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AUTHOR Bausch, Amy; Becker, Kim  
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## ABSTRACT

A program was undertaken to teach organizational and study skills to middle and high school students. The targeted population consisted of sixth grade students in a social studies class and ninth grade students in a world geography class. The schools are located in a middle-to-lower class suburban community near a large midwestern city. An organizational checklist, a student survey, and a student organization and study skills test evidenced the lack of study and organizational skills by students. Analysis of probable cause data indicated that teachers do not teach organizational and study skills for a variety of reasons. Probable causes included the inclusion of special needs students in regular classroom settings without the proper support and a lack of parental support. Solution strategies involved the direct teaching of study skills and organizational strategies. Post intervention data indicated little change in the students' awareness of study and organizational skills. It suggests that the reasons for the lack of change could be a function of the data collection tools used, or the short time period allowed for intervention. The student survey, pre/post test, and organizational checklist are appended. (Contains 24 references.) (JDM)

A STUDY OF STUDENTS' LACK OF STUDY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Amy Bausch  
Kim Becker

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters in Arts in Teaching and Leadership

St. Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development

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SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

*Dr. Susan L. Moore*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

*Arnold Barbreeck*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

*Beverly Colley*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean, School of Education

## ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving the organizational and study skills of middle school and high school students through the use of explicitly taught study skills and organizational strategies. The targeted population consisted of sixth grade students in a middle school social studies class and ninth grade students in a high school world geography class. The schools are located in different communities but both are middle to lower class suburban communities near a large midwestern city. An organizational checklist, a student survey, and a student organization and study skills test evidenced the lack of study and organizational skills seen in these students.

Analysis of probable cause data indicated that teachers do not teach organizational and study skills for a variety of reasons. Probable causes include the inclusion of special needs students in regular classroom settings without the proper support, and the lack of parental support.

A review of solution strategies suggested by researchers in the field of education, combined with an analysis of the problem resulted in the development of a program for improving the organizational and study skills of students. This program involved direct teaching of study skills and organizational strategies.

Post intervention data indicated little change in the students' awareness of study and organizational skills. Reasons for the lack of change could be a function of the data collection tools used or could be due to the short time period allowed for intervention.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

#### General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted sixth and ninth grade social studies classes exhibit a lack of study and organizational skills that interfere with their academic growth, test scores, assignment completion and grades. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes student surveys, student pretests and organizational checklists completed by the teacher-researchers.

#### Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in two schools in different districts. Site A is a small middle school serving grades 6-8. The district also includes one K-1 school and one 2-5 school. Site B is a medium high school serving grades 9-12. It is the only high school in a unit district, which also includes one 7-8 school, five K-6 schools and one early education center. Both schools are located in a working class suburban area. The tables are derived from information found in the 1999 School Report Cards.

Table 1 represents the racial/ethnic backgrounds and the total enrollment for Sites A and B in relation to one another and the state, as of September 30, 1999. Site A is predominately White, which is similar to the district yet well above the state average. The majority of students at Site B are also White. However Site B has a large Hispanic population, which is above the state average.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Characteristics and Total Enrollment

|        | White | Black | Hispanic | Asian<br>P. Islander | Native<br>American | Total<br>Enrollment |
|--------|-------|-------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Site A | 90.6% | 3.6%  | 3.9%     | 0.8%                 | 1.1%               | 362                 |
| Site B | 61.5% | 3.3%  | 33.4%    | 1.1%                 | 0.7%               | 1,344               |
| State  | 62.0% | 20.6% | 13.9%    | 3.2%                 | 0.2%               | 1,962,026           |

The information in Table 2 includes low-income, limited-English proficiency, attendance, mobility, and chronic truancy. Site B has higher rates of mobility and truancy than Site A. Also, Site B has a dropout rate of 8.2%. No dropout rate is available for Site A because it is a middle school.

Table 2

Low-Income, Limited-English-Proficient, Attendance, Mobility and Chronic Truancy

|        | Low<br>Income | Limited-English<br>Proficient | Attendance | Mobility | Chronic<br>Truancy | Number of<br>Chronic Truants |
|--------|---------------|-------------------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Site A | 21.8%         | 0.0%                          | 93.8%      | 13.1%    | 3.9 %              | 13                           |
| Site B | 31%           | 6.3%                          | 94.9%      | 19.2%    | 34.1%              | 456                          |
| State  | 36.1%         | 6.4%                          | 93.6%      | 18.1%    | 2.3%               | 43,332                       |

Table 3 represents the racial/ethnic background and gender of all school personnel categorized as classroom teachers. The statistics for Site A and Site B are figured for the entire district. Both districts have a predominately white, female staff. The staff of Site B is slightly more diverse than that of Site A, but neither staff mirrors the diversity of the student body.

Table 3

Teachers by Racial/Ethnic Background and Gender

|        | White | Black | Hispanic | Asian<br>P. Islander | Native<br>American | Male   | Female | Total Number |
|--------|-------|-------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------------|
| Site A | 100%  | 0.0%  | 0.0 %    | 0.0 %                | 0.0 %              | 17.4 % | 82.6%  | 58           |
| Site B | 94.2% | 0.0%  | 4.9%     | 1.0%                 | 0.0%               | 28.1%  | 71.9%  | 456          |
| State  | 84.9% | 11.0% | 3.3%     | 0.7%                 | 0.1%               | 24.6%  | 75.4%  | 119,718      |

Table 4 includes professional characteristics of the teachers including: average years of experience, level of education and salary. Average administrator salary is also included. Compared to similar type schools in the state, the teachers at Site A average less years of experience, have less education and earn less money. While the same is true of the staff of Site B, the disparity is less at that school.

Table 4

Teacher Characteristics/Salary

|        | Average<br>Teaching<br>Experience | Teachers with<br>Bachelor's<br>Degree | Teachers with<br>Masters<br>and Above | Average<br>Teacher<br>Salary | Average<br>Administrator<br>Salary |
|--------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Site A | 12.9 Years                        | 75.7%                                 | 24.3%                                 | \$38,895                     | \$74,419                           |
| Site B | 14.6 Years                        | 54.7%                                 | 45.3%                                 | \$47,882                     | \$61,096                           |
| State  | 15.0 Years                        | 53.1%                                 | 46.7%                                 | \$45,337                     | \$76,917                           |

Table 5 represents pupil to staff ratios and expenditures per student. Site A has higher than average pupil-teacher ratio and pupil-certified staff ratio. However, it has a lower than average pupil-administrator ratio. Both sites spend less per student than the state average.



Table 5

Pupil to Staff Ratios and Expenditures per Student

|        | Pupil-<br>Teacher<br>Ratio | Pupil-<br>Certified<br>Staff<br>Ratio | Pupil-<br>Administrator<br>Ratio | Instructional<br>Expenditure<br>per Pupil | Operating<br>Expenditure<br>per Pupil |
|--------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Site A | 22.4:1                     | 16.6:1                                | 220.6:1                          | \$3,173                                   | \$5,287                               |
| Site B | 17.8:1                     | 15.0:1                                | 188.5:1                          | \$3,308                                   | \$5,612                               |
| State  | 19.6:1                     | 14.3:1                                | 243.3:1                          | \$3,990                                   | \$6,682                               |

The targeted group of students at Site A is a sixth-grade social studies classroom.

Although the official school name designates it as a junior high, the school serves grades 6-8.

The school is departmentalized, each grade has one language arts, science, math, social studies and learning disabilities teacher. Department meetings are held after school on a bi-monthly basis. In the past, all teachers also taught one class of reading per day. This year language arts and reading have been integrated into one class. The faculty also includes two p.e./health teachers. The school shares a fine arts coordinator, a band/chorus teacher, a social worker, a speech/language specialist and a school psychologist with the rest of the district.

Each grade level is considered to be a team. The building itself is organized so that grade level classrooms are near each other for the ease of students and teachers. Sixth grade students have the majority of their classes in one hallway and that is where their lockers are located. Team meetings are often held during the shared lunch hour. The team has no other common planning time, which impedes the ability of the team to plan together. Time away from the classroom has been provided for the purpose of planning integrated curricula, which the principal supports.

The building currently used as the junior high opened in 1961. A recent addition included several new classrooms, and an updated library and computer lab. This is in-line with the district and site emphasis on technology. The site also places an emphasis on providing after-school opportunities for the students, including a variety of athletic teams and several clubs. Two late buses provide transportation for students staying after school for extra-curricular or academic reasons.

The administrative configuration of Site A includes a superintendent , an assistant superintendent and building principal. The current building principal is concurrently serving as assistant superintendent. The principal is involved with students and staff on a continual basis and is very supportive and encouraging of the teachers. Although Site A does not currently have an assistant principal, the school does have a behavioral specialist who works with at-risk students as well as helping with day to day disciplinary issues.

The curriculum of Site A has a strong basis in the state education goals set forth by the State Board of Education. All classroom teachers follow these goals as they make daily lesson plans. The social studies goals for the targeted group are as follows:

As a result of their education in social studies, the students will be able to:

1. Understand, analyze and compare social, political and economic systems.
2. Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.
3. Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society.

The structure of Site B is quite different from Site A. The targeted group of students at Site B is a ninth-grade World Geography classroom. The high school serves grades 9-12. This year,

the school had been divided into five academic departments led by department heads. These departments include Humanities (social studies, art, choir, band), Applied Arts (computer courses, graphic arts, auto shop, business courses, home economics,) Life Fitness (physical education, health, driver's education,) Applied Science (math, science,) Language Arts (English, foreign languages, ESL and bilingual education.) Special Education continues to be its own department, headed by a Special Education Coordinator. These departments are superficial; teachers tend to work more within their own discipline, i.e. social studies. The faculty also includes one school psychologist, three social workers, and a speech/hearing specialist. Staff meetings are held after school on a monthly basis. Departments frequently meet on school improvement days.

Because of rapid growth in the area, a high school was opened in 1962. Several additions have occurred over the years. These include an additional gym, more classrooms and a larger lunchroom. The most recent addition/renovation is an art room and a technology lab. The school currently has fifty-four classrooms, two gyms, an auditorium, an auto shop, three computer labs/classrooms, and a library that also includes about thirty computers.

Site B offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Activities that are made available to the students both before and after school include many types of athletic teams and a variety of clubs and other organizations. Students are expected to provide their own transportation.

The administrative structure of Site B includes a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a district special education coordinator, a building principal, two assistant principals, two deans, a building special education coordinator and five department heads. The deans and the department heads are involved with the students and deal with the day to day

disciplinary issues. The principal handles most of the administrative business and is out of the building quite a bit. One assistant principal focuses on curriculum and is not very visible to students/faculty. The other assistant principal is much more active amongst the student population, sponsoring a club and handling some of the disciplinary issues.

The curriculum at Site B is based on an outline of the subject matter. Teachers create the time frame for it to be taught and administrators based on the state education goals. The teachers at Site B are given a great deal of freedom in their classrooms to teach the subject matter in their own teaching styles. The world geography curriculum is structured as follows: five themes of geography, climate and weather, plate tectonics, global cultures, economics and politics, one hundred places around the world, and various regions of the world exploring their culture and land features (maps).

At both sites a handbook explaining behavior expectations and guidelines is distributed to students and parents in the beginning of the year. Parents are highly encouraged to attend such school-sponsored events as open house and parent-teacher conferences. Grade reports are sent to parents on a regular basis so parents are continually aware of their students' status.

### The Surrounding Community

Communities play a large role in the operation and governance of schools. The community of Site A is predominately residential with a few small businesses and no industry. The site is located in the far northwest suburbs of a large Midwestern metropolitan area and was once considered a resort area. Many residents no longer have school-age children, but the district has experienced some recent growth as younger families have moved into some new housing. As stated above, the vast majority of the students are white, which is representative of the community as a whole.

The majority of the students reside in single-family homes. The average home is 20 years old, and the median price of a home is \$181,172. Only 27% of students graduating from the area high school go on to attend a four-year college. This may be due in part to the fact that the majority of adults in the community did not attend college. In fact, most are employed in blue-collar jobs that do not require formal education. This may cause a difference in the expectations of schoolwork between teachers and parents.

The community of Site B is predominately residential with some small businesses and few industries such as Baxter Laboratories and Grieve Corporation. The site is located in the far northwest suburbs of a large Midwestern metropolitan area and was once considered a resort area. The district is experiencing growth due to the fact that younger families have been moving into recently built housing. An influx of immigrants (many Hispanic as noted in Table 1.) has also contributed to growth in the district. The immigrants bring with them different cultures with different expectations of student education.

The majority of students reside in single-family homes. The average home is sixty years old, and the median price of a home is \$107, 296. Only 36% of the students graduating from the high school attend a four-year college. Similar to Site A, the majority of adults in the community did not attend college. Most are employed in blue-collar jobs that do not require formal education. For this reason, parents may value education differently than teachers.

### National Context of the Problem

In the information age of the twenty-first century, the ability to physically and mentally organize the boundless amounts of information that we are faced with on a daily basis becomes increasingly important. Even in the electronic age, the paper chase continues to be a reality

faced by students and teachers. The organizational problems faced by many students are amplified by this situation.

It has been documented by researchers that 67% of secondary general educators believe that organizational skills are a crucial factor for success in the classroom setting (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997). Furthermore, in the era of inclusive education accompanied by the need for teachers to make accommodations for students with a variety of special needs, helping students organize becomes increasingly important (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997).

The careers that schools are preparing students for has drastically changed in the past twenty years. Today's students will grow to adulthood in an economy which requires an education past high school for the maintenance of a middle class life style. As more and more careers require a college education or equivalent technical training, the need for study skills instruction becomes paramount.

Educational researchers have indicated this need as well. Smith and Commander (1997) note, "Many students seem to lack the tacit knowledge, or the understanding of how to be successful in an academic environment (p 30)." The question then becomes what is this tacit knowledge? Orstein (1994) states "good study skills connote the ability to learn and make use of what one is reading or studying to understand the information and to engage in independent learning without immediate feedback from the teacher (p 62)."

Many parents also seem to agree with the idea that an increase in study skills will led to an increase in academic performance as evidenced by the success of Sylvan Learning Center and other similar programs (Thomas, 1993). Further evidence of the importance of studying and study skills lies in cross-cultural comparisons of American students with the rest of the industrialized world. American students often demonstrate lower academic achievement. Some

researchers believe that American students spend significantly less time in study than higher achieving students in other nations (Chen & Stevenson, 1989). The next chapter provides evidence that the problems exist at the targeted sites and addresses some probable causes for these problems.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

#### Problem Evidence

In order to provide evidence that a lack of organization and study skills exists in the classroom, student surveys and pre-tests were distributed, collected and analyzed. An organizational checklist was also administered by both teacher-researchers.

#### Student Survey

During the third week of school, students were asked to fill out a survey in class regarding their behavior in the areas of studying and keeping organized (Appendix A). The purpose of this survey was to target the studying and organizational behaviors exhibited by students in junior high and high school. The survey was given anonymously. At Site A, twenty-six students were surveyed and at Site B, twenty-three students were surveyed for a total of 49 students. The students were asked questions about note taking, reviewing notes, studying, study techniques and organization. The results of the student survey are recorded in Table 6.



Table 6

Student Survey Results

|   | Site A |    | Site B        |               | Total        |    |
|---|--------|----|---------------|---------------|--------------|----|
|   | Yes    | No | Yes           | No            | Yes          | No |
| Do you                                      |        |    |               |               |              |    |
| take notes?                                 | 24     | 2  | 22            | 1             | 46           | 3  |
| read your notes each day?                   | 7      | 19 | 6             | 17            | 13           | 36 |
| before a test?                              | 19     | 5  | 22            | 1             | 41           | 6  |
| study for tests?                            | 23     | 3  | 21            | 2             | 44           | 5  |
| have a buddy in each class that you         |        |    |               |               |              |    |
| could call for help, assignments etc.?      | 19     | 7  | 11            | 12            | 30           | 19 |
| have a regular time to study at home?       | 15     | 10 | 12            | 11            | 27           | 21 |
| have a regular place to study at home?      | 20     | 5  | 17            | 6             | 37           | 11 |
|   |        |    |               |               |              |    |
|   |        |    | <b>Site A</b> | <b>Site B</b> | <b>Total</b> |    |
| Which of these study techniques do you use? |        |    |               |               |              |    |
| Study with a friend                         |        | 15 | 8             |               | 23           |    |
| Review the textbook                         |        | 15 | 16            |               | 31           |    |
| Parents/friends quiz you                    |        | 22 | 10            |               | 32           |    |
| Review your notes                           |        | 23 | 21            |               | 44           |    |
| Use a study guide                           |        | 15 | 22            |               | 37           |    |
| Predict test questions                      |        | 4  | 6             |               | 10           |    |
|   |        |    |               |               |              |    |
| When do you start studying for a test?      |        |    |               |               |              |    |
| when it is announced                        |        | 4  | 2             |               | 6            |    |
| a week before                               |        | 5  | 6             |               | 11           |    |
| a few days before                           |        | 8  | 9             |               | 17           |    |
| the day before                              |        | 5  | 6             |               | 11           |    |
| through out the unit                        |        | 0  | 1             |               | 1            |    |

The data collected from the survey does show that there are some underlying organizational and study skills problems with the students in the targeted populations. For example, 44% of the students reported not having a regular time to study and 23% of the students reported not having a regular place to study. Only 61% of the students reporting having another student in their classes that they could call on for assignments or help if needed. Furthermore, 19% of the students reported that they begin to study for a test the day before. These behaviors are most likely having a negative impact on the students' grades.

### Pre-test

The third week of school year, the students were asked to take an anonymous pre-test on study and organizational skills. The test was designed to measure the students' knowledge in the area of study and organizational skills. Twenty-six students were tested at Site A and twenty-two students were tested at Site B for a total of forty-eight students. Students were asked questions about note-taking skills, specific study techniques, using text books, when and how to prepare for a test, following directions, active listening, bringing supplies to class, and keeping folders and notebooks in order. For each question, students were asked to choose correct answers from a list of possible choices. Students were directed before beginning that many questions had more than one correct answer, where given the option of choosing "I don't know" and also given the option of writing in an additional choice. Because of the fact that most questions elicited multiple responses from most students, it would be impractical to include all responses to all questions. Table 7 represents the results of four key questions on the pre-test.

Table 7

Organizational and Study Skills Pre-test Results

|  | Site A | Site B | Total |
|--|--------|--------|-------|
| When you come to class you should ALWAYS bring:    |        |        |       |
| text   | 6      | 21     | 27    |
| snack  | 0      | 1      | 1     |
| pen/pencil   | 24     | 21     | 45    |
| folder   | 25     | 20     | 45    |
| homework   | 24     | 21     | 45    |
| gum  | 0      | 3      | 3     |
| assignment notebook                                | 24     | 16     | 40    |
| class notebook                                     | 23     | 20     | 43    |
| calculator   | 11     | 1      | 12    |
| magazines  | 1      | 0      | 1     |
| other  | 0      | 0      | 0     |
| I don't know                                       | 0      | 0      | 0     |
| You should prepare for a test by:                  |        |        |       |
| looking at your notes five minutes before the test | 11     | 7      | 18    |
| reviewing your notes thoroughly                    | 21     | 19     | 40    |
| reviewing your text book                           | 15     | 9      | 24    |
| answering the questions on the study guide         | 15     | 19     | 34    |
| predicting questions that will be on the test      | 4      | 6      | 10    |

going through the book while listening to music

|                                     |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| or watching television              | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| talking to your friend on the phone | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know                        | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| other                               | 0 | 0 | 0 |

When taking notes in class, you should:

|  |    |    |    |
|--|----|----|----|
| be careful so the teacher does not catch you               | 2  | 0  | 2  |
| put the date on the top of the page                        | 15 | 18 | 33 |
| give your notes a title that tells you what they are about | 20 | 21 | 41 |
| use loose-leaf paper and shove into a book                 |    |    |    |
| when you are done  | 1  | 1  | 2  |
| keep your notes in order                                   | 18 | 20 | 38 |
| draw doodles all over the place                            | 1  | 3  | 4  |
| I don't know   | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| other  | 2  | 0  | 0  |

When using your textbook to study, you should:

|  |    |    |    |
|--|----|----|----|
| re-read everything that you have already read        | 15 | 10 | 25 |
| look over the titles and bolded words to make        |    |    |    |
| sure that you understand                             | 12 | 18 | 30 |
| sleep with the book under your pillow so that you    |    |    |    |
| learn through osmosis                                | 0  | 0  | 0  |
| look up the words that you still don't understand in |    |    |    |

|   |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|
| the glossary                                    | 22 | 19 | 41 |
| read any and all chapter summaries              | 8  | 10 | 18 |
| flip through the book while watching television | 0  | 1  | 1  |
| I don't know                                    | 2  | 0  | 2  |
| other   | 1  | 0  | 1  |

---

The results of this survey show that the students in the targeted population do have some of the pre-requisite knowledge about how come to class prepared. Over ninety percent of the students were aware of all of the things they needed to bring with them to class on a daily basis. These items include class notebooks, folders, homework assignments and at Site B, their course textbook (Site A does not issue textbooks to the students in the targeted class.) This eliminated any doubt that their failure to bring them to class results from an ignorance of their necessity. Also, students demonstrated some knowledge of proper test preparation by their responses to the survey. The most popular answer to the question of how to prepare for test was “reviewing notes thoroughly,” followed by “answering questions on the study guide,” with “reviewing your text book” coming in third.

However, student knowledge that they should be using a certain strategy does not necessarily correlate with the knowledge of how to use the strategy correctly. For example, many students reported that reviewing the textbook was a good way to prepare for a test. When asked about the ways in which they should be using their textbooks to study, the students provided evidence that the ways in which they are using their textbooks may not be the most effective. Over one-half of the students responded that re-reading everything previously read is a good strategy, while only a third of the students selecting reading the chapter summaries. It

seems that the students are expending energy and time re-reading information they have already read, instead of simply reading chapter summaries.

Another example of the knowledge gap that exists is in the area of note taking. Many of the students successfully chose some of the proper note taking strategies on the pre-test, however a large percentage were missing vital steps to keeping an organized notebook. Thirty-three percent of the students did not select dating notes as an important note taking strategy. Also, 22% of the students left out keeping notes in order as being a significant step. These students who are problem among the vast majority who reported that reviewing their notes as a strategy will be studying notes that may be less than adequate.

#### Teacher Checklist

Both teacher-researchers at Sites A and B filled out a checklist on students' organizational skills as evidenced by their ability to bring the necessary supplies to class. Each teacher checked for items such as pencils, textbooks, folders, class notebooks, assignment notebooks, etc. Any time a student failed to bring one of these items, it was recorded on the checklist. The results of the organizational checklist are found in Table 8.

Table 8

Organizational Checklist Result

|                     | Site A | Site B | Total |
|---------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| pencil              | 6%     | 0%     | 3%    |
| folder              | 8%     | 15%    | 10%   |
| notebook            | 4%     | 3%     | 3%    |
| assignment          | 14%    | 15%    | 14%   |
| assignment notebook | 4%     | N/A    | 4%    |
| textbook            | N/A    | 3%     | 3%    |
| any single item     | 27%    | 23%    | 25%   |

The results from this checklist are powerful. When each item is looked at individually, it seems very insignificant. The important statistic is the total number of students effected by a lack of preparedness for class. The final column of the table indicates the percentage of students who failed to bring at least one item to class on at least one occasion. A full one-fourth of students in the targeted populations was unprepared for class in some way. Because the data gathered by the pretest indicates that these students are well aware of the need to bring these items to class, their failure to do so is most likely due to a lack of organizational skills.

#### Probable Causes

The literature suggests several underlying causes for a lack of organizational and study skills in the school setting. The most commonly cited in the literature is a lack of explicit instruction in this area by teachers for a variety of reasons. The priorities of students and parents

outside of school also are named as contributing to this problem. A third reason, which is less often referred to by researchers is the inclusion of special needs students without the proper support.

### Lack of Explicit Instruction

As children progress to the higher levels of education, many teachers assume that students have already acquired the study and organizational skills needed to be successful students. In a research article found in the Journal of Developmental Education, Smith and Commander (1997) noted that students were not displaying the “unwritten rules for academic success” that teachers expected them to have already mastered. It is expected and assumed that students are acquiring these skills, which are never being explicitly taught by teachers nor parents (Bowers and Farr, 1984). As noted by the literature, although teachers assume students have been taught the necessary organizational and study skills, they in fact have not.

One of the reasons teachers do not teach organizational and study skills is because the teachers are not adequately trained in these skills. A research study cited by Thomas (1993), stated, “Many teachers feel inadequately trained to teach study skills. A study of thirty-seven elementary, middle and secondary teachers revealed that 36% said they had received sufficient training to feel well prepared to teach study skills while 64% said they needed more training.” (pg 17) Another reason teachers do not teach study and organizational skills is because of the emphasis by administrators, the public as well as teachers themselves to focus on academic curriculum. Furthermore, many school districts are unsure of how to work study and organizational skills into their established curriculum (Ornstein, 1994).



### Student-Parent Priorities

Part of the problem lies in students' attitudes towards school and learning. American students seem to view school, homework and studying as tedious, difficult and boring.

“American children do not appear to enjoy homework and their mothers believe that they must intrude in order to see that the children complete their homework” according to Chen and Stevenson in their article, “Homework: A Cross-cultural Examination” (1989). The students themselves seem to agree with this statement. When asked why they do not complete their homework, students said that they do not have time to do their homework because they are busy doing “real things” such as socializing or working part time and that there is no point in doing homework (Hinchey, 1996). Perhaps another reason not admitted to by students is that they have a difficult time accomplishing their required tasks because of poor time management and organizational skills. These skills are quite difficult to learn and part of that difficulty is that in most school systems the onus for learning the structure of these skills is placed on the students (Bowers and Farr, 1984).

Augmenting the problem that many students' priorities seem to be non-academic, many parents do not or can not place their children's education as a top priority. With the increasing number of latch-key kids, parental help for students educational needs may be drastically reduced because of economic needs and social schedules (Sullivan and Sequeira, 1996). According to research done by Murphy and Decker (1990), “by and large, parents were not actively involved in supporting individual teacher's homework policies.” (pg 42) Obviously, if parents do not have time to help their students with their schoolwork, children are not learning study and organizational skills at home.

### Inclusion of Special Needs Students without Proper Support

Inclusion of special needs students in regular education settings continues to be a hot topic. When done correctly, the situation can be beneficial to all students and educators. When done incorrectly however, it can be damaging to the special needs student and can make instruction difficult for the regular education teacher. Many of the disabilities that challenge special needs students make acquiring study and organizational skills more difficult for them than their non-disabled peers. For example, students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) struggle with organizational skills to a much greater degree than students who do not have ADHD (Stormont-Spurgin, 1997). Note taking often proves difficult for students with learning disabilities. In the article, "Note-taking for the Mainstreamed Student," (1988) Wood, White and Miderhoff list four main reasons that students have difficulty taking notes from a lecture: "1.) visual processing problems, 2.) deficient motor skills, 3.) inability to extrapolate major concepts, and 4.) auditory processing problems (pg 108.)" Therefore, regular education teachers must make modifications to ensure the success of these students in the area of note taking. A further difficulty also faced by students with learning disabilities includes an inability to read grade-level content-area textbooks. Although sophisticated readers may be capable of understanding the subject matter put forth by textbooks through independent reading and study, students with learning disabilities require alternative strategies to handle the level of detail found in most textbooks (Horton and Leavitt, 1989). . Without the proper support, this can prove quite difficult for regular education teachers who lack the training to make the proper accommodations for students with special needs.

### Site-Based Causes

In addition to the probable causes cited in the literature, reasons for the problem exist with the targeted population at Site A and B. The sixth grade students in the targeted population at Site A are experiencing a transition from fifth grade in which they were in a self-contained classroom with the same teacher all day to a middle school setting in which they have a different teacher for each subject. Some of the challenges faced by the students during this transition include switching classes, using a locker instead of keeping all of their belongings in a desk, and dealing with the rules and expectations of several teachers while losing the uniformity of having only one teacher. This transition amplifies the organizational difficulties faced by many students. Further complicating the problem is the new focus on academic content. For the first time in their school careers, students are being asked to listen to lectures, take notes and be more independent with their study habits. Without the consistency of a single teacher keeping track of their progress, some students struggle with this transition.

The targeted population at Site B is also undergoing transition. These students are all ninth graders, having moved from a junior high setting into high school. Many of these students have received failing grades in the past, yet due to the district's social promotion policy have been allowed to move on with their classmates. These students seem to have a difficult time understanding the concept that a failing grade in a course means that they receive no credit and must repeat it. The study and organizational skills needed for success have not been necessary for these students in the past and now that they are in high school, most teachers assume that the students already possess them.

A second site-based cause at Site A comes from the surrounding community. Many of the parents and other adults living in the district do not have a high school diploma and few have

any college education. This adds to the problem for many reasons. First of all, students lack role models to whom further education is important. Many parents work in blue-collar jobs that do not require higher education. Due to this fact, some students and parents do not feel that education is important. Also, the jobs that some parents hold require them to work many hours, including second and third shifts. This fact causes students to come home to empty homes without the parental involvement and support that is so essential to the development of student skills such as study and organizational strategies.

Site B has a higher than average truancy and mobility rate. Site A does have problems with truancy and mobility, however they are not as bad as at Site B. Truancy and mobility seem to add to the problem of a lack of study and organizational skills. Students who are not in class fall behind and can become disorganized. Switching schools on a regular basis can cause curriculum to seem disjointed and nonsensical. These students may become unmotivated and feel as if they are hopelessly behind their peers. This can cause students to place little importance on school and learning. These factors can inhibit students from gaining the necessary study and organizational skills.

Many students who begin their high school careers at Site B do not obtain a high school diploma. A multitude of factors contribute to this statistic, including those discussed in the previous paragraph. Cultural factors may also have an influence. Site B has a higher than average Hispanic population, many of whom are recent immigrants. Quite a few of these students who drop out do so at the request of the parents. The extra income that is brought in by these teenagers is perceived to be more important than earning a high school diploma. Dropping out of high school is considered acceptable and necessary within this culture. Students who

realize that they will probably not graduate from high school may not be very motivated to develop good student skills including study and organizational strategies.

The organizational problems faced by some students at Site A seem to be compounded by family situations. Many students in the targeted population come from single-parent and stepfamily situations. These students are often shuffled from house to house on a regular basis. Some students report having difficulty returning forms requiring parental signatures due to this situation. Also, some relate occasionally leaving important items, such as homework or school supplies at one parent's home where it can not be easily obtained. The discontinuity of their family life can cause students to have difficulty obtaining study and organizational skills.

In conclusion, these causes are all contributing factors as to why students lack study and organizational skills. Because these skills are so vital to the success of all students, it is critical that students acquire these skills. Possible solutions to this problem will be more specifically defined in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

#### The Literature Review

Research revealed several possible solutions to increase students' study and organizational skills. These possible solutions include: teaching organizational skills; time management, object organization, homework, notebook organization, note-taking skills, and a variety of study strategies.

#### Organization Skills and Strategies

Organizational skills are vital to the success of students in the classroom environment. As students progress through the educational system, the challenge of staying organized becomes greater each year. Initially, students remain in one location and are required to do very little to organize. Although the paper work aspect of schooling becomes more daunting during upper elementary school; students continue to be homeroom centered. That is to say, that they have a desk in one classroom where their belongings remain throughout the day. Upon entering the middle school or junior high setting, students experience a fundamental shift in the necessity for organization. They are now expected to change classes and teachers and no longer have a homeroom-based desk. They must shift from class to class and use a locker, often for the first time. This is

a difficult transition for many. The difficulty is compounded by the assumption of many educators that the students already possess these skills.

### Time Management

Some of the more important, yet often elusive skills needed by students are time management skills. One method that teachers can use to model good time management skills is through a well-designed classroom schedule. “Establishing a classroom rhythm is necessary in order to maintain the daily routines so important to facilitating organized behavior” (Slade, 1986, p 235.) Seeing an adult employ time management skills can help students to see the value of them.

Teachers can also assist students with time management skills by introducing time management skills to them directly. When students are given class time to work, Storment-Spurgin suggests having them take note of how much of the assignment was completed in class, then instructing them to use that information to plan the additional time they will need at home to complete the assignment (1997.) A second strategy for direct instruction involves having the students create a calendar to chart how they spend their time on a daily or weekly basis (Sheilds & Heron, 1989.) Teachers can use this calendar to help students start budgeting time for necessary activities and balancing that with other obligations, as well as leisure time. List making is another strategy that can be used for time management. “Students should be encouraged to make lists of activities they will do during the morning, afternoon or entire day. Have students cross off each activity when it is completed” (Storment-Spurgin, 1997, pg 1.) Direct instruction of these skills is necessary as they are neither innate nor common knowledge.

Organizational skills instruction should not end with the tone of the school bell. Parental involvement is a crucial ingredient. As noted by Soloman, teachers should encourage parents to provide a consistent time and place for their children to study (1989.) During the study time, parents should expect their children to: 1.) organize their materials, 2.) have all assignments; the parents' role is assist only when and if the student becomes discouraged (Soloman, 1989.) With a unified approach from both school and home, children will begin to develop and utilize time management skills.

### Object Organization

Succeeding in school requires students to keep track of a variety of materials. For many classes, students are required to have no less than the following materials: writing utensils, text book, notebook, folder, assignment notebook, assignments in addition to many other peripheral items. This is a challenging task for some students. For some students the presence of all of these items can become distracting, setting up a work station, free from the clutter, where students can work, focused solely at the task at hand can help (Sheilds and Heron, 1989.)

There are other strategies for helping students in this area, which are more direct in nature. For example, Williamson suggests that teachers have older students read about closet design and organization and transfer that knowledge through a locker organization contest (1997.) Younger students can participate in a scavenger hunt. Teachers can divide the class into teams that compete to find the most designated items in their desks (Williamson, 1997.) After participating in this activity, the students can transfer the concept by brainstorming ways to win; which will lead to the development of good organizational strategies.



Organizing class notebooks can also be problematical for students. Price proposes a very specific design, his intent was for math, but it is applicable to any subject area and would probably best serve students at the high school level or above. He suggests that each student keep a three-ring binder for each class divided into separate sections (Price, 1997.) This method can be varied depending on the level of the students, the materials to be organized and the subject matter at hand.

### Homework Organization

Within the basic area of object organization lies a very important sub-topic; homework organization. Every teacher, most likely every student has experienced the effects of lost homework assignments. Consistency in the area of homework will help students. Homework that is regularly assigned and collected has been shown to have a positive impact on students (Soloman, 1989.) Students need homework to be meaningful in order for it to be effective for them. Memory of information is tied to three specific factors: attention, meaning and relevance (Fogarty, 1997.) Homework meets the purpose of providing attention to the information, and teachers can design the homework to specifically ensure that it is meaningful and relevant as well. However, no matter how well designed an assignment is, a student who cannot complete it because he or she has lost it gains nothing from that assignment.

Color-coding is another method for helping to keep students organized. The notebook, folders, textbook and even workbooks for each class can be the same color, making it easy and fast for students to gather the correct materials for each class (Williamson, 1997.) Construction paper can be used to make implementing this system with existing materials very simple and cost-effective. While this strategy will be helpful

for all students, it will be especially beneficial to those students whose strength is in the visual/spatial areas. Chapman lists coloring coding as an activity that promotes learning with the visual/spatial intelligence (1993, pg 114.) Another solution for helping students to keep their homework organized, is quite simple yet effective; “each student should have an assignment notebook” (Williamson, 1997, pg 38.) Teachers can use assignment notebooks in a manner that benefits students with strengths in many intelligences. For example, a teacher could spend the last portion of the day or class period by writing the day or class assignment on the board, which would appeal to visual learners (Chapman, 1993.) Then students could write the assignment in their own books, which would appeal to the verbal/linguistic intelligence (Chapman, 1993.) Next, the class could categorize assignments, what type of homework do they have that night; this would benefit the naturalist intelligence (Chapman, 1993.) Teachers could also ask students how many assignments they have that night, which would appeal to the logical/mathematical intelligence (Chapman, 1993.) A further benefit to spending time reviewing the assignments with the students is it places importance and meaning on the assignment notebook, which as stated previously, is vital for memory.

A more complex method for helping students keep track of their assignments is called the log and chart method. “Providing students with a visual representation of the contents that must be learned, the tasks that need to be accomplished is a central component of the log and chart format” (Sheilds and Heron, 1989, pg 8.) The log and chart format is a more complicated system of recording assignments than a typical assignment notebook and may take more time for students to learn, as well as more time per day to complete. However, it will provide more information on the assignment that

an assignment notebook which simply lists assignments. No matter how well designed an assignment may be, if students lose it before it can be completed, it serves no purpose whatsoever.

### Note Taking

As students get older, the focus of school curriculum shifts from the teaching of skills and processes to the teaching of information and facts. A change in teaching style accompanies this shift, students are often lectured to and expected to take notes on these lectures. Similar to other organizational skills, teachers often believe that students “just know” how to take notes. That is in fact far from true, therefore, students need to be taught this skill.

Based on his study of college students’ notes, Locke (1977) suggested stressing the importance of material that is not written on the board, announcing explicitly the precise role that lectures play in the course, and combating student fatigue by providing a rest break (Beecher, 1988, pg 98.)

Making students aware of what is expected of them is the first step in helping them to take better notes.

The structure of the lecture is also important in terms of student note-taking, especially for students who are new to the process. What follows are some suggestions for instructors when using the lecture format to teach: 1.) write down important information 2.) avoid information overload on written materials 3.) use handouts that provide space in which the students can write (Beecher, 1998.) Providing handouts for students to utilize while note taking is a suggestion given by many experts. Hodapp and Hodapp suggest providing the students with a ‘skeletal’ set of notes to guide the students’

attention (1992.) A similar system for structuring students' note taking is to supply them with an outline of the notes. The outline would be partially completed and as the students' ability to take notes increased, the amount of information provided to the students would be decreased accordingly (Williamson, 1997.) Teachers can also take care to assure that the delivery style they use is varied to ensure that their lectures are meaningful to students with different intelligence strengths. According to Chapman, typical lecturing with notes, in an outline form will appeal to the verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial and logical mathematical intelligences (1993.) To appeal to the musical/rhythmic intelligence, teachers might utilize the following strategies: creating songs, using musical mnemonic devices, and using unison recall of information (Chapman, 1993.) Even in a lecture format, learning with the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence can be promoted. Teachers can allow for stretching and exercise breaks or can review materials discussed through games that involve movement (Chapman, 1993.) The intrapersonal intelligence can be promoted through times for reflection while note-taking and the interpersonal intelligence could be used through activities as simple as "turn to your partner and...." (Chapman, 1993.) Most of these activities are short and easily inserted into a lesson, yet are very effective in meeting the needs of a diverse group of learners in an area of note-taking, that they may uncomfortable or unwilling to do.

For students to be able to correctly record notes from lectures, they must be listening closely to the messages being delivered by the speaker. Many students believe that they are listening, when in fact they are not. Students may need instruction in active listening, also called attentive listening. An example of an activity which teaches active listening skills is to put students into pairs and have one partner draw a picture based

solely on his or her partner's description of the image (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991.) This activity requires students to focus their complete attention on to the partner's description. With proper processing, students can then transfer the importance of attentive listening to a lecture setting.

Feedback is important. Teachers can provide feedback to their students by collecting and grading their notebooks on a regular basis (Hodapp and Hodapp, 1992.) This feedback helps not only the student to understand how they are progressing in their note taking skills, but it also helps the teacher to adjust her curriculum according to the students' needs.

### Study Skills

Study skills are the difficult to define set of skills needed by students to be successful in the area of learning. Many junior high and high schools do have programs to teach students study skills, but that may be too late. According to Hoover, there is a direct link between the effective use of study skills by students in later grades, and the development of those skills during the elementary school years (1989.) This means that the instruction of study skills should begin very early in the academic career of students.

In the instruction of study skills, teachers take care to provide a multitude of strategies. "Self-regulated learners need a repertoire of study strategies to meet the varying demands of tasks and texts they will encounter" (Nist, et al. 1991, pg 851.) Some guidelines provided by Price for students to use when studying for a test include: 1.) reviewing all notes taken during the unit, 2.) look up and learn the definition of all vocabulary words, 3.) study quizzes and review questions that were difficult (1997.)

While these strategies may seem over-simplistic and obvious to instructors, students may not be aware of them.

Graphic organizers can be invaluable study techniques. A graphic organizer is a visual design of some sort that can be used to organize information; a Venn diagram for example, is a graphic organizer. The use of graphic organizers provides a physical interaction with the information that makes the information more visible and concrete to students (Forgarty, 1997.) Some examples of graphic organizers include webs, concept maps, flow charts and Venn Diagrams. Once students become comfortable with the use of graphic organizers, they can self-select the organizer that best suits the needs of the material and their learning styles.

Another study technique that students can be taught to employ is the use of memory link systems, sometimes known as mnemonic devices. There are three major types of link systems: 1.) Linking information to familiar material 2.) Linking information to visual representations 3.) Linking information to associated information (Joyce & Weil, 1996.) The use of the acronym ROY G. BIV (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) to remember the colors of the rainbow is an example of this type of memory strategy. Students can be taught existing mnemonics or be encouraged to create their own. For example, students can draw pictures or make up acronyms or poems to help them remember the material they are studying.

Metacognition is also important for lasting retention of information. Metacognition is the act of thinking about the thinking process. “In the metacognitive moment, the learner plans, monitors, and evaluates his or her own thinking and learning.” (Fogarty, 1997.) This puts the learner more in control of his or her learning and deepens

understanding, which will allow the information to be used in a much broader variety of experiences. Teaching students to think about their own learning can be a very effective study technique.

While at first glance, cooperative learning may not seem to fall in the realm of study techniques, this strategy can in fact facilitate student learning. Studying in a cooperative learning setting requires the students to take a more vocal, more active approach to studying. The verbal give and take that occurs requires the students to think, question, and respond to questioning; which in turn fosters a deeper understanding for all participants (Fogarty, 1997.) Any technique that facilitates deeper understanding will help ensure student retention of the material, which is the goal of all study techniques.

#### Textbook and Study Skills

The use of textbooks is an integral part of any study system. Many teachers assume that because their students can read that they can read and comprehend textbooks. Speaking of the differences between reading novels and textbooks, Burns states, “ The purposes for reading are not the same, the formats vary, and textbooks have a much heavier concept and vocabulary load.” (1999, pg. 208) To increase students’ comprehension of textbooks, teachers can teach students to utilize methods to deal with the concepts and vocabulary found in textbooks. Some strategies teachers can use to accomplish this include: KWL charts, anticipation guides, word splashes, word sorts, webs and semantic maps to name a few (Burns, 1999.) These simple yet effective strategies can be quite functional in facilitating meaningful student use of textbooks.

Teaching the strategies is not the only method for teachers to help their students become better at studying. The structure of the class is important as well, along with the

structure of the information presented. The structure of the information will help guide the studying. Teachers can provide monitored time in class for studying. A period of time dedicated solely to studying should be given to the students immediately prior to an exam (Beecher, 1988.) Students will benefit not only from having the time provided to them, but will also see that devoting time to study is important to their teacher.

Upon reviewing the aforementioned strategies, the two teacher-researchers established a plan of action for developing study and organizational skills in their targeted populations. The following section includes the details of that plan.

### Project Objectives and Processes

#### Project Action Plan

- Week One: Send home parent letter
- Administer survey
- Administer pre –test
- Discuss basic organization
- Week Two: Implement organizational checklist
- Discuss following directions, have students complete an activity which requires them to read all directions
- Discuss textbooks
- Identify parts of the book and their functions
- Students complete scavenger hunt with the book
- Begin to teach note-taking skills
- Week Three: Teach note-taking skills



Dating notes

Titling notes

When to take notes

How to organize notes

When and how to review notes

Students reflect on note taking

Week Four: Active Listening Skills

Students draw a picture from a partner's description

Students repeat a story told by a partner to another person

Students reflect on active listening

Week Five: More on Organization

Teach effective use of folders/notebooks

Discuss routines

Discuss list-making

Students complete activity "classify your closet"

Students reflect on organizational strategies

Week Six: Study Techniques

Discuss planning for studying

Teach mnemonic devices

Students create their own mnemonic devices

Teach using visualization/imagery as a memory technique

Students create their own images to help them remember

Students reflect on this week's strategies

Week Seven: Study Techniques

Discuss study buddies and quizzing

Discuss using study guides

Students work in pairs to use a study guide

Students reflect on this week's strategies

Week Eight: Study Techniques

Discuss predicting test questions

Discuss using Venn diagrams

Students practice using these techniques

Students reflect on this week's strategies

Week Nine: Administer survey

Administer post-test

Collect data with organizational checklist

Students reflect on skills and strategies learned

Students share study techniques that work well for them

Methods of Assessment

In an attempt to assess the effects of the intervention, several post intervention assessments were given. Students were asked to complete a post test which assessed their knowledge of study skills and a post survey which provided information about the students' behavior in the area of study skills. Each teacher-researcher also completed an organizational checklist documenting the percentage of time that students brought required materials to class.

The results of the intervention as documented by the assessments given after its completion will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESULTS

#### Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to teach students to utilize various study and organizational skills in class, leading them to be more successful. The teacher-researchers used various types of activities, individual and group, to teach the students skills. After the activity a discussion/reflection was lead about the skill and how it applies to class.

Several strategies were used to increase student knowledge and use of study and organizational skills over the course of the quarter. These strategies included: team games, reflection, classroom discussions, direct instruction, and practice time.

During week one of the study the teacher-researchers sent home a parent letter explaining the objective of our action research paper and allowing parents to permit their child's involvement. The teacher-researchers devoted week two to administering the pre-test and surveys to the students to provide evidence that the problem exists. Also, during week two the teacher-researchers began targeting organizational skills. Activities and discussions were used to focus on: following directions, functions of the textbook, and note-taking skills. The teacher-researchers implemented the organizational checklist during week three and continued to work on note-taking skills. Paired-group activities and reflections were used to teach active listening at week four. Throughout week five, more organizational skills were focused on, such as: effective use of folders and

notebooks, routines, and list making. These skills were discussed and reflected upon by the students as part of the intervention. Throughout the quarter, the organizational skills were reviewed and reflected on during lessons in class. Teacher-researchers began to shift their focus from organizational skills to study techniques at week six. The class held discussions on the importance of preparing and planning for tests and class. The students participated in small-group activities to teach and practice the use of mnemonic devices and imagery as memory techniques. Throughout the nine weeks at various times the teacher-researchers administered an organizational checklist to monitor the students' preparation for class. Weeks seven and eight focused on a variety of study strategies the students could use to prepare for tests. Students worked in small groups and individually practiced such skills as study buddies, the use of study guides, predicting test questions and Venn diagrams.

At the end of the nine weeks students reflected on the skills and strategies learned throughout the quarter. The teacher-researchers also administered the post-test and surveys to the same students for a comparison of their studying and organizational behaviors. The intervention was consistent throughout at both sites. The next section provides an analysis of the results after the intervention was completed.

#### Presentation and Analysis of Results

Tests, surveys, and checklists were re-administered in January of 2001 to assess whether intervention was successful. The targeted population was again given the test, survey, and checklist in an attempt to measure growth from the beginning of the intervention to the end. The next section discusses the students' post-survey results and the trends that occurred.

### Student Survey

The interventions were conducted by each site to re-evaluate the initial results of the student surveys. The students at both sites indicated neither positive nor negative improvement on their behavior. The results of the students' post-surveys are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9

### Student Post-Survey Results

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|  | Site A |    | Site B |    | Total |    |
|--|--------|----|--------|----|-------|----|
|  | Yes    | No | Yes    | No | Yes   | No |
| Do you take notes?   | 20     | 5  | 22     | 1  | 42    | 6  |
| Do you read your notes?  |        |    |        |    |       |    |
| each day?  | 2      | 23 | 3      | 20 | 5     | 43 |
| before a test?   | 21     | 4  | 21     | 2  | 42    | 6  |
| Do you study for tests?  | 23     | 2  | 22     | 1  | 45    | 3  |
| Do you have a buddy/friend in<br>each class that you could call<br>for assignments, help, etc? | 20     | 5  | 13     | 10 | 34    | 15 |
| Do you have a regular time<br>to study at home?  | 13     | 12 | 13     | 10 | 26    | 22 |

|  | Site A |    | Site B |    | Total |    |
|--|--------|----|--------|----|-------|----|
|  | Yes    | No | Yes    | No | Yes   | No |
| Do you have a regular place<br>to study at home? | 21     | 4  | 18     | 5  | 39    | 9  |

|   | Site A | Site B | Total |
|---|--------|--------|-------|
| Which of these study techniques do you use? |        |        |       |
| Study with a friend                         | 12     | 8      | 20    |
| Review the textbook                         | 9      | 14     | 23    |
| Parents/friends quiz you                    | 22     | 11     | 33    |
| Review your notes                           | 21     | 21     | 42    |
| Use a study guide                           | 19     | 19     | 38    |
| Predict test questions                      | 3      | 11     | 14    |

|  |   |   |    |
|--|---|---|----|
| When do you start studying for a test? |   |   |    |
| When it is announced                   | 3 | 2 | 5  |
| A week before                          | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| A few days before                      | 3 | 4 | 7  |
| The day before                         | 1 | 4 | 5  |
| Through out the unit                   | 0 | 2 | 2  |

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Nearly all students at both Sites indicated taking notes, the students also indicated that they did not review those notes on a daily basis. By reviewing the notes on a daily basis it makes it easier to recall information for a test. The post-survey results show that 88% of the students used their notes to study for tests, while 94% reported they study for

tests. Site B revealed the greatest amount of improvement in the area of predicting test questions. This may be due to high school students having a better concept of what may be on a test and so they can predict questions more easily. Although far more students at Site A used someone to quiz to prepare for a test as compared to Site B. Both sites showed a similar number of students having a regular time to study at home. This may be due to the various activities the students may be involved in during the school year. More students at Site A indicated that they had a friend in each class to call for assignments or help, compared to the students at Site B. Since Site A is a smaller school the students may know everyone better making it easier to call someone. Overall, however, the numbers did show some type of organizational and study skill improvement at both sites. The next section discusses the results of the students' post-tests.

#### Organizational and Study Skills Student Post-test

The interventions for the post-tests were also conducted consistently by site. The post-tests did reveal some type of improvement in the students' knowledge and use of organizational and study skills. Because most questions elicited multiple responses from most students, it would be impractical to include all responses to all questions. Table 10 represents the results of four key questions on the post-test.



Table 10

Organizational and Study Skills Student Post-test Results

|   | Site A | Site B | Total |
|---|--------|--------|-------|
| When you come to class you should ALWAYS bring:       |        |        |       |
| Text  | 4      | 23     | 27    |
| Snack   | 0      | 1      | 1     |
| Pen/pencil  | 26     | 23     | 49    |
| Folder  | 26     | 20     | 46    |
| Homework  | 26     | 23     | 49    |
| Gum   | 0      | 3      | 3     |
| Assignment notebook                                   | 25     | 17     | 42    |
| Class notebook  | 25     | 22     | 47    |
| Calculator  | 8      | 2      | 10    |
| Magazines   | 0      | 1      | 1     |
| Other   | 1      | 1      | 2     |
| I don't know  | 0      | 0      | 0     |
| You should prepare for a test by:                     |        |        |       |
| Looking at your notes five<br>minutes before the test | 6      | 8      | 14    |
| Reviewing your notes thoroughly                       | 21     | 21     | 42    |
| Reviewing your text book                              | 12     | 16     | 28    |

|   | <b>Site A</b> | <b>Site B</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Answering the questions on the study guide                                | 17            | 23            | 40           |
| Predicting questions that will be on the test                             | 11            | 16            | 27           |
| Going through the book while listening to<br>music or watching television | 0             | 1             | 1            |
| Talking to your friend on the phone                                       | 2             | 0             | 2            |
| I don't know  | 1             | 0             | 1            |
| Other   | 2             | 0             | 2            |

When taking notes in class, you should:

|   |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|
| Be careful so the teacher does not catch you                  | 0  | 1  | 1  |
| Put the date on the top of the page                           | 19 | 23 | 42 |
| Give your notes a title that tells you what<br>they are about | 20 | 22 | 42 |

Use loose-leaf papers and shoves into a book

|                                 |    |    |    |
|---------------------------------|----|----|----|
| when you are done               | 1  | 1  | 2  |
| Keep your notes in order        | 22 | 22 | 44 |
| Draw doodles all over the place | 2  | 1  | 3  |
| I don't know                    | 0  | 1  | 1  |
| Other                           | 0  | 1  | 1  |

When using your textbook to study, you should:

|  |   |    |    |
|--|---|----|----|
| Re-read everything that you have already<br>read | 8 | 17 | 25 |
|--|---|----|----|

|   | Site A | Site B | Total |
|---|--------|--------|-------|
| Look over the titles and bolded words to make sure that you understand  | 19     | 13     | 32    |
| Sleep with the book under your pillow so that you learn through osmosis | 1      | 1      | 2     |
| Look up words that you still don't understand in the glossary           | 20     | 15     | 35    |
| Read any and all chapter summaries                                      | 12     | 11     | 23    |
| Flip through the book while watching television                         | 1      | 1      | 2     |
| I don't know  | 1      | 3      | 4     |
| Other   | 1      | 0      | 1     |

---

According to the post-test, over 90% of the students were aware of the items they needed to bring with them to class on a daily basis. Far more students at Site B indicated they were bringing their textbook to class, this is because the textbooks at Site A remain in the classroom. The results of the posttest at Site B revealed less improvement in bringing their assignment notebook to class than at Site A. At Site B no assignment notebooks were given to the students.

Both sites showed improvement in note-taking skills, specifically in the areas of “putting a date at the top of the page” and “keeping their notes in order”, these results were reinforced when the teacher-researchers collected and observed the students’ notebooks.

The students seemed to be preparing for tests appropriately in general at both sites, but Site B students indicated they were answering study guide questions and predicting questions on tests more than Site A students. This may be due to students at Site B receiving study guides for each test and gaining extra-credit points for its completion; also the students at Site B may have a better concept of predicting test questions.

Both sites showed similar numbers when using their textbook to study, including looking over titles and bold words, looking up words that they don't understand and reading chapter summaries. Site A indicated a more accurate use of their textbooks for studying while Site B students found it important to re-read everything they have read.

#### Teacher Checklist

Both teacher-researchers at Site A and B filled out a checklist on students' organizational skills periodically throughout the quarter and for the last week of the quarter. The results of the organizational checklist are found in Table 11.

Table 11

#### Organizational Checklist Results (Percentage Missing per Site)

|            | Site A | Site B | Total |
|------------|--------|--------|-------|
| Pencil     | 4%     | 2%     | 3%    |
| Folder     | 7%     | 18%    | 13%   |
| Notebook   | 6%     | 5%     | 5%    |
| Assignment | 16%    | 17%    | 16%   |

|                     | <b>Site A</b> | <b>Site B</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Assignment notebook | 3%            | N/A           | 3%           |
| Textbook            | N/A           | 9%            | 9%           |
| Any single item     | 29%           | 28%           | 28%          |

---

Overall, the percentage of students that were not fully prepared for class increased at both sites. Both sites showed an increase or a similar percentage in bringing pencil, notebook, and assignments to class. Site A students brought their folder to class more often than Site B.

Although students appeared to be more conscious of their organizational skills, they were not yet at the level that the teacher-researchers expected them to be at. The teacher-researchers feel this type of classroom ideal may never be achieved from their classroom alone, though; if the entire school focused on organizational skills then some major changes may be seen. With this in mind, the researchers came to the following conclusions regarding the study of organizational and study skills in the classroom.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This section reaches conclusions and offers recommendations based on the intervention done by the researchers on the topic of organizational and study skills. The conclusions reached are primarily based on the student post-survey and post-test, and the teacher checklists taken in January of the school year after the intervention research was analyzed. The conclusions were also reached by comparing early data with the data compiled after the intervention was complete.

## Student Surveys

The post-intervention surveys revealed an overall awareness regarding organizational and study skills to be used for school. The students felt that they had gained knowledge of organizational and study skill strategies to be used in the classroom. The surveys were consistent at both sites indicating some behavioral improvement and a heightened consciousness of organizational and study skills. There are some noted improvements when comparing the pre-survey to the post-survey. For example, only 61% of the students on the pre-survey reported having another student in their classes that they could call on for assignments or help if needed, on the post-survey 71% of the students reported they had another student to contact. This may be due to students getting to know other students over time in their classes. Furthermore, 29% of the students reported that they are predicting test questions as a way to prepare for tests a substantial improvement from the pre-survey of only 20%. In reality the teacher-researchers intervention might have been more successful but the results are based on students self-reporting, which may not accurately indicate the improvements reached. The next section discusses the conclusions reached based on the student test.

## Organizational and Study Skills Student Test

The tests revealed a slight improvement in some areas of organizational and study skills, but overall there was no notable change from the pre-test to the post-test. As indicated on the pre-test the students demonstrated some knowledge of proper test preparation, on the post-test there was a mass improvement in “answering study guide questions and predicting test questions”. As shown here “answering study guide questions” went from 76% on the pre-test to 82% on the post-test, as well as “predicting

test questions” going from 22% to 55%. According to these results, the students have gained knowledge of these skills but it is still not as certain how often the students use these skills to prepare for tests. By combining results of the pre-survey and post-test, we can conclude that nearly all students took notes and used the notes to prepare for tests, the notes were more organized, and the students should have been better prepared for the tests. The next section discusses the conclusions reached based on the organizational checklist.

### Teacher Organizational Checklist

There were no noticeable changes from the organizational checklist if anything the organization got worse from the beginning of the year to the end of the first quarter. This may be due to students having a better attitude at the beginning of the school year, in terms of them generally wanting to start off well and then as the school year progresses the students become more lax. Based on the student-survey results, the student-test results, and the teacher checklist, the researchers suggest the following recommendations.

#### Recommendations

The following suggestions are recommended by the researchers to continue to increase knowledge and use of good organizational and study strategies. Continue with the intervention throughout the entire school year, making organizational and study skills a school wide program, keep the lines of communication open between teacher and student, and contact parents even if they are often hard to reach.

Based on the surveys, tests, and checklists the researchers suggest that it is important for teachers to continue with the intervention for the entire school year because students need to understand that gaining knowledge and use of organizational and study

skills is a process that takes time. Although some improvement was noted, a substantial improvement was not documented from the beginning of the school year to the end of the first quarter. The intervention would be successful if it were ongoing.

In addition, the researchers feel it would be vital for the school to implement organizational and study skills as a school wide program. By having a school wide program the students would receive the skills, practice, review and expectations from all their teachers. The benefits of the added knowledge and use of organizational and study strategies would be seen in their academic progress and improved behavior.

The interaction between teacher and student throughout the year is equally important. For teachers to be able to communicate to a student, to discuss with them the type of organizational or study strategies that the student uses, the teacher can then make suggestions as to what to try next.

Finally, mutual respect can also be gained through increased parent contact. Students will feel a sense of joy if their teachers call their parents in regards to how well they are doing, which is reinforcement for those students that are organized and prepared for class. Contacting parents about missing assignments and students not being prepared for class can also have a positive effect. However, contacting parents must continue on a regular basis and can not end when the intervention is complete. Teachers need to continue to invite parents in, inform them of classroom activities, and call them on a regular basis, regardless of how their child has been doing. This will promote an active teacher/student/parent relationship when all are working together for the good of the child.



The researchers were moderately pleased with the results of the intervention. Although the researchers felt that more time was needed to see a significant improvement in the students' knowledge and use of organizational skills. The students felt that they had gained some knowledge of organizational and study skills during the intervention.

The overall results indicated a slight improvement in the knowledge and use of organizational and study skills, but the researchers concluded that an intervention of three months can not significantly change the students' organizational and study skills. It is a process that needs to continue over the course of the year. In order to truly be successful, a teacher and school need to teach, practice, and review the organizational and study skills on a regular basis over an extended amount of time before there will be a significant change in the students organization, academic success and behavior.

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APPENDIX A  
STUDENT SURVEY

Do not write your name!

## STUDENT SURVEY

These are questions about your study and organizational habits. This will not impact your grade in any way. Please be honest with your answers.

1. Do you take notes Yes No

If no, why not?

2. Do you read your notes each day? Yes No

Before a test? Yes No

3. Do you study for tests? Yes No

How do you study for tests?

When do you start studying for a test?

If you do not study, why not?

4. Which of these study techniques do you use?  
Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ Study with a friend

\_\_\_\_\_ Review your notes

\_\_\_\_\_ Review the text book

\_\_\_\_\_ Use a study guide

\_\_\_\_\_ Parents / friends quiz you

\_\_\_\_\_ Predict test questions

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you have a buddy/friend in each class that you could call for assignments, Help etc...

Yes

No

6. Do you have a regular time to study at home?                      Yes                      No

7. Do you have a regular place to study at home?                      Yes                      No

8. I have trouble finding my school supplies (notebook, pen, textbook) when I need them.

Sometimes

Always

Never

9. I do my homework but can not find it later.

Sometimes

Always

Never

10. I start projects/assignments but have a hard time finishing them.

Sometimes

Always

Never

APPENDIX B  
PRE/POST TEST



No Name Needed

## Organizational/Study Skills

## Pre/Post Test

Please respond to the following statements honestly and thoughtfully. Your answers will allow me to help you with organization and study skills. For each statement check off all the answers you think are correct. (It is ok to have more than one checked.)

## 1. Taking notes is important because:

- it's what the teacher wants you to do  
 to keep students busy during class  
 to help you remember the material  
 to help you learn the material  
 to help you study for tests  
 it is not important to take notes  
 I don't know  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. When you come to class you should ALWAYS bring:

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> text         | <input type="checkbox"/> gum                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> snack        | <input type="checkbox"/> assignment notebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pen/pencil   | <input type="checkbox"/> notebook for class  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> folder       | <input type="checkbox"/> calculator          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> homework     | <input type="checkbox"/> magazines           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____        |

## 3. You should start studying for a test:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the day of the test  | <input type="checkbox"/> the night before           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a week before        | <input type="checkbox"/> when the test is announced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> through out the unit | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____         |   |

4. You should prepare for a test by:

- looking at notes five minutes before the test
- reviewing your notes thoroughly
- reviewing the textbook
- answering the questions on the study guide
- predicting questions that will be on the test
- going through the book while listening to music or watching television
- talking to you friend on the phone
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. A mnemonic device is:

- it is a way to follow directions
- it is a way to take notes
- it is a way to help remember information
- a part of a car engine
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Active listening is:

- hearing noise
- looking at the person who is speaking and focusing carefully on what they are saying
- putting your head down as if sleeping
- nodding and making gestures
- looking out the window
- moving a lot while listening
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. For school, you should have:

- only one folder you use for every subject
- a couple folders you use for every subject
- a separate folder for each class
- no folders at all
- only one notebook that you use for every subject
- a couple of notebooks that you use for every subject
- a separate notebook for each class
- no notebooks at all
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. To properly follow directions on test and assignments, you should:

- skip over them and start right away
- start the assignment and *if* you are confused, read the directions
- read all the directions before beginning
- refer to the directions throughout the assignment as needed
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. When taking notes in class, you should:

- be careful so the teacher does not catch you
- put the date on the top of the page
- give your notes a title that tells you what they are about
- use loose leaf paper and shove into a book when you are done
- keep your notes in order
- draw doodles all over the place
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. It is a good idea to predict test questions because:

- it strengthens your psychic ability
- it helps you focus on what information is important to study
- it is like cheating, so it is fun
- it helps you to review your notes
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. When using your textbook to study, you should:

- re-read everything that you have already read
- look over the titles and bolded words to make sure that you understand
- sleep with the book under your pillow so that you learn through osmosis
- look up the words that you still don't understand in the glossary
- read any and all chapter summaries
- flip through the book while watching television
- I don't know
- other: \_\_\_\_\_



APPENDIX C  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHECKLIST

|    | STUDENT CHECK LIST FOR ORGANIZATION |        |        |          |            |         |        |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|----------|------------|---------|--------|
|    | NAME                                | PENCIL | FOLDER | NOTEBOOK | ASSIGN. SH | ASSIGN. | RECORD |
| 1  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 2  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 3  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 4  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 5  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 6  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 7  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 8  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 9  |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 10 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 11 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 12 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 13 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 14 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 15 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 16 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 17 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 18 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 19 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 20 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 21 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 22 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 23 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 24 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 25 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 26 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 27 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |
| 28 |                                     |        |        |          |            |         |        |





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