extant data from a relatively small LEA in the southeastern portion of Virginia. Although the results of this study mirrored a portion of the results of Rock and Zigmond (2001), it would be recommended that additional studies be done with a larger portion of the country, thus increasing the sample size, making the results of the study able to be generalized to other populations.

In addition, the LEA from which the data for this study were collected had recently begun the CSC process and the LEA faculty was receiving ongoing training designed to enhance the overall process throughout the data collection period. It would be interesting to study an LEA where the CSC process had been in place for an extended period of time to determine if the number of years, with this process in place, would result in a significant difference in the referral rate.

Also, the sample for this study was primarily a homogenous one with limited minorities being represented. Because of the United States Department of Education (1998) findings related to the disproportionate number of minorities being identified, it would be beneficial to examine a portion or cross-section of the country with a more diverse population. Once again, this would provide results that would be more able to be generalized to other populations.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to examine the Response to Intervention (RTI) as it is currently: The practice of providing and implementing intervention strategies within the general education arena with the specific purpose of evaluating the students’ responses to the research and/or evidence based interventions (Virginia Department of Education, 2007). It would be beneficial to examine the general educators’ interventions within the general education population at this time to determine the effectiveness of RTI process has since the inception of the CSC. This examination may provide benefit to teachers and students as to how to provide
effective supplementary instruction for all students within the general education arena as well as contribute to the tool kit of effective intervention strategies.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Student Coded ID# ____________

Grade Level: _____ Gender ____ Race ____

1. What was the year assistance was recommended and subsequently provided?

______________________________________________________________________________

2. What was the reason for the referral for assistance? Did the referral for assistance align with the reason for referral?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Yes, the referral was consistent with assistance given ________

No, the referral was not consistent with assistance given ________

3. What were the reading levels and academic grades for each nine week period and the end of the year final grades? (documents may be attached if available)

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

4. What were the outcomes of the intervention for this particular student at the end of year one and what was the outcome for the student at the end of year two, if applicable?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Additional Comments/Notes:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

DATE: December 22, 2004

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jean B. Crockett
     Educational Leadership & Policy St. 0302
     Donald Reed
     EDRE 0358

FROM: David Moore

Study Committee Initiative in Virginia" IRB # 04-641

I have reviewed your request to the IRB for exemption for the above referenced project. I concur
that the research falls within the exempt status. Approval is granted effective as of December 22,
2004.

Virginia Tech has an approved Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00000572, exp. 7/20/07) on file with
OHRP, and its IRB Registration Number is IRB00000667.

cc: File
     Department Reviewer M. D. Alexander EL 0302
IRB APPROVAL STATUS

An Investigation of the Implementation of the Child Study Committee Initiative in Virginia

# of human subjects

CLASS OF SUBJECT: A C P PW MD EcD EdD
(Adult, Children, Prisoners, Pregnant Women, Mentally Disabled, Economically Disabled, or Educationally Disadvantaged persons)

TYPE OF STUDY:
Interview, Survey, Questionnaire, Observation of Public Behavior, Sensory Evaluation, Psychological Evaluation, Computer Usage/Comprehension analysis, Video recording, Audio recording

FUNDING comparison date

HOLD

- Full IRB Review
- Full IRB Continuation
- Full IRB Amendment Review

Required Prior to approval:
- Exempt form
- Expedited form
- Narrative form
- Consent form
- Child Assent form
- Parent Permission form
- Teacher/School Participation form
- Department Reviewer
- copy of survey/interview questions

APPROVED

Exempt

Expedited

Continuation

Full IRB

INTERIM

Amendment

Email approval asap

IRB # 04-641

12/26/04
EXEMPT PROTOCOL REVIEW DOCUMENTATION SHEET:
Findings of the Virginia Tech IRB Chair

IRB # 04-641

TITLE: An Investigation of the Implementation of the Child Study Committee Initiative in Virginia

[ ] (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

[ ] If children are involved in the study, the researcher will not participate in the activities being observed.

[ ] (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

[ ] (3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

[ ] This study does not include the prospective collection of materials listed above.

[ ] (5) Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or Agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) Public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

[ ] (6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

I certify that I have reviewed the protocol referenced above, and found that it met the criteria for exemption from the policy as described at 45 CFR 46 Subpart A - §46.101(b).

[Signature]
IRB Chair

[Date]
Form 3 - EXEMPT

Request for Exemption of Research Involving Human Subjects

[please print or type responses below]

Principal Investigator (Faculty or Faculty Advisor and primary contact): Donald Reed

Co-Investigators (Faculty or Student): Jean B. Crockett
doreed@vt.edu, crockett1@vt.edu

Department(s): ELPS
Mail Code: 0302
E-mail: Phone 311-4566

Project Title: An Investigation of the Implementation of a Human Subjects
The Child Study Committee Initiative at Virginia Tech
Source of Funding Support: Deparment

[ ] All investigators of this project are qualified through completion of the formal training program or web-based training programs provided by the Virginia Tech Office of Research Compliance.

Note: To qualify for Exemption, the research must be (a) of minimal risk to the subjects, (b) must not involve any of the special classes of subjects, and (c) must be in one or more of the following categories. A full description of these categories may be found in the Vertebrate Research section of the Virginia Tech "IRB Protocol Submission Instructions Document" and in the federal regulations (45 CFR 46.101(b)(1)(i)); (http://irbрап.ohsu.edu/vt/vt.html#101)

[ ] 1. Research will be conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices [see item (1), page 6 of the "Instructions" document].

[ ] 2. Research will involve the use of educational tests of educational, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless the subjects can be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects and disclosure of responses could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability or reputation [see item (2), page 6 of the "Instructions"].

[ ] 3. Research will involve the use of educational tests of educational, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under item 2 above if the subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office, or Federal statute(s) require(s) that the confidentiality or other personally identifiable information will be maintained [see item (3), page 6 of the "Instructions" document].

[ ] 4. Research will involve the collection of data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects [see item (4), page 7 of the "Instructions" document].

[ ] 5. Research and demonstration projects designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public benefit or service programs, procedures for obtaining benefits or proposed changes in such programs [see item (5), page 7 of the "Instructions" document].

[ ] 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies [see item (6), page 7 of the "Instructions".]

Print name: Donald Reed
Print name: Jean B. Crockett
Date: 12/14/04

Chair, Institutional Review Board:
Date: 12/14/04

Rev: 4/27/01
Protocol to Accompany Institutional Review Board
Request for Expedited Review
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Project Title: An Investigation of the Implementation of the Child Study Committee Initiative in Virginia

Principal Investigators:
Donald Reed (Primary Investigator), Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Dr. Jean B. Crockett, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Justification of the Project
Guidelines that determine whether a student may require special education services are determined by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, an investigation of teaching referral practices suggested that teachers usually refer students for special education who present problematic behavioral or academic concerns to them. Some of these referrals were thought to be based on contextual, affective, or a combination of both beliefs held by the teachers (Ysseldyke, 2002). The steadily increasing numbers of students being found eligible for special education services indicates that a shift in policy may be necessary. One such shift would be to pursue aggressively intervention assistance while the student remains in the general education realm. Thus, in an effort to provide more effective instruction in the general education setting, Rock and Zigmond (2001) suggested that school-based intervention teams such as Child Study Committees (CSC) operate under the following principles: "(a) to ensure effective use of general education services for all students prior to referral for special education services; (b) to establish building-based, teacher problem-solving teams to assist teachers; (c) to screen students systematically prior to referral for special education services using assessment and instructional techniques; and (d) to provide support and assistance to general education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms" (p. 153). The focus of this study addresses the implementation of intervention assistance policies in Virginia. The specific purpose is to examine how general educators’ intervention strategies align with the academic and/or behavioral concerns of the referred student as well as to examine the outcomes of the CSC initiative for affected students. In addition, issues related to the representation of minority students in special education are an area of interest.

Procedures
The methodology chosen for this study is quantitative descriptive content analysis. Descriptive content analysis incorporates the notion of comparison and relationships of one thing to another (Verna & Beard, 1981). Although it is recognized that this type of analysis may not answer all fundamental questions, it is noted that it provides data that may be useful for future research in a more rigorous experimental design. In addition, descriptive research is associated with an amount of interpretation of the meaning and
significance of the outcome. The content data to be analyzed in this study will be derived from existing documents, in this case, the minutes taken at over 100 CSC meetings held in 12 elementary schools across one school system. These documents describe the nature of the student’s problem (i.e., academic, behavior, or both); a summary of parental comments; methods, materials, strategies, and resources considered and or used to remedy the problem; and a summary of actions taken. The descriptive content analysis will also reflect demographic school related data and the academic and social progress of students referred to the CSC over a two-year period.

Risks and Benefits
There are no known risks involved to participants in this study. The confidentiality of the documents will be given primary consideration throughout this study. The information will be recorded in such a manner that no individual can be identified directly or through identifiers linked to individuals. Benefits to the participating school system include the opportunity to receive descriptive information about elementary schools regarding the identification, revision, and refinement of intervention-assistance practices. However, no guarantee of benefits will be made to participants in the research project. In addition, upon request from participants, the researcher will provide a summary of the research results.

Confidentiality/Anonymity
The data will be considered confidential and restricted to analysis only by this researcher. The completed data collection instruments will be kept in a locked file cabinet; only this researcher will have access to it. In addition, after 3 years, the original data collection instruments will be destroyed.

Informed Consent
Appropriate personnel at the participating school system will be informed about the nature of the study and asked to give consent for the conduction of the study in writing. Such consent will indicate that participation is voluntary and that they understand they can choose not to participate during any portion of the research project.

Biographical Sketch
The faculty member guiding the research process is:
Dr. Jean B. Crockett, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Jean B. Crockett is an associate professor and program leader for Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Special Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Before joining Virginia Tech’s Educational Leadership and Policy Studies faculty in 1997, Dr. Crockett was a school principal in the New York metropolitan area and served as a teacher and administrator in both general and special education for 22 years. She holds a Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Virginia, a professional diploma in Educational Administration and Supervision from St. John’s University, in New York, an MA from
SUNY Stony Brook, and a BA from Marymount Manhattan College. In 2002, she was named a Garvin Fellow for her research and scholarship and Virginia Tech. Dr. Crockett’s interests are at the intersection of educational leadership and special education research with a particular focus on the relationship between policy reform initiatives and the instruction of exceptional learners. Crockett’s publications in special education and educational leadership address programming and placement issues for students with disabilities, the conceptual and historical foundations of special education, and frameworks for leadership at the interface of special and general education in contemporary schools. Dr. Crockett has delivered keynote addresses on these topics nationally and in Queensland, Australia, and Canterbury, England. She is currently the special education editor for the *Journal of Law and Education*.

Donald Reed is a Ph D candidate in the EDSE program at Virginia Tech. He received a bachelor’s degree from Louisiana State University in 1988. He received his master’s degree from the University of Louisiana at Monroe in school psychology in 1991 and a specialist degree in school psychology in 1992. He is a graduate teaching assistant in the department of Teaching and Learning and is preparing to be an administrator in secondary education and/or a professor in higher education. Mr. Reed was a school psychologist in Louisiana from 1994-2001 where he assessed students for special education services, provided counseling services, and developed behavioral plans for students who exhibited inappropriate behavioral patterns.