

The Georgia School Improvement Specialists: A Qualitative Study Exploring Their Roles with
Principals of Middle Schools Identified as Focus Schools

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Peter Schmid, and my mother, Margaret Beaumont Zucker. When I first met my husband, I said I wanted to pursue a doctorate and he readily encouraged me to go for it. During my long journey in finishing this dissertation, he never wavered in his support and served as a dedicated dissertation cheerleader and occasional dissertation dictator to help me complete it. Now, he can no longer claim he has a college student in the house, but finally, a graduate! For his love and support, I am much appreciative.

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In Memory

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ABSTRACT

While educational initiatives have used external consultants to effect change since the 1950s (Sulla, 1998), understanding their roles and their work has become increasingly important in helping low-performing schools facilitate change and guide the school improvement process (Brady, 2003; Mass Insight Education, 2012; Toppings, 2013). The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to identify and explore the roles Georgia's school improvement specialists serve when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School status. The benefits and challenges of the school improvement specialists supporting principals with school improvement efforts are identified as well. This study will be framed in the work of Schein's (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy. The participants included 10 principals of middle schools in Focus School status and 10 school improvement specialists who work middle schools in Focus School status. Questionnaires, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, and field notes provided appropriate data sources.

Findings from this study showed that school improvement specialists assist principals through required work and unofficial service. The benefits which surfaced are support for the principal and school, help with school improvement work, and having access to a consultant with expertise and experience. The challenges were related to people issues and aspects beyond their control. School improvement specialists served in roles themed as supporting and monitoring and included Schein's three models of consultancy. Dynamics in regards to relationships, positional influence, and job requirements impacted the model of consultancy employed by the school improvement specialist. Based on the results of this research study, school improvement specialists served a multitude of roles in their work with principals of Focus Schools.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Over the last two decades, federal and state laws, such as state accountability policies and the No Child Left Behind Act, and grant programs, like Race to the Top and Title I School Improvement Grants, have given state education agencies (SEAs) considerably more responsibilities for directing and guiding the improvement of low-performing schools (Massell, Goertz, & Barnes, 2012). Several states have developed plans for providing some form of technical assistance to these struggling schools. A form of technical assistance that states frequently provide to their low-performing schools is educational consultants; they are typically former district and school leaders and educators. The intent is for these external consultants to assist the low-performing school in school improvement and turn around the school's performance.

This form of support to struggling schools is not new. Educational consultants have a variety of designations such as school change facilitators (Williams, 1996), outside reformers (McDonald, 1989), external consultants (Fullan, 1991), school improvement coaches (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005), and highly skilled educators (Neuman-Sheldon, 2006). While educational initiatives have included the use of external consultants to effect change since the 1950s (Sulla, 1998), understanding their roles and their work has become increasingly important in helping low-performing schools facilitate change and guide the school improvement process (Brady, 2003; Mass Insight Education, 2012; Toppings, 2013).

Many struggling schools may have challenges in recognizing how to raise student achievement (McFadden, 2009; National Education Association, 2001; Reeves, 2003) and require outside assistance to improve. These schools usually cannot engage in and sustain

improvement without support from local and state infrastructures (Housman & Martinez, 2001). While current federal and state educational policy recognize this and require state and local support, there is a lack of focus on the results of this support (Goertz, Duffy, & Le Floch, 2001; Redding & Walberg, 2008). Based on a review of all 50 states' systems of supports, there are multiple organizational structures that states are using to deliver support and technical assistance to their struggling schools (Westat, 2006). Additionally, Archer (2006) found that 32 states provide ongoing assistance but not on-site assistance on a regular basis, and 17 states provide coaching/facilitating to groups of schools or to whole districts. While all states have some form of technical assistance in place, Brady (2003) found that providing technical assistance was a mild intervention for turning around schools. Based on his review of several district and state interventions, technical assistance was frequently chosen. If this is just a *mild* intervention, is it having a strong enough effect to help low-performing schools to improve and become successful?

External consultants are a form of technical assistance states may offer to low-performing schools. As previously stated, these consultants are often former school administrators and educators. These external education consultants are often seen as outsiders with “no axe to grind” (Crawford & Earley, 2004, p. 377). Rather than taking on the role of regulator or watchdog, they serve as a facilitator of the educational reform initiative (McDonald, 1996; McGown, 1995). According to Cameron (2010), consultants were a part of the “benefits and sanctions” (p. 344) of school reform by applying pressure for change while also providing support for this change through their work with school leaders. Yet, Lieberman (2001) acknowledged an important point that these external change facilitators, or consultants, face the challenge of being outsiders trying to change schools.

The work of external consultants in improving schools presents dissimilar results, as demonstrated in studies since the 1970s. In their review of 146 school improvement efforts, Huberman and Miles (1984) found the provision of external assistance is likely to have a greater impact than that of isolated change efforts. Yet, in the Rand study, Berman and McLaughlin (1978) found outside consultants ineffective because they were not aware of the district's issues or teachers' needs and motivations. Even though several schools had improved with the help of state-funded external consultants, no consultants interviewed were ready to claim that they had achieved permanent improvements in the schools that they had served (Laguarda, 2003). Often, external consultants serve as the strategist for school improvement reforms, though principals receiving this support reported it was limited in value and cited issues from too many meetings and competing strategies from the state and district (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazey, 2013). While on the surface, the results of using external consultants to assist low-performing schools in improving is positive, the fact they did not believe their work would make lasting change could be considered disconcerting. The contradictory findings could make one question what the external consultant's role really is in working with the administrators and faculty of a low-performing school.

Statement of the Problem

External support is a factor identified as important in improving low-performing schools (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002; Stoll & Myers, 1998). Though there have been studies conducted on external consultants and their role of assisting teachers (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003; Tung & Feldman, 2001), there is scant published empirical data and research about external consultants assisting principals of low-performing schools (Cameron, 2010). Schools are following the trends of corporate America (Wagner, 1994) by bringing in outside consultants to

help effect change and make substantial improvements. While external consultants are common in the business world as an intervention to help executives improve their performance and the company overall, there is limited empirical research about what happens, why it happens, and what makes it effective or ineffective in a corporate setting (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Greiner & Ennsfellner, 2010; Kilburg, 1996). If the fields of education and business rely on external consultants to assist them in the support and improvement of their leaders and organizations, developing an understanding of the roles of these outside consultants is prudent. In a time when state education systems are operating on limited budgets and school accountability continues to heighten, there is a need to understand the roles of external consultants, specifically assigned to aid principals, since states rely on these external consultants to bring about school improvement in low-performing schools (Brady, 2003; Holdzkom, 2001; Mass Insight Education, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), “One of the most important things that states and districts can provide to struggling schools is expertise...to provide assistance with the planning, implementation, and evaluation of reform efforts” (p. 37). Experts external to the failing school or district are able to “provide customized assistance” (Bowles, Churchill, Effrat, & McDermott, 2002, p. 4). Yet, it is unclear to what extent the external consultants assisted low-performing schools in improving since principals and teachers rarely mentioned them when they were asked about strategies to improve student performance (Neuman-Sheldon, 2006).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and explore the roles Georgia’s school improvement specialists serve when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. The roles of the school improvement specialists were examined and compared

from the perspectives of the principals and the school improvement specialists. Additionally, the factors that determine the model of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) were identified. These purposes were accomplished through the theoretical lens of Schein's consultation models (1978, 1990, 1999).

Research Questions

To better understand the roles that Georgia's school improvement specialists serve when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools, three questions were examined using Schein's consultation models (1978, 1990, 1999) as the theoretical framework to guide the study. The research questions used to guide this study were:

1. How do Georgia's school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?
 - a. What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?
 - b. What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?
2. What models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) do school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School Status?
3. What factors determine what models of consultancy Georgia's school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?

Delimitations

The following delimitations created the frame for this study. First, this research is delimited to Georgia's school improvement specialists as the state-funded external consultants studied. Second, the study was limited to a purposeful sample of Title I middle schools in Georgia that are in Focus School status. Third, the study only includes the perceptions and experiences of the 10 principals and 10 school improvement specialists who consented to participate.

Limitations

The study had three main limitations. The first was the use of a qualitative study design because it limits the ability of the findings to be generalized to other settings (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Second the data was collected during the summer of 2013 after the first year of the school improvement specialists and principals worked together. The experiences and perspectives of the participants are related to the 2012-2013 school year. Third, this study used open-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with the participants and some responses may reflect a response bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall by participants, or reflexivity (i.e., participants give answers that they feel the interviewer wants to hear) (Yin, 2003).

Significance of the Study

In this study, I sought to contribute to the research on external consultants and understanding the consultants' roles when working with the principals of low-performing schools. While this form of assistance is mandated by federal and state policies, research on external consultants assisting low-performing schools is limited and the findings are somewhat contradictory (Calkins et al., 2007; Davis, McDonald & Lyons, 1997; Mass Insight Education,

2012). Murphy and Meyers (2008) found that highly qualified individuals, such as external consultants, positioned in failing schools to assist with school improvement, often lead to positive results. While external assistance appears to be positive, there is limited reporting about the kinds of strategies that work well or don't work well, or the level of intensity of intervention that is needed (Mass Insight Education, 2012; McCloskey & Monrad, 2004).

Greiner and Ennsfellner (2010) noted that "The consulting industry has shown a consistent annual growth rate of 15%, resulting in industry revenues of \$200 billion and over one million consultants employed across the globe" (p.72). Yet, while so much is spent on external consultants in education reform and business restructuring, there is limited existing research on their effectiveness (Finnigan, Bitter, & O'Day, 2009; Finnigan & O'Day, 2003). The need for more research on the effectiveness of this type of state-funded support, to improve low-performing schools and districts, is corroborated in the literature (Cameron, 2010; Rudo, 2001). Understanding the improvement strategies adopted by districts and schools is vitally important because the success of any education reform will eventually be measured by its ability to bring about positive change in schools and districts (Marsh & Robyn, 2006). Many states are looking to change or refine their strategies for supporting low-performing schools, but have limited research on how to evaluate their current support strategies and improve their ability to effect school-level change (Boyle, Le Floch, Therriault, & Holzman, 2009). Knowing the role of external consultants assigned by the state to be a tenuous and challenging one (Roy & Kochan, 2012), research into how this strategy impacts school change and supports the school leaders is vital. As school reform research over the past 30 years has highlighted the importance of strong school leadership for all types of school improvement initiatives (McCloskey & Monrad, 2004), understanding how to better support these school leaders is critical to the state's ability to

continue to improve its struggling schools. Recognizing the roles external consultants serve with these principals and identifying the beneficial roles may result in finding ways to effectively support low-performing schools.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms key to understanding this study.

1. **School Improvement Specialist:** Individuals assigned on a long term basis to specific schools based on student achievement data. They advise, mentor, and provide feedback to school administrators to mobilize and lead the staff to implement required plans, actions, and changes to improve academic performance. The school improvement specialists also assist administrators and teacher leaders in school improvement processes that produce improve overall student learning (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).
2. **Focus School:** “A Title I school that has the largest within-school gaps between the highest-achieving subgroup or subgroups and the lowest-achieving subgroup or subgroups or, at the high school level, has the largest within-school gaps in graduation rates (“within-school-gaps” focus school)” (Georgia Department of Education, 2012, p. 37).
3. **Regional Education Service Agency (RESA):** The 16 regional educational service agencies strategically located in service districts throughout the State of Georgia. They were established for the purpose of sharing services designed to improve the effectiveness of the educational programs of member school systems. The RESAs assist the State Department of Education in promoting its initiatives. The RESAs inform systems of innovation and gather research on programs as needed, (<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Learning/Pages/ETC-RESA/RESA.aspx>).

4. State Educational Agency (SEA or State): “This is the Georgia State Board of Education. The State Superintendent of Schools implements the administrative functions on behalf of the Georgia State Board of Education” (Georgia Department of Education, 2009, p. 29).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the area of research and the research study. The statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions are included. The chapter concluded with the definitions of terms relative to the study, delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presented the review of literature. The review of literature will cover the following areas: consultants in business, school interventions, educational consultants, and Schein’s consultation models (1978, 1990, 1999) as the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and methodology, the role of the researcher, the participants, data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures. Additionally, this chapter explained how the strategies were employed to establish validity and reliability.

Chapter 4 covered the exploratory qualitative study of Georgia’s middle schools in Focus School status receiving support from Georgia’s school improvement specialists. The chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes.

Chapter 5 closed this study with a discussion about how the findings pertain to the literature and relate to the theoretical framework. The chapter included a discussion about implications for current practice and areas for which further research is needed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the topic of this study. First, an exploration of the use of consultants in business is presented with a synopsis of business consulting, roles and duties of business consultants, and results from using them. Next, an overview of state assistance utilized for schools not meeting state and federal accountability measures is discussed. Then, pertinent literature about educational consultants is reviewed. This section includes an examination of their roles and duties, results from utilizing educational consultants as a means for school improvement, and their work with principals. Last, the theoretical framework of Schein's models of consultancy (1978, 1990, 1999) is discussed. This literature review provides necessary background on topics germane to this study.

Business Consultants

The concept of using external consultants in education was influenced by their use in the business world. With many school improvement and school turnaround initiatives drawing on experiences and practices from the field of business, looking at the pertinent literature about business consultants is essential to this literature review and overall study.

The consulting profession has a long tradition of helping organizations prepare for the future, reaching back to soothsaying by high priests and court jesters (Kubr, 1996; Turner, 1995). Consultancy is to a large extent a people-focused business (Kubr, 2002; Lorsch & Thierney, 2002). According to Greiner and Ennsfellner (2010),

The consulting task, like the work of most professions (physicians, attorneys, architects, engineers, psychologists, and teachers) involves helping clients through using acquired expertise, with the results carrying major consequences for good or bad. Consultants, like

the other professions, require specialized knowledge in analyzing a problem and coming up with expert advice that will affect a firm's performance, as well as the future lives and careers of many employees. (p. 72)

Consultants can play an impactful role in decisions and outcomes for companies. Consultants create new frames of reference that force top managers to recognize the antiquated nature of previous strategic orientation and usher in new conceptualizations and jargon (Abrahamson, 1986). Crowther and Lancaster (2009) report that management consultants are brought in for fresh and objective perspectives, and they can also provide additional skills and experience to the organization. Empirical research establishes that clients turn to outside consultants primarily for new ideas, proficiency, and impartiality/objectivity (Gattiker & Larwood, 1985). Further confirming this in interviews with 250 executives, Vogl (1999) found that clients are looking for expert advice.

Typically, consultants are invited into the client's organization to help deal with particular concerns on behalf of the client. They are often viewed as providing active guidance and direction toward addressing the client's problem (Argyris, 1982). At the same time, consultants are outsiders. They are seen as external parties to the client situation, who are detached personally from the implications of any proposed solutions (Spector & Cooley, 1997). They offer the potential advantage of being experienced observers and analysts without the related disadvantage of being locked into defending previously established positions or ways of thinking (Gattiker & Larwood, 1985). Smircich and Stubbart (1985) recognized, "Management consultants challenge the existing cognitive order—they state the obvious, ask foolish questions, and doubt— all of which helps organizational members get 'outside of themselves' " (p. 731).

External consultants can provide the managers and organizations with fresh ideas from a more objective position and possibly bring about needed change to improve the organization they are assisting.

Roles and Duties

The popular image of the consultant is that of an expert who has the answers and provides special technical recommendations and advice (Schein, 1988). Greiner and Metzger (1983) described the work of a consultant as an advisory service contracted for and provided to organizations by a specially trained and qualified person who assists, in an objective and independent manner, the client organization to identify management problems, analyze such problems, and help, when requested, in the implementation of solutions. Turner (1982) identified eight task categories that described the work of a consultant with a client: providing information to a client; solving a client's problem; making a diagnosis of the problem; making recommendations based on the diagnosis; assisting with implementation of recommended actions; building a consensus and commitment around a corrective action; facilitating client learning; and permanently improving organizational effectiveness.

Beyond consultants being the outsider providing recommendations for improvement, the consultant's work is to foster the emergence of new frames of reference among strategic managers that make them see aspects of the environment that necessitate a shift in strategy (Hedberg, 1981). Consultants serve as change agents who must join in accountability for the end result of their projects (Appelbaum & Steed, 2005). Marguiles and Raia (1972) divided consultant roles into task-oriented and process-oriented roles. Task-oriented roles focused more on the consultant being the technical expert (i.e., providing solutions to an existing problem), while process-oriented roles centered more on the consultant as a process facilitator

(i.e., helping the client through the problem solving process). Additionally, Lippitt and Lippitt (1986) identified several roles a consultant might play through a continuum from nondirective to directive. These roles in order of nondirective to directive are objective observer, process counselor, fact finder, identifier of alternatives and linker to resources, joint problem-solver, trainer/educator, information specialist, and advocate. Jang and Lee (1998) recognized five basic roles of the consultant:

- The expert provides skills and knowledge.
- The manager has special skills to manage or control the assigned project.
- The researcher obtains, analyzes, and interprets objective data in a scientific manner.
- The counselor assists clients in learning and imparting knowledge through formal methods and subsequently assumes responsibility for the client's learning process.
- The politician understands the sources of power in social systems and gains the support of those who have the power and influence to facilitate or inhibit change.

The consultants' roles and duties are varied. Much of this may be due to the variety of contexts in which they serve or even due to their own perception of their expected roles in assisting organizations. With no simple explanation regarding what they do for the managers and organizations they serve, understanding the impact of their work becomes even more critical.

Results

Despite the size and significance of the consulting industry, there does not seem to be a correspondingly large wealth of empirical data on the practice of management consulting as noted by many researchers (Appelbaum & Steed, 2005). In their study on success factors between clients and consultants, Appelbaum and Steed (2005) found:

Employee perceptions were most positive towards the professionalism of consultants, their understanding of the sense of urgency and motivation, and the efficacy of their communication. There was also evidence that employees perceive that consultant projects have strong executive support. Despite these factors, there were still mixed ratings of the impact and success of consulting projects at the organization. (p. 91)

These findings do little to clarify whether consultants bring about meaningful change to the organizations they are hired to serve.

Donnelly (2011) recognized that consulting clients' interpretations of the standard and success of services delivered were influenced by the quality of the relationship with the consultant and joint decision making. In situations where the client-consultant relationship was long-term, consultants were better able to identify unstated needs of the client and provide opportunities for additional consulting support (Donnelly, 2011). Yet, Donnelly (2011) identified risk associated with long term client-consultant relationships such as consultants could end up *going native* and the strength of the client relationship could cause conflicting tensions for commitment, identification, and reciprocal conduct of the consultants.

O'Driscoll and Eubanks (1993) explained that data utilization and setting of specific goals were major contributors to effective consulting. When consultants gathered information about the organization to understand the group they were working with, developed interventions based on the information, interpreted data for clients, and provided feedback to the organization; they rated their own consulting services more highly than those who did not (O'Driscoll & Eubanks, 1993). Additionally, those who believed that their intervention goals had been specific felt they provided higher rated service. Consultants who created goals that were measurable and set by management and the consultant, displayed competency in interpersonal skills, and

understood that group process management were important factors for successful results for clients (O'Driscoll & Eubanks, 1993).

Nikolova, Reihlen, and Schlapfner (2009) shared, "Consulting work involves a complex set of social practices between clients and consultants" (p. 297). They found only when clients' and consultants' expectations overlap to some degree, they can make sense of the actions of others and work successfully together (Nikolova et al., 2009).

Rynning (1992) offered a tentative list of factors contributing to consulting success. These include clarity in need and problem formulation, number or quality of new ideas, new knowledge, special planning, new ways of thinking, level of planning, level of co-operational abilities, management of time, planning capabilities, efficiency of execution, strategy formulation, problem solving, implementation, follow-up, and economy. This is an extensive list of factors identified for successful results worthy of further investigation.

Understanding and measuring the impact of using a business consultant is challenging; some results show evidence of its lack of effectiveness. In their study on factors influencing the success of management consultancy projects, Jang and Lee (1998) reported,

Many clients have complained about the service of consulting firms. Clients often assert that consultants lack expertise, specialized knowledge or objectivity, and fail to produce client's overall expectations. Similarly, consultants claim that top managers lack sufficient support in the management consulting process. This situation points out the lack of knowledge by both the client and the consultant about what it takes to implement successfully their work in a complex environment. (p.67)

Ford (1985) cited insufficient clarity is at the heart of most poor client-consulting relationships. The failure to communicate, to identify the real problem, promising too much too soon, failure to

specify roles and recommending unfeasible actions all jeopardize the success of a consultant's work with a client organization (Ford, 1985). Finally, in the discussion of Smith's (2002) study of multiple companies' use of consultants, he suggests that consulting activities and client objectives cannot occur without project outcomes that are clearly understood by both parties, and stresses the importance of good communication between the client and the consultant, with senior management.

Furthermore, Vogl (1999) recognized the following issues in interviews with executives: issues in implementation of the consultant's recommendations, consultants lacking sufficient knowledge of the hiring company, and consultants with limited to no experience in operating business at a high level. Crowther and Lancaster (2009) recognized that fear and resentment can rise in employees when working with a consultant. Employees may be less than cooperative and take offence to a consultant's recommendations and ideas. Another issue with external consultants is their limited responsibility and accountability for results (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009). Frequently, they make recommendations and then leave the client to handle the implementation and effectiveness. Some consultants acknowledged in general that "despite all our efforts – and good intentions – many of our techniques and interventions fall well short of their desired goals" (Warren, 2004, p. 347). According to Jang and Lee (1998), a consultant alone cannot turn around a troubled situation; they are able to outline what should be done, but the client must take those steps.

Alvesson and Johansson (2002) emphasized the variation in consultancy work and described the nature of management consultancy as consisting of complex interactions and relationships between consultants, clients, the situation, and the task. Receiving recommendations from a consultant who does not have the necessary background experience,

coupled with little understanding of the organization being assisted, can lead to a loss of valuable time and resources for an organization that may need to rapidly turn around to succeed or even just survive.

State Assistance

In this section, state assistance for educational consultation to schools will be discussed. First is a look at the new waivers from the U.S. Department of Education that allow states flexibility in meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002). Then there is a discussion of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and types of assistance provided by states to low-performing schools. Reviewing the research about state assistance during the era of NCLB and other previous accountability systems is pertinent to this research study.

In 2012, Georgia's Department of Education was one of the states to apply for and receive the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This waiver gave Georgia flexibility in terms of meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As stated by the U.S. Department of Education (2012),

In order to move forward with State and local reforms designed to improve academic achievement and increase the quality of instruction for all students in a manner that was not originally contemplated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a State educational agency (SEA) may request flexibility, on its own behalf and on behalf of its local educational agencies (LEAs), through waivers of ten provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and their associated regulatory, administrative, and reporting requirements. (p. 1)

The waiver allowed for flexibility in 10 areas which are:

1. An SEA would have flexibility to develop new ambitious but achievable annual measurement objectives (AMOs) in reading/language arts and mathematics in order to provide meaningful goals that will be used to guide support and improvement efforts.
2. An SEA would have flexibility in implementation of school improvement requirements.
3. An SEA would have flexibility in the implementation of the LEA improvement requirements.
4. An SEA would have flexibility for how Rural LEAs determine spending of rural LEA funds.
5. The LEAs would have flexibility to operate a schoolwide program in a Title I school with less than 40 percent poverty if the SEA has identified the school as a priority school or focus school and if the LEA is implementing turnaround strategies that benefit the entire educational program.
6. An SEA would have flexibility to allocate funds to an LEA in order to serve priority or focus schools, if the SEA determines such schools are in need of more support.
7. An SEA would have flexibility to use funds provide financial rewards to any reward school, if the SEA determines such schools are most appropriate for financial rewards.
8. The LEAs would have flexibility regarding Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) improvement plans.
9. An SEA and its LEAs would have flexibility to transfer certain funds.

10. An SEA has flexibility to use School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to support Priority Schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012)

States who received the waiver are allowed to create meaningful parameters and expectations for student achievement and school improvement efforts.

Part of the changes with the waiver was how schools were identified for needing additional support to improve. Related to this, Hall (2013) wrote,

To prompt aggressive interventions in schools where students are farthest behind, the waiver requires states to identify two specific kinds of schools for concerted action: “Priority” schools, generally the lowest performing schools in the state, and “Focus” schools, those with the biggest achievement gaps and/or lowest performing groups of students. (p. 6)

These new categories for identification replaced the previous categories related to when schools did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for 2 or more consecutive years. The previous method of identifying schools did not always capture the neediest schools since they may have been achieving AYP, but still have failing achievement scores or significant achievement gaps between subgroups of students. The new means of identification of schools provides for systemic, context-specific interventions that focus on the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Hall (2013) reports that “While new accountability systems don’t raise achievement or close gaps, well-designed accountability systems are important tools in the effort to promote equity and raise achievement” (p. 9).

Per the flexibility guidelines, SEAs must provide the priority and focus schools with appropriate timely and comprehensive monitoring of and technical assistance for turning around

the schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Part of the technical assistance provided in many states is the use of state-funded educational consultants. Prior to the waiver, several states utilized state-funded educational consultants based on the NCLB (2002) essential components of support to assist schools in their school improvement efforts. Though ways schools are identified has changed, the provision for guidance and help from an educational consultant remains. In the state of Georgia, their consultants, the school improvement specialists, work with the identified priority and focus schools for 3 consecutive years.

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states have been required to provide assistance to school districts for the purpose of improving schools not making adequately yearly progress. According to Redding and Walberg (2008), “The U.S. Constitution and federal laws leave the control of education largely to the states and states have long provided some form of support to their school districts” (p. 3). NCLB requires each state to have three essential components in their system of support. Under No Child Left Behind Sec. 1117 (a) (4) (A), the essential components include: school support teams, distinguished educators, and additional approaches designed to increase opportunities for students to meet each state’s challenging content standards. The law gives states flexibility in tailoring interventions, requiring only that all supports be systematic, intensive, and sustainable (NCLB, 2002).

Since NCLB’s provisions mandate that state departments of education get involved in schools failing to achieve AYP, many states face a new challenge: working to enhance academic achievement in chronically low-performing schools (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008). Tucker and Toch (2004) express concern that state departments of education have never been equipped to do the kind of work that NCLB now demands. Previously, most interventions focused on financial and management issues, but more recent academic problems present a very

different and more challenging endeavor (Seder, 2000; Wong & Shen, 2003). With the demands of NCLB, state departments of education are striving to provide assistance to their schools and districts not making AYP.

As required under NCLB, all states have put into place a range of strategies and technical assistance programs that target schools identified as in need of improvement (Mintrop, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB prescribes specific consequences and assistance for schools receiving Title I funds failing to meet AYP, but the law allows states to determine the structure for non-Title I schools (Krieg, 2008). This should be noted because not all states provide the same level or type of assistance to schools not making AYP. While states often use multiple strategies to improve identified schools, most states focus their efforts on one of five primary support strategies: school support teams; specialized individuals; regional centers, area educational agencies, or county offices; providing resources or hosting statewide meetings; or dependence on districts to provide support (Stullich, Eisner, McCrary, & Roney, 2006). These support strategies are intended to help low-performing schools improve and meet the criteria for AYP.

With the optimum range of state-supported technical assistance for schools identified as in need of improvement still unknown, states have opted for undifferentiated strategies and programs (Goertz, Duffy, & Le Floch, 2001). Davis, Krasnoff, Moilanen, Sather, and Kushman (2007) report:

As states and districts provide support for schools facing increasingly stringent No Child Left Behind requirements, common strategies are emerging, such as providing professional development for principals and assigning external facilitators such as distinguished educators or school support teams to provide consistent support. However,

such challenges as large percentages of rural and remote schools, high numbers of non-English-speaking and special education students, and local control issues all preclude the emergence of one overarching best solution. At this time a better understanding of the critical success factors and conditions that optimize the improvement process is needed to assist policymakers as they develop their statewide systems of support. (p. 3)

Assessing the impact of state accountability activities is anything, but straightforward (Hanushek & Raymond, 2003, 2005). Moreover, school performance does not typically improve in even and measurable increments, which frustrates attempts to detect progress (Elmore, 2003).

One of the most difficult issues to emerge from state accountability systems is the question of how to best intervene in the most academically vulnerable schools, those schools whose student achievement data reveal that they dramatically and persistently fail their students (McRobbie, 1998). Dominguez, Nicholls, and Storandt (2006) found that unsatisfactory schools, that appear to share a common set of weaknesses, do not react uniformly to the technical assistance that is put into place. Some improve, others simply do not, and some vacillate without apparent direction (Dominguez et al., 2006). This is further supported by the assessment of teacher and administrator perceptions of state intervention (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008) which reveals a continuum with state interventions leading to some positive outcomes, some negligible results, and some largely negative consequences. There are no simple answers in how to affect positive, sustainable change in low-performing schools, but developing a more comprehensive understanding of how state assistance can support these schools is essential (Laguarda, 2003).

Educational Consultants

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) calls for distinguished educators to provide intensive and sustained assistance to schools farthest from meeting the state's student performance standards (Davis et al., 2007). These distinguished educators (e.g., school improvement specialist, exemplary educator, school improvement facilitator) serve as the state-funded external education consultant who is assigned to work with low-performing or failing schools. The law defines distinguished educators as teachers or principals who are knowledgeable about research-based programs and instructional practices and successful with Title IA school-wide projects, school reform, and methods for improving educational opportunities for low-performing students (Davis et al., 2007). As Rhim, Hassel, and Redding (2008) noted, the use of distinguished educators has been envisioned as one of the main sources of support for the implementation of NCLB.

External expert assistance is often a crucial element of successful school improvement projects (Hamann, 1992). External educational consultants are able to offer specific or customized assistance to failing schools which is becoming a more viable option for such schools (Bowles, Churchill, Effrat, & McDermott, 2002; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Schools are turning to external consultants to assist in the reform process (Fullan, 1991; Louis, 1981), and research on school reform supports the use of external consultants as being critical to successfully achieving reform goals (Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Hamman, 1992). This type of external support is a factor recognized as important in improving schools in disadvantaged areas (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002; Stoll & Myers, 1998). With many struggling schools in low-income communities, external consultants could be a necessary component to supporting these schools.

Futernick (2007) recognized the particular value that the external partner, or consultant, can bring to the school reform process.

1. Advocacy for the future: Few activities face greater day-to-day operating pressures than schooling. External partners can serve as a powerful counter-balance to the tyranny of the day-to-day. Since they are engaged explicitly to advance the reform process, their presence alone reinforces awareness of the reform agenda. Moreover, external partners can prompt meetings on key reform initiatives and otherwise keep the reform process alive in people's minds and actions.
2. An insider-outsider perspective: Leaders of school-reform processes, like anyone trying to accomplish something important and difficult, need both to immerse themselves totally in their organization and step back conceptually. An "outsider" to the organization—if sufficiently knowledgeable about the organization and committed to the leaders' vision and values—can serve as the mirror and thought partner that leaders need in order to take that step back and see, think, and interpret afresh. (p. 30-31)

Additionally, Louis (1981) found that external consultants have a greater chance of bringing about reform than those within the organization because of there being less bureaucracy in the role which results in more flexibility. The *fresh eyes* approach brought by an external consultant has some demonstrated benefits, making this an important piece of the school improvement puzzle.

Roles and Duties

The roles and duties of external educational consultants vary and are dependent on a variety of factors. Futernick (2007) identified several different ways external partners help, such

as taking on some direct reform responsibilities (under the overall guidance of internal leadership) to help deepen and accelerate the process, facilitate internal discussions, occasionally handle conflict-resolution processes that can be difficult for insiders to handle, help delegate staff work in preparation for follow-up of specific meetings, conduct in-depth analysis of data for the school, or assist in establishing relationships with community organizations. Murphy and Meyers (2008) discussed the varied nature of external educational consultants' tasks, services, and time in providing support to failing schools, but noted they were expected to work with principals and the school improvement teams two to three days a week.

Research from the UK, about the use of an external adviser (external consultant) working with head teachers (principals), provided further information about external consultants' roles and duties. Crawford and Earley (2004) looked at the role of external advisers working with head teachers on performance management and found the external adviser appears to perform a multiplicity of roles- as counselors, facilitators, mentors, honest brokers and coaches. The external adviser encouraged the head teacher to discuss issues that they wouldn't discuss with anyone else (Crawford & Earley, 2004). Additionally, Chapman and Harris (2004) found external support partners did the following:

- Facilitated the generation of ideas and dissemination of good practice.
- Helped prevent innovation from being blocked and ensured that the momentum for change is maintained.
- Provided support for school improvement by acting as a resource for professional development, helping schools with data analysis and giving intensive early support to schools. (p. 225)

In large-scale consultancy-based national reform (i.e., the Secondary National Strategy in London, UK), the SNS consultants were meant to implement specific SNS reform agendas within schools (DfEE, 2001 in Cameron, 2010). According to Cameron (2010), SNS consultants' duties might include:

- SNS consultant run workshops that introduced specific aspects of the reform to the faculty;
- work outlines (often originating through meetings between school senior leadership and local authority advisers and SNS consultants);
- school exam achievement;
- local authority and school achievement targets;
- individual school and departmental perceived needs; and
- differentiated days of allocated support to schools.

These international examples demonstrate the diversity of activities and roles an educational consultant might perform when working with a school in the United States.

While there is no available research on Georgia's school improvement specialists, the description of their responsibilities explains what they might do in their assigned schools. The Georgia Department of Education (2012) identified school improvement responsibilities that school improvement specialist should provide to Focus Schools:

1. Planning and organization and school improvement planning process: This includes developing and monitoring the school improvement plan, assist with the budgetary process, classroom observations, and partnering with the principal and leadership team to observe classrooms as professional learning.
2. Assessment and data analysis: This includes reviewing school data and identifying root causes to identify what needs to occur in with the school improvement plan;

- assisting the principal and leadership team with implementing and monitoring of the school improvement plan including the review student academic progress, student and teacher attendance, discipline, and graduation rate; assisting the school and district with the analysis of feeder school student achievement data; and assisting the school in using data to plan for continuous improvement.
3. Leadership and leadership teams: This includes participating on the school's leadership team, ensuring implementation and monitoring of the Leadership Strand in the School Keys and the High Impact Practice Rubric for Leadership Teams, assisting leadership teams with short-term action plans, assisting leadership in addressing targeted areas and with feedback from observations, ensuring leadership teams use effective protocols for meetings, supporting development with planning and implementing a Flexible Learning Program, and ensuring the leadership team utilizes the School Keys, Leadership Strand, to self-monitor progress three times a year.
 4. Curriculum, assessment, and instruction: This includes ensuring the school is implementing Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and Georgia Performance Standards, ensuring the implementation of the GaDOE curriculum maps, assisting with the implementation and monitoring of standards-based teaching and learning, ensuring framework/benchmark assessments are given and results are analyzed to guide instruction, and ensuring that administrators and the leadership team guide school-wide planning.
 5. Professional learning: This includes supporting the instructional coaches with planning and leading professional learning; assisting with the implementation of professional learning provided by GaDOE and the area RESA; ensuring the school

provides time for teachers to collaboratively plan for instruction, meeting student needs, and participate in job-embedded professional learning; attending GaDOE and RESA professional learning with their schools, supporting follow-through with implementation of strategies from the Summer Leadership Academy, and supporting the principal and leadership team in monitoring the implementation of professional learning.

Georgia's school improvement specialists are expected serve their schools in a variety of ways and many of them involve direct support to the work of the principal.

Many states provide external consultants to support low-performing schools similar to the Georgia's school improvement specialist program. Presented here is the available research on state-funded external consultants' duties and roles served in low-performing schools. In Alabama schools that received support from peer mentors (Alabama's state consultants), teachers and administrators reported the peer mentors assisted their schools through professional development, monitoring instruction, creating data reports, and planning (Redding & Walberg, 2008). In Washington, school improvement facilitators work as external change agents to facilitate school improvement by doing the following:

1. Helping the school staff identify and eliminate barriers to change and promote necessary school consensus for change;
2. Helping local educators build capacity and sustainability of working programs in the schools;
3. Helping and supporting the leadership team at the school by guiding crucial conversations and bringing issues to the table; and

4. Mentoring principals as a way to build capacity, not reliance. (Redding & Walberg, 2008)

The school improvement facilitator's work was consistently cited as a reason for schools meeting their goals and principals appreciated the school improvement facilitator's assistance. Similarly, Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators, formerly known as Distinguished Educators, assisted schools in the following ways: professional development, curriculum alignment, classroom instruction, test preparation, leadership, school organization and decision-making and resource procurement (David, Coe, & Kannapel, 2003). The duties of the state-funded external consultants appear largely similar.

Results

Several research reports identify issues and inconsistencies when using external consultants. The use of external consultants to impart knowledge or to assess programs or schools has been heavily criticized for being ineffective because these approaches largely ignore the impact of the local context on reform and assume that solutions to educational dilemmas can be imported (Crandall et al., 1982; Goodman, 1994; McLaughlin, 1990). Issues found were that state consultants duplicated work already done at the local level or by previous consultants, required school leaders to continuously familiarize new consultants due to inconsistent tenure of consultants in a particular school, and used competing criteria to prioritize school improvement strategies (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). Finnigan, Bitter, and O'Day (2009) found that external consultants developed plans for improvement that included a range of disconnected strategies, and this incoherence was a barrier to schools needing assistance. Chapman (2005) cited the inconsistency of external support as another key factor in the apparent failure of contemporary interventions that many struggling schools turn to for needed support. Roy and

Kochan (2012) found the role of an outside expert from State Department of Education is tenuous and difficult. An overarching theme from the available research is that inconsistencies appear to be many for myriad reasons, when schools have utilized educational consultants.

For schools to achieve substantive reform through the effective use of external consultants, both the schools and the consultants need to have a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of the consultant and school partnership (Sulla, 1998). When assigning personnel from the state department or other external agencies to work with underperforming schools, those selected should have strong communication and interpersonal skills and should also display an understanding and sensitivity for those who are working in these schools (Roy & Kochan, 2012). The success of external consultants in assisting organizations in the pursuit of reform has been strongly linked to their ability to recognize and interact with the local context rather than taking a one-solution-fits-all approach (Berman & McLaughlin, 1980; Guskey, 1995; Prestine & Bowen, 1993).

Factors that influence the success of a consultant's work with schools are the extent to which the consultant recognizes issues germane to the school, the ability of the consultant to help the administrators and teachers engage in reflective inquiry, and the processes that the consultant uses when working with the administration and faculty (Hamman, 1992; Johnston, 1989; McDonald, 1989; McLaughlin, 1990; Schein, 1969). In addition, Davis et al. (2007) found that Washington's principals, in their evaluation of the School Improvement Assistance Program, noted a more productive working relationship with the school when the school improvement facilitator's experience, expertise, and leadership style were aligned with the school's needs and context. In Stunk, McEachin, and Westover's (2012) research, qualitative findings on external assistance provided by intervention teams that include consultants were viewed as effective

resources to provide support and assistance with issues related to assessing needs, help prioritizing and planning, and with implementation in school improvement strategies. In schools working with Alabama's School Assistance Teams, Roy and Kochan (2012) recognized the importance of supportive leadership from the principal as a major key to the success of school improvement efforts. Understanding the local context of the school and providing a consultant whose experience and strengths match the school's needs are both keys to better results when assigning an educational consultant.

According to Calkins, Guenther, Belifiore, and Lash (2007), in many cases this type of support was considered a "light-touch" (p.10) effort that may help some average-performing schools improve, but it is not sufficient to produce successful turnarounds in chronically low-performing schools. Finnigan and O'Day (2003) found the external assistance provided by the Chicago Public School Reform was too weak to create any deep lasting change in struggling schools. Similarly, in Calkins' et al. (2007) review of this type of state support, they reported,

Highly Skilled Educators and programs modeled after the Kentucky approach, it appears, can be helpful in schools with some level of pre-existing capacity to improve, especially at the elementary level. Their efficacy at higher levels of schooling, and in the particular subset of chronically under-performing schools that we are examining here, appears to be much less promising. In these cases, simply providing expert assistance without the ability to make more substantial changes happen falls short of the magnitude of the task. (p. 98)

Additionally, David et al. (2003) found that the impact of Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators (HSE) was considerably weaker in schools with the most severe problems concerning faculty morale, school leadership, and district support—which also tended to be those in the most

economically-depressed areas. In the summary of findings on the Tennessee Exemplary Educators Program, Craig and Butler (2006) found,

At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, 126 (i.e., 76.36%) of the schools assisted by Exemplary Educators achieved adequate yearly progress while 39 schools (i.e., 23.64%) did not. However, as in prior years, no discernible pattern has been observed linking individual Exemplary Educator characteristics or particular activities Exemplary Educators perform in assisting schools to increasing student achievement and/or attaining adequate yearly progress. (p. 29)

As a result of schools making adequate yearly progress, failure to understand the role the Exemplary Educator plays in this improvement process leaves questions about the Exemplary Educator's true efficacy. Additionally, according to Finnigan, Bitter, and O'Day's (2009) most recent study on improving schools with external consultants,

The support provided to low-performing schools in most cases was not sufficiently targeted, coherent, or intensive to influence instruction and student learning in a meaningful way. As a result, the schools' responses to external support were quite variable and most schools realized at most a minimal benefit from this support. (p. 3)

Finally, according to the researchers, mentoring and coaching provided by retired educators and administrators that occurs for a few hours each week or month is unlikely to have lasting value to a low-performing school (Mass Insight Education, 2012). They warned against using outside external consultants to recommend a school improvement plan without staff *buy-in* and having the necessary instructional and leadership skills to assist in implementing the plan (Mass Insight Education, 2012). Just assigning a state-funded external consultant for more years in these struggling schools is unlikely to increase their success unless other conditions change.

Work with Principals

Fullan (2002) posits that “Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement” (p. 16). Principals dealing with data-driven decision-making and the responsibility for the performance of student achievement can be stressful, and having a consultant or mentor to discuss issues with and come up with possible solutions can be beneficial (Duncan & Stock, 2010). Linn, Rothman, and White (2001) asserted that principals are the key to the success for any school, and especially in turning around failing schools. The Southern Regional Education Board (2000) found that, “not only is local leadership essential to embarking on the kind of comprehensive and far reaching restructuring initiatives that failing schools need, but that external assistance is crucial” (p. 1). According to the research, understanding how external consultants can support the principals is crucial. The external consultant’s role of providing support, together with the challenge needed to encourage development is essential (Earley & Weindling, 2006).

Several studies about Kentucky’s Highly Skilled Educators (HSE) shed light on the work of state-funded external consultants with principals of identified, struggling schools. David et al. (2003) found that HSEs worked with principals in the following ways: meeting with and talking to principals daily, in some cases functioning as an assistant principal, working with the principal to improve leadership skills and indirectly working on leadership by focusing on grade level or faculty meetings, and on professional development or discussing ways to assess instruction. In another study examining Kentucky’s HSE program, the following work with principals acknowledged,

Emphasis is placed on helping principals take on greater responsibility for instructional leadership. HSEs' work with school principals is central to their success and it extends beyond the planning and strategizing. Most HSEs find they have to devote significant attention to assisting their principals in coming to grips with this key responsibility. This is important not only because the HSE will eventually leave, but also so they can share the burden of instructional leadership that they are expected to provide during their two-year stay. (Mandel, 2000, p. 11)

In survey reports about Kentucky's program, principals felt their HSE was highly effective in encouraging the principal's leadership position (Davis, McDonald, & Lyons, 1997). These researchers found 89% of elementary teachers and 51% of middle school teachers believed that school leadership had improved as a result of the work of the state-funded external consultant (David et al., 2003, p. 21). David et al. (2003) also found 58% of HSE respondents listed principal leadership as one of the three greatest challenges they had faced (p. 21). Clearly, state-funded external consultants are having an influence on school leadership, but even these findings are limited in what they tell us about how principals of low-performing schools are assisted by external consultants.

In Toppings (2013) research on school turnaround efforts, he found leadership coaching in low-performing schools was viewed as being a key to long-term sustainability of achievement gains and that it is seen positively at the state, local, and school level. The leadership coaching provided by external coaches helped principals focus school efforts on improving, helped the school leadership and faculty understand and utilize data for decision making purposes, and how to work effectively in professional learning communities (Toppings, 2013). Though for all of this to occur successfully, Toppings recognized there needed to be: a good fit with the coach and

school; relationship building between the coach, school leaders; and faculty, and frequent, consistent support.

Finnigan and O'Day's (2003) study of the reform efforts in Chicago Public Schools captured the bigger issue of this type of support. They found principals needed to be stronger leaders and often the external consultants only recommended generic strategies to the principals such as be more visible, monitor instruction closely, and follow through with teachers on instructional issues. Additionally, Boyle, Le Floch, Therriault, and Holzman's (2009) study on perceptions of state support for school improvement found school administrators often appreciated support providers who could serve as a sounding board and provide feedback on specific school improvement issues. Several administrators also expressed a desire for more hands-on support from their consultants. Some administrators viewed the consultants as serving a largely bureaucratic role (e.g., ensuring proper paperwork was completed and filed) rather than engaging in more substantive aspects of the school's improvement efforts. Hamilton, Heilig, and Pazey (2013) recognized that the external consultants served as the strategist for school improvement reforms. Yet, in the findings from their study, they stated that the principals who received support from a consultant reported it was limited in value and compromised by having issues from too many meetings and competing strategies from the state and district (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazey, 2013). One principal from the study equated all the meetings related to reform process and random input from consultants about how to improve being like "too many cooks in the kitchen" with little value in terms of actually turning the school around (Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazey, 2013, p. 23). These studies reflected the challenge consultants face in providing in-depth, meaningful support to school administrators as they work to improve their low-performing schools.

In studies from the UK about consultant leaders working with head teachers (i.e., principals), there are other notable findings. In the UK, consultant leaders are the educational consultants who work with the head teachers of low-performing schools. Berwick (2004) documented that individual consultant practice with a head teacher might include mentoring, coaching, and facilitating. In the study of consultant leaders working with head teachers in London, he gives the following reasons why recipient head teachers might not accept consultant leaders' support:

- They have had a poor experience of consultancy in the past which has predominantly been carried out in an executive/'telling' manner, offering solutions but lacking accountability for the outcomes.
- They have had no experience of the type of consultancy being offered and could not see its value.
- The London Challenge Adviser who recommended the use of CLs had not broached the issue with the school, although this is a requirement of their support plan.
- The value of the work has not yet been proven. (Berwick, 2004, p. 15)

Recognizing that these barriers exist and finding ways for external consultants to overcome them is crucial to the external consultants' ability to work effectively with school leaders. In a qualitative evaluation of the role of consultant leaders (CL) within the London Challenge, Earley and Weindling (2006) found,

- The CL strategy seems to have had a positive reception among the heads and the receiving schools.

- The role of a CL requires a huge amount of tact and sensitivity to the needs of the other head and his/her school. Reference was made to ethical dilemmas and tensions that may arise.
- In some cases, the self-esteem of the receiving school was so low that it was difficult for the head or members of the senior leadership team to accept support or to acknowledge that what the CL had to offer would be valuable.
- There are benefits to be gained from both parties from the scheme.
- It appears to work most readily with those heads who are recently appointed.
- As the scheme develops and matures and as further resources are dedicated to this strand, its chances of further success appear great. (p. 51)

While the support provided was well received, there were some challenges that the consultant leaders faced in assisting their head teachers. Not unlike the previously reviewed studies, these also leave more questions about the roles external consultants play when working with principals of struggling schools.

Cameron (2010) studied the large-scale consultancy-based national reform, the Secondary National Strategy (SNS) in London, with a specific focus on the work and relationships of the SNS consultant and the school leaders. In terms of the SNS consultant's relationships with school leadership, roles within the SNS policy text are more or less pre-defined and static (Cameron, 2010). SNS consultants are meant to work in specific ways with specific people depending on their formal positions within the school (DfES, 2002 as cited in Cameron, 2010). In his study, Cameron (2010) found the SNS consultants all had experiences in which they felt *used* by the schools' leaders to do a job that they felt should have been done by the leadership themselves. According to Cameron (2010), SNS consultants share, alter, and

frame messages between faculty and school leaders to strengthen their position with both groups and to ease what can possibly be a harsh message. Instead of transparency, SNS consultants “intimate at the problems” concerning teachers and departments to senior leadership (p. 352). Additionally, Cameron captures the complexity of the role of the educational consultants in their work with faculty and school leaders:

...the SNS consultant navigates through the school hierarchy with care. The SNS consultant role fills a complex space within secondary school social relations as they operate under a mandate of reform implementation that requires them to establish close supportive relationships with heads of departments and teachers while also serving the school’s leadership agenda. When these come into conflict, SNS consultants are forced to navigate tense, political social spaces. In these situations, SNS consultants can operate in a dual capacity both reporting to senior leadership while protecting departmental relationships. (p. 357)

The research confirms that if external consultants are selected and used properly, they can effectively help school administrators reach their goals for change, yet conversely, a consultant who was poorly selected or utilized, can have a negative impact (Sulla, 1998). The questions about what external consultants’ roles are in supporting principals of low-performing schools still remain as the available research is inadequate at this point.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be framed in the work of Schein’s (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy. Since the late 1960s, Edgar Schein worked toward developing a typology of consultation models based on key assumptions about helping (Rockwood, 1993). Consultation and helping processes can be distinguished best by analyzing the tacit assumptions they make

about the client, the nature of help, the role of the consultant, and the nature of the ultimate reality in which the client and the consultant operate (Schein, 1999). Schein's consultation models examined the content versus process component of problems and problem solving. Content variables involve the problems themselves and the needed duties performed. Process variables have to do with how tasks and problems are worked on by individuals and groups. The three broadly-accepted models of consultation are purchase-of-expertise, doctor-patient, and process consultation (Schein, 1990). Schein (1999) suggests that the three models can be thought of as different modes of operating and are defined by the three different roles consultants can operate in when they help a client. According to Schein (1999),

The main reason for distinguishing among the three models is that the helper must choose from one moment to the next which role to be in or which model of helping to use, but all three models imply that help is the primary function of consultation. (p. 5)

Each model expects something different from the consultant, and many times what model is utilized can be based on multiple factors related to the client, the organization, the challenges being faced, and the consultant.

Purchase-of-Expertise

The purchase-of-expertise model of consultation assumes that the client purchases some form of needed information or expert service that cannot be provided by the client themselves from the consultant (Schein, 1999). Purchase-of-expertise suggests that clients are looking for consultants to provide independent perspective to solve specific challenges. There is no expectation to focus on the client relationship by itself, but rather to provide expertise on the identified problem in a detached manner (Rockwood, 1993). This model of consultation appears

clear cut, but there are several assumptions that must be met for the purchase-of-expertise model to work effectively.

1. The client has to have made a correct diagnosis of what the real problem is.
2. The client has identified the consultant's capabilities to solve the problem.
3. The client has to correctly communicate what the problem is.
4. The client has thought through and accepted all of the implications of the help that will take place. (Schein, 1978, p. 340)

According to Schein (1999), the purchase-of-expertise model requires clients to take much of the responsibility since they must diagnose problems of their organization correctly. The consultant is essentially commissioned to find and give appropriate information on behalf of the client. Once the assignment has been given, the client becomes dependent on what the consultant decides. In this model, the client hands over the power to handle the problem to the consultant. Purchase-of-expertise may be appropriate when the issues are clear-cut and specialized information is needed, but there can be concerns for both the client and consultant when the issues may be difficult to identify.

The Doctor-Patient

The doctor-patient model requires the consultant focus on using a diagnostic approach to examine the client organization's problems (Schein, 1999). The client knows something is wrong, but is unsure of what it is or how to solve it (Rockwood, 1993). The consultant comes in to identify the problem and to provide the solution to it. Unlike the first model, this model emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships and developing trust between the client and the consultant, much like one would do with a doctor.

The key assumptions that need to be met for the doctor-patient model to be effective include:

1. The client has correctly interpreted the organization's assumptions and knows where "sickness" is.
2. The client can trust the diagnosis.
3. The person or group defined as sick will provide the necessary information to make a good diagnosis.
4. The client will understand and accept the diagnosis, implement the prescription, and think through and accept the consequences.
5. The client will be able to remain healthy after the consultant leaves. (Schein, 1978, p. 341)

Schein (1999) cautioned that the doctor-patient model is fraught with issues if the client has not adequately shared the problems of the organization, if the consultant misdiagnoses the problems within the organization or if the organization is unable to make the recommended changes due to reasons beyond the scope of the consultant. Additionally, Schein (1999) identified some factors that are needed for this model to work. These include the following: the problem must be accurately identified, the patient must reveal accurate information, the patient believes and agrees to the recommended prescription, the diagnostic processes are done correctly to identify the problem and offer the right solution, and the patient is actually able to make the proposed changes. This model depends on the client trusting the consultant to find the problem and fix it. In some situations, this model is the effective means to make necessary changes.

The Process Consultation

Schein (1990) noted the process consultation model considers the consultant as a facilitator with the client actually providing much of the relevant expertise. There is a clear distinction of roles and tasks. In the end, the client chooses what to do about the problem. The consultant provides more of the framework and methodology for defining the problem and the best possible alternatives.

The key assumptions that need to be met for process consultation to be effective are:

1. The nature of the problem is such that the client not only needs help in making a diagnosis but would also benefit from participating in making the diagnosis.
2. The client has constructive intent and some problem-solving ability. The process consultation model will not work if the client primarily wants to engage in a dependent relationship with the consultant or is clearly motivated by destructive aims.
3. Ultimately, the client is the one who knows what form of intervention or solution will work best within the organization.
4. When the client engages in the diagnosis and selects and implements interventions, there will be an increase in his or her future problem-solving abilities. (Schein, 1978, p. 342)

Process consultation is systemic in that it accepts the goals and values of the organization as a whole, attempts to work with the client within those values and goals, and jointly find solutions that will fit within the organization system (Rockwood, 1993). This model does not lay the burden of the expected improvement on an outside consultant, but rather has the consultant serving as a coach or facilitator, guiding the managers and organization through the processes to identify and solve their problems.

Each of these three models demonstrates the variety of roles a consultant can play when assisting an organization in making improvements and solving issues. For struggling schools and the principals who serve them, these models may bring to light the roles external state-funded consultants fulfill when working with them. With the needs of struggling schools being so complex, understanding the roles of the state-funded external consultant can enhance the research on how to best support these schools and their leaders.

Conclusion

This literature review was provided to build a meaningful background for the study. The review initially examined the business world to explore external consultants since often school improvement practices are based on business turnaround practices. In the section on school interventions, a picture of what struggling schools should receive based on the requirements of federal guidelines, was provided. Then an in-depth look at external educational consultants was outlined to develop an understanding of their roles, work, and results. Finally, Schein's (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy were presented as the theoretical framework for this research study. This will serve as the sieve to filter the data and shed light on the findings about the roles of state-funded external consultants working with principals of low-performing schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to explore the roles of state-funded educational consultants (i.e., Georgia's school improvement specialists) working with principals of middle schools in Focus School status. Additionally, the factors that determine which model of consultancy utilized were identified. This exploratory qualitative study included open-response questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and reflective field notes. The research questions to be answered were:

1. How do Georgia's school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?
 - a. What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?
 - b. What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?
2. What models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) do school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School Status?
3. What factors determine what models of consultancy Georgia's school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?

This chapter describes the design of the study and the rationale for the chosen design. The chapter will include procedures and methods used to conduct this study. Included are sections on the participants, data collection procedures, the data analysis procedures, and methods of verification utilized to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data.

Rationale for Qualitative Study Design

To better explore and identify the roles of Georgia's school improvement specialists when working with principals, this study employed an exploratory qualitative study design. The exploratory qualitative study design fulfills the research agenda if the researcher is interested in interpretation, discovery, and insight (Merriam, 1988). This was the intent of the present study.

Qualitative research "implies direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 7). With an important strength of qualitative research being the insight of the multiple realities and perspectives derived from individuals' experientially-based perceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1988), this exploratory, qualitative design allowed me to gather data that gave specific insight into the participants' perceptions, experiences, and understanding.

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). This allowed me, as the researcher, to be responsive to the context within which I collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). The qualitative study required field notes which included descriptions and researcher comments which were part of preliminary data analysis (Merriam, 1988). Additionally, the qualitative design was fitting because the nature of my study entailed questions that were better answered by gathering direct information from participants (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 1994).

Research Design

This study was an exploratory qualitative study design. An exploratory research design allows the researcher to understand the world from the participant's perspective (Kvale, 1996; Robson, 1993). Since there is limited research on state-funded consultants working with principals, this choice of design allowed me to better answer the proposed research questions.

The exploration of both the principals' and school improvement specialists' experiences of working together was possible with this research design. Figure 1 reflects the design used for this exploratory qualitative study.

The Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Merriam, 1998). Thus, understanding the duties and skills of the researcher was important to me as a novice researcher. Yin (2003) provided this list of commonly required skills for qualitative researchers:

- asking good questions and interpret the answers
- being a good listener
- being adaptive and flexible
- having a firm grasp of the issues being studied
- being unbiased by preconceived notions.

Merriam (1998) noted tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, and communication skills as being those factors that most writers and researchers consider to be essential for those who conduct this type of research. As the researcher of this study, I realized my role was both complex and dynamic as I worked to design the study, collect the data from the participants, analyze the data, and then report the findings in a meaningful manner.

Simply stated, my goal as the researcher was to be an effective instrument for gathering and analyzing the data. My expectation was that the planned research design allowed me to answer the research questions so that a better understanding of the roles of state-funded consultants, working principals of low-performing schools, could be shared.

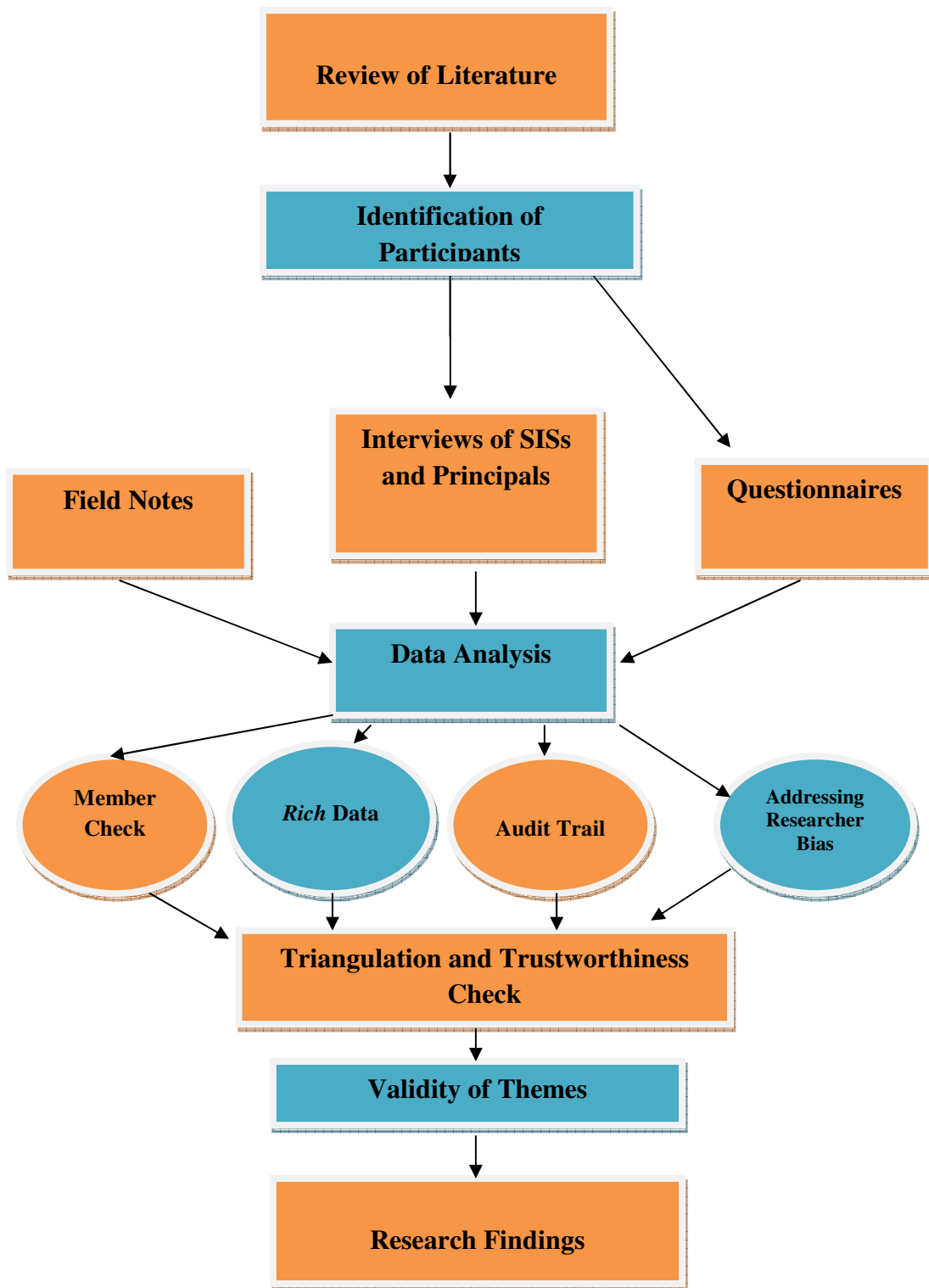


Figure 1. Qualitative research design. This figure demonstrates the exploratory qualitative study design.

Site and Participants

Selecting the site and sample is a critical task in a qualitative study, and it requires purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Patton (1990) argued that, ...logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 169)

Additionally, the sample must be appropriate, consisting of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

As the researcher in this study, I employed purposeful sampling as a means to identify a state-funded external consultant program working with principals of low-performing schools. Gay and Airasian (2000) noted the researcher must choose participants who have “experiences related to the topic of research not participants who necessarily represent some larger population” (p. 139). Georgia’s school improvement specialist program is a state-funded program that provides external consultants to work with principals of low-performing schools. Georgia’s geographic location was a consideration in choosing a state-funded external consultant program to research since I resided in a neighboring state and wanted the ability to travel to participants. The school improvement specialists are experienced educators, who have typically served in school or district leadership positions (e.g., principal, superintendent). The school improvement specialists work out of regional education service agencies (RESA) and serve school districts in their surrounding area. The schools they serve are identified as Focus Schools.

For middle schools, a Focus School is a Title I school that has the largest within-school

gaps between the highest-achieving subgroup or subgroups and the lowest-achieving subgroup or subgroups, or a school that has a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement according to the NCLB Waiver (subgroup n equal greater than or equal to 15) (GaDOE, 2012). “These determinations must be based on the achievement and lack of progress over a number of years of one or more subgroups of students identified under ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) in terms of proficiency on the statewide assessments that are part of the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system combined for one or more subgroups” (GaDOE, 2012, p. 5). The provision of an SIS placement was part of the requirement for Focus Schools, along with a memorandum of agreement the state, regional service agency, the school district, and principal signed. The memorandum of agreement outlined that the school and district were subject to non-negotiable actions and interventions as identified in the ESEA Flexibility Request which included intensive school-level support and guidance from the state as well as offering a flexible learning program to eligible students (GaDOE, 2012). From the memorandum of agreement (GaDOE, 2012), for a school to exit Focus School status the following must occur:

The School must no longer meet the definition of a Focus School for three consecutive years; demonstrate that the subgroup(s) that caused the School to be identified as a Focus School has decreased the number of non-proficient students by 25%. (p. 2)

All principals and their schools in this research study are currently in their second year as Focus Schools and are continuing to work with the SIS assigned to their school.

There are 16 Georgia RESAs and 13 of them serve middle schools identified as Focus Schools. All directors of school improvement in each of the 13 RESA offices were contacted via email, with follow up emails and phone calls to determine if the school improvement specialists serving middle schools identified as Focus Schools would be interested in participating in the

study. Four RESA offices had school improvement specialists who expressed an interest in participating in the study. The contact information for the interested school improvement specialists was provided to the researcher by the respective directors of school improvement. Ten school improvement specialists working with middle schools identified as Focus Schools agreed to participate in the study. Table 1 displays information about the principals and the SIS who worked together and in what stages of the study they participated. All school improvement specialists participated in the questionnaire phase of the study and four participated in the interview phase of the study. Three school improvement specialists worked with principals who agreed to participate as well. The fourth school improvement specialist's principal initially agreed to participate in both phases of the study, but was unable to continue due to his district not submitting a letter of permission for university Institutional Review Board purposes.

Table 1

SIS Participation Information

SIS	Principal Participated	Principal/s	Completed Questionnaire	Participated in Interview
S1	Y	P1 P2	X	X
S2	Y	P3	X	
S3	Y	P4 P5	X	
S4	N		X	
S5	Y	P7	X	X
S6	Y	P6	X	
S7	Y	P8	X	
S8	Y	P9	X	X
S9	Y	P10	X	
S10	N		X	X

N-10 S-School Improvement Specialist, P-Principal worked with

The Georgia middle schools invited to participate in this study were selected based on two criteria. One was the middle school had to be identified as a Focus School. The other was the middle school had to receive services from a school improvement specialist who was participating in the study. Sixteen schools within 11 school districts met the criteria. All 11 school districts were initially contacted by phone or email to inquire about procedures for gaining permission to conduct research with the principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. Two districts declined to participate due to the principals' lack of time, one district did not allow research to be conducted by people outside their district, and one district initially agreed to participate, yet did not remit submit a letter of permission for university Institutional Review Board purposes. Seven school districts granted approval to collect data from their principals of middle schools in Focus Status. Of the 12 principals, 10 elected to participate in the questionnaire phase of the study, and two principals declined to participate though their respective school improvement specialist did participate. Three principals were part of the interview phase of the study. Table 2 presents information about principals including which SIS the principals worked with and in which stages of the present study the principal participated.

Table 2

Principal Participation Information

Principal	SIS	Completed Questionnaire	Participated in Interview
P1	S1	X	X
P2	S1	X	
P3	S2	X	
P4	S3	X	
P5	S3	X	
P6	S6	X	
P7	S5	X	X
P8	S7	X	
P9	S8	X	X
P10	S9	X	

N-10 P-Principal, S-School Improvement Specialist worked with

Since confidentiality assurances were provided to the participants, actual participants' names were not used in the study but were identified by position and number (i.e., S1; P7). All 20 participants completed the questionnaire. Three principals and four SISs participated in the interview stage of the study. Three pairs of principals and the SISs who worked with them were interviewed separately. While the point of saturation was reached at the third interview with both principals and SISs, only one additional SIS interview was able to be conducted. Additional attempts to interview other principal participants were made; however, no other principals would commit to the interview phase of the study. Field notes were collected for all participants interviewed during digitally-taped interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

Yin (1994) said, "The first principle of data collection in a case study is to use multiple sources of evidence" (p. 90). In this study, there are three sources of data. The first was a questionnaire for the school improvement specialists and principals working in middle schools in Focus School status, and the questionnaires were collected at the end of the 2012-2013 school year. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school improvement specialists and principals during summer 2013. The third source of data was the reflective field notes. Table 3 offers a visual representation of the relationship between the data sources and the research questions.

Table 3

Matrix of Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Questionnaires	Interview Transcripts	Reflective Field Notes
1. How do Georgia's school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools? a. What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status? b. What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?	X	X	X
2. What models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) do school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School Status?	X	X	X
3. What factors determine what model of consultancy Georgia's school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?	X	X	X

Following IRB approval to conduct the research study, the contact information for the school improvement specialists and principals was compiled from RESA school improvement directors and district websites and organized in a contact list. Next, the data collection procedures began with a letter sent via email to the principals and school improvement specialists to invite them to participate in this study and provide them with an overview of this research study. In the letter, the purpose of the study was described as well as how the data will be collected and used. Additionally, the letter included information about the questionnaire. Then the school improvement specialists and principal who agreed to participate in the study were emailed the invitation to complete the online questionnaire.

The 20 participants were ensured confidentiality when recording the results of the study. Principal participants are identified with a P and a number. SIS participants are identified with a S and a number. Additionally, identifying details were altered to help provide confidentiality. Participants were asked to agree to an Informed Consent to Participate in the Research form (see Appendix E), if they participated in a semi-structured interview. Since all interviews were conducted via Skype, the Informed Consent to Participate was read to each participant and the participants orally consented to participate. Each paragraph was checked off as it was read per the direction of The University of Tennessee IRB guide (IRB Administration, 2012) and the written informed consent was dated and labeled by the researcher.

Questionnaires

School improvement specialists and principals of middle schools in Focus School status were asked to complete an online questionnaire (see Appendices A and B). The principals and school improvement specialists were provided login information in the letter describing the study (discussed in the previous section). SPSS MRInterview was the online program utilized for the

questionnaire. The principals and the school improvement specialists had individualized questionnaires with questions specifically worded for their position as either a principal or school improvement specialist. The questionnaire primarily contained open-ended questions with some semi-closed questions. Open-ended questionnaires have questions for which researchers do not provide the response options; the participants provide their own response to questions (Creswell, 2003). The open-ended questions allowed participants to create responses within their cultural and social experiences instead of the researcher's experiences (Neuman, 2000). As the researcher, I did not know the response possibilities from the two groups in the study and having this type of questionnaire allowed me to explore the responses. The questionnaire was designed to answer the research questions that guided this study (see Table 4). Additionally, the questionnaire included demographic information. Follow-up e-mails were dispatched and additional phone calls occurred for non-responses to determine willingness to participate in the research and ensure higher rates of participation.

Table 4

Research Questions in Relation to Questionnaires and Interview Questions

Research Question	Principal Questionnaire	SIS Questionnaire	Principal Interview Questions	SIS Interview Questions
1. How do Georgia's school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools? a. What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status? b. What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?	6, 7, 11, 12,13	7, 8, 12, 13,14	4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26	4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26
2. What models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) do school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School Status?	6, 7, 11, 12, 13	7, 8, 12, 13, 14	4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26	4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26
3. What factors determine what model of consultancy Georgia's school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?	8, 9, 10, 12	9, 10, 11, 14	6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26	6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with school improvement specialists and principals of Focus School status middle schools. The interviews can be considered “a conversation with a purpose” (Dexter, 1970, p. 136). Participants for the interviews were selected based on their willingness to participate and whether both the principal and school improvement specialist from the same school consented to be interviewed. All participants who met these criteria were interviewed. Interview protocols (Appendices C and D) differed for the principals and the school improvement specialists. The areas of responsibility of the Georgia school improvement specialists in Focus School status schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2012) were reflected in the interview protocols. The interview protocols were semi-structured so further probing could occur as needed. The interviews were one-on-one interviews. The participant was provided two options in how the interview could occur; (1) a face-to-face interview where the researcher and participant would physically meet and complete the interview; and (2) a Skype interview to allow participants more flexibility on when and where the interview occurred. While participants were offered both options for interviewing, all participants opted for Skype interviews due to complexity of scheduling interviews across the state of Georgia and to accommodate participants who needed evening interviews due to work. The interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Since verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis (Merriam, 1998), they were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber.

Reflective Field Notes

According to Creswell (2003), “Reflective field notes are personal thoughts that researchers have that relate to their insights, hunches, or broad ideas or themes that emerge

during an observation or interview” (p. 203). Merriam (1988) suggested the researchers should, “Record notes after interviews are complete because doing so will allow the investigator to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyze the information itself” (p. 82). By recording reflective field notes when interviewing the principals and school improvement specialists, I was able to synthesize what I saw and heard from the interviewees and the situation I was researching as well as begin some preliminary data analysis. This “joint collection and analysis of data is essential in qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 106).

Data Analysis Procedures

Analyzing qualitative data entails the determination of categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondents’ view of the world in general and of the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988). The qualitative data for this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison is an inductive (i.e., specific to broad) data analysis procedure that consists of generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories (Creswell, 2003). This helps reduce redundancy and develops evidence for categories according to Creswell (2003). As the researcher, I employed the constant comparative method as I coded and analyzed the questionnaires, interview transcripts, and reflective field notes. QDA Miner 4.0, a software package from Provalis Research was used for qualitative data analysis of text. Utilizing QDA Miner 4.0 allowed me, as the researcher, to organize, explore, and code data into categories so I could examine and compare the codes.

Coding is one of the significant steps taken during analysis to organize and make sense of textual data (Basit, 2003, p. 143). With the significance of this initial step in mind, the data from

the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes were carefully coded. According to Basit (2003), codes are defined as,

...tags or labels for allocating units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying—sized words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. (p. 144)

To help with the initial coding, I used codes based on the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 as a type of provisional coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) said the codes list can be generated from the literature review, previous studies, the theoretical/conceptual framework, and the research questions, but these codes are not to be considered locked or concrete. As qualitative data are collected, coded and analyzed, the provisional codes can be modified, deleted, or expanded to include new codes (Saldana, 2009). Utilizing provisional coding allowed me to move into more in-depth data analysis, the second iterative process.

After the initial phase of coding was completed, the next iterative process began. The coded data was analyzed and regrouped into categories using the QDA Miner program. Then, I additionally manually coded data based on initial coding using QDA Miner to make certain the categories were appropriate and thorough. Categories are conceptual elements that span many individual examples of the category (Merriam, 1998). Since the constant comparative method was employed in this study, these guidelines for determining categories were useful:

1. Categories should reflect the purpose of the research.
2. Categories should be exhaustive.
3. Categories should be mutually exclusive.

4. Categories should be sensitizing.

5. Categories should be conceptually congruent. (Merriam, 1998)

This process in the study entailed a dedicated focus on my part as the researcher to ensure the data were accurately interpreted.

The third iterative process was to integrate related categories to create themes. Themes represent the major ideas developed from the data (Creswell, 2003). The themes tie back to answering the research questions and possibly expand on the Schein's consultation models as the theoretical framework.

A code map, developed by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002), showing the three iterations of analysis is found in Table 5. The code map provides the reader clarity of how the data were categorized, consolidated, themes formed, and research questions answered. Table 5 shows the development of the codes, themes, and answers to the research questions from the analysis of the data.

Validity and Reliability

Patton (1999) wrote, "The qualitative researcher has an obligation to be methodical in reporting sufficient details of data collection and the processes of analysis to permit others to judge the quality of the resulting product" (p. 1191). With this in mind, I wanted to ensure validity and reliability in this research study.

Table 5*Code Mapping*

Third Iteration: Themes					
RQ One: 1.Required Work	RQ One: 2.Unofficial Service	RQ One A: 3.Expertise and Experience	RQ One B: 4. Barriers	RQ Two: 5. Supporting & Monitoring	RQ Three: 6. Dynamics
Second Iteration: Categories					
1a. School improvement and accountability 1b. Curriculum & instruction 1c. Professional learning	2a. Principal's needs 2b. Change & capacity	3.Expertise and experience	4a. Principal issues 4b.SIS issues 4c. Beyond control	5a. Purchased expertise 5b. Good doctor 5c. Collaborative guide	6a. Relationships 6b.Positional influence 6c. Job requirements
First Iteration: Initial Codes					
1a. Accountability & monitoring 1a. Data analysis 1a. School improvement planning 1a.State/district navigator	2a. Coaching principals 2a. Confidant & sounding board 2a. Supportive partner 2a. Second set of eyes	3a.Experience 3a. Expertise	4a. Busy principal 4a. Resistant principal	5a. Principal requested 5a. District/teacher requested	6a. Professional respect 6a. Positive and trusting
1b. Instructional coaching/strategies 1b. Curriculum planning 1b. Classroom observations	2b. Face of change 2b. Capacity building		4b. All-knowing outsider 4b. Overstepping bounds	5b. Principal shares/SIS solves 5b. SIS sees/SIS solves	6b. Principal positional influence 4b.SIS positional power/influence
1c.Presenting professional learning 1c. Coordinating professional learning			4c. Focus School issues 4c. Outside factors	5c.Collaborating together 5c. Guiding hand	6c. SIS required duties 6c. Focus School mandates
Data: Questionnaires		Data: Interviews		Data: Field Notes	

Note. Adapted from “Qualitative Analysis on Stage: Making the Research Process More Public” by V. A. Anfara, Jr., K. M. Brown, and T. L. Mangione, *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), p. 32 Copyright 2002 by American Educational Research Association. Used by permission.

Several researchers offer strategies for validity and reliability. Creswell (1998) provided eight verification procedures for ensuring the quality and rigor of a qualitative study: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation; (b) triangulation; (c) peer review of debriefing; (d) negative case analysis; (e) clarifying researcher bias; (f) member checks; (g) rich, thick description; and (h) external audits. Similarly, Merriam (1998) names six strategies to enhance internal validity: (1) triangulation; (2) member checks; (3) long-term observation; (4) peer examination; (5) participatory or collaborative modes of research; and (6) researcher biases. Additionally, Maxwell (2005) suggested these strategies (1) intensive long-term involvement; (2) *rich* data; (3) respondent validation (member checks); (4) intervention; (5) searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases; (6) triangulation; (7) quasi-statistics; and (8) comparison. While using all strategies for this study is not possible or would not be recommended, many of these strategies will be utilized.

Rich Data

Rich data includes intensive semi-structured interviews, open-response questionnaires, and reflective field notes. These data should be detailed and varied enough to provide a revealing picture of what is going on (Becker, 1970).

Triangulation

Patton (1999) recognized four kinds of triangulation which contribute to verification and validation of qualitative analysis:

- (1) checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods, that is, methods triangulation; (2) examining the consistency of different data sources within the same method, that is, triangulation of sources; (3) using multiple analysts to review findings, that is, analyst triangulation; and (4) using multiple

perspectives or theories to interpret the data, that is, theory/perspective triangulation. (p. 1193)

In this study, I triangulated using different data sources. Triangulation of the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes (Maxwell, 1996, Yin, 2003) ensured that accurate conclusions were drawn. Creswell (1998) explained triangulation as the “process involving corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 202).

Researcher Biases

Merriam (1998) stated that researchers must clarify their biases so the reader will understand any bias and/or assumptions that might impact the inquiry. (See the Role of the Researcher in Chapter Three) In addition, Maxwell (1996) explained,

It is clearly impossible to eliminate the researcher’s theories, preconceptions, and values. The task is not to eliminate bias but to understand how values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study. (p. 91)

As the researcher of this study, my experience working in schools identified for low-performance and working with state-funded educational consultants was taken into consideration as I collected and analyzed data. My previous experiences included both positive and negative situations. These experiences are what inspired this research. Being conscious of any bias based on previous experience or preconceived notions was imperative to me as the researcher.

Member Checks

According to Merriam (1998), “This is the process of taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible,” (p. 204). Maxwell (2005) considered member checks an important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the

perspective they have on what is going on, as well as an important way of identifying personal biases and misunderstandings of what was observed. In this study, participants who were interviewed took part in member checks to ensure validity of the findings. Participants were sent a copy of their transcribed interview and asked to make changes or clarifications, if necessary. One participant clarified details that did not come through clearly in the transcribing process. All others confirmed their transcripts did not require changes.

Audit Trail

An audit trail is an essential component of any rigorous qualitative study (Halpern, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to an audit trail as when an independent judge can authenticate the findings of the study by following the trail of the researcher. This included a detailed description of how the data were collected, how codes and categories were determined, and how decisions were made throughout the research process. An audit trail was performed by a doctoral student from another university who recently completed a series of research classes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the methodology for this research. The chapter covered the rationale for the study design. A review of the data collection procedures and plan for data analysis were included. Also, several tables and figures further clarified the design and implementation of the planned study. Finally, the chapter closed with the strategies used to ensure validity and reliability. Chapter Four will outline the analysis of data and findings from this study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions. The final section answers each of the research questions and overviews the themes that were developed from the analysis of the data as they relate to the theoretical framework of this study.

This study was designed to identify and explore the roles Georgia's school improvement specialists serve when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. The roles of the school improvement specialists were examined and compared from the perspectives of the principals and the school improvement specialists. In addition, the factors that determined which model of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) used was identified. These purposes were achieved through the theoretical lens of Schein's consultation models (1978, 1990, 1999).

The research questions used to guide this study were:

1. How do Georgia's school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?
 - a. What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?
 - b. What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status?

2. What models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) do school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School Status?
3. What factors determine what models of consultancy Georgia's school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?

Analysis

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the qualitative data collection included questionnaires, interviews, and field notes. These data sources offered a way to identify and explore the roles Georgia's school improvement specialists served when working with principals of middle schools in Focus School status. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Questionnaires: Demographic data

Questionnaires were collected from 10 principals and 10 SISs. Table 6 displays information about the principals' education, years' experience as the school's principal, school size and school locale, number of years an SIS has served the school, number of days the SIS was at the school, and meetings with the SIS. There were four female principals and six male principals; one held a master's degree, seven held educational specialist degrees, while two held doctorates. Only one principal (P9) was in her first year as principal of her current school. She previously oversaw the alternative school in her school district. In total, 80% of the principals worked with their schools from 3 to 5 years. Another principal (P5) served her school for 7 years.

Six of the schools were in rural or remote locations, based on the locale information from Institute of Educational Sciences; four of the schools were located in cities. The principals led Title I schools that ranged in size from just over 300 students to over 1,000 students. From the questionnaires, all principals indicated their schools were identified as Focus Schools because of the achievement gaps that existed between the Students with Disabilities subgroup with the highest-achieving subgroup. While the Focus School designation was new because of the NCLB Waiver (2012), four schools received support from an SIS based on the previous NCLB policies. Six schools had not been previously identified and were in their first year of working with an SIS. The principals reported that the SISs typically spent one day a week at their schools. Half of the principals reported they met with their SIS weekly, two reported meeting only once a month, and three reported meeting two to three times a month with their SIS. Per the Focus School mandates, principals and SISs were required to meet twice monthly, and as seen from the data there was a range in the frequency.

Ten SISs completed the questionnaire for this research study. Table 7 outlines the SISs education, number of years as an SIS, and professional experience, number of days at the school, and meetings with the SIS. Six SISs held educational specialists degrees and four of the SISs held doctorates. Their years of experience as SISs ranged from two to ten years with the median number of years being three years. All SISs had classroom experience. Four SISs previously had been instructional coaches and six SISs reported experience as an assistant principal. Three had been principals and one reported working as a district level administrator.

The SISs worked with one to four Focus Schools but not all of their schools were middle schools. All SISs stated they were at their schools four to five days a month. Six SISs reported meeting with their principals every time they were at their schools but whether these were formal

meetings is unknown. Four SISs reported meeting with their principals two to three times a month. This frequency of meeting together was an area in which the data from the principals and SISs did not match.

All principals and SISs reported engaging in work to move the middle schools out of Focus School status during the first year together. Further discussion of the work the principals and SISs engaged in will be included in the findings.

Interviews

Three principals and four SISs were interviewed for this study. In this section, a snapshot of each interviewed participant is provided including their perceptions and experiences about SISs working with principals of Focus Schools. This provides the reader a contextual base for understanding how SISs worked with the principals in their school improvement efforts.

Principal interview 1. The first principal (P1) was a middle aged, White woman who had spent the entirety of her educational career, 23 years, in the school. Principal 1 had been a teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, and now was in her third year as the principal. She held an education specialist degree and was in the process of completing her doctorate at a nearby regional university at the time of the interview. The school was described as being part of a rural school district. It was about 50% African American and 50% White with a student population averaging about 650. The school had an assistant principal, 55 certified teachers, and 10 other additional non-certified/classified staff. She stated, “We have done fairly well on our standardized state testing for our all-student population, our subgroup. We struggle tremendously with our students with disabilities. That's why we are on the Focus School list, because of the gap between those students and our all-students subgroup. There's a distinct gap that we are continuing to work on” (P1, interview).

Table 6

Principal and School Information

Principal	Highest degree	Years experience as principal of school	School locale	School size	Years SIS assigned	# days SIS at School per month	SIS meeting per month
P1	Ed.S.	3	Rural, fringe	662	3	4-5	2-3
P2	Ed.S.	5	Rural, fringe	842	1	4-5	2-3
P3	Ed.S.	5	City, midsize	566	1	4-5	4-5
P4	Ed.S.	3	Rural, fringe	944	3	4-5	1
P5	Ed.S.	7	City, midsize	647	More than 3	4-5	2-3
P6	M.S.	3	Town, remote	337	3	4-5	1
P7	Doctorate	3	City, small	1,032	1	4-5	4-5
P8	Doctorate	4	City, small	774	1	4-5	4-5
P9	Ed.S.	1	Rural, distant	319	1	4-5	4-5
P10	Ed.S.	5	Rural, distant	324	1	4-5	4-5

P-Principal, Locale codes from <http://ies.ed.gov/>

Table 7

SIS Information

SIS	Highest degree	Years as SIS	SIS educational background	# days SIS at school per month	SIS meetings per month
S1	Doctorate	8	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal	4-5	4-5
S2	Ed.S.	10	Teacher	4-5	2-3
S3	Ed.S.	4	Teacher Instructional Coach	4-5	4-5
S4	Ed.S.	3	Teacher Assistant Principal	4-5	2-3
S5	Ed.S.	3	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal	4-5	4-5
S6	Doctorate	6	Teacher Instructional Coach	4-5	2-3
S7	Doctorate	2	Teacher Assistant Principal District Administrator	4-5	4-5
S8	Doctorate	3	Teacher Instructional Coach Assistant Principal	4-5	4-5
S9	Ed.S.	3	Teacher Instructional Coach Assistant Principal Principal	4-5	4-5
S10	Ed.S.	5	Teacher	4-5	2-3

S-School Improvement Specialist

Principal 1 indicated she held the SIS in high professional regard based on their shared professional history and in terms of what he did as the SIS for the school. The principal and the SIS (S1) worked together previously at this school. More than once the principal spoke of an appreciation for having an SIS to help with bringing in new ideas, finding solutions to problems, and to be an extra set of hands and eyes in the school. Since the school district was rural, Principal 1 thought that without the SIS, she and the school would be cut-off from new ideas and valuable information. While the principal did not want the school identified, she lamented the end of the guaranteed three years of support from the SIS per the design of the Focus School mandates. Principal 1 did not identify challenges to having a SIS assisting her or the school, though she did not care for all the Focus School paperwork. There was expressed value for having someone the principal could vent to when she was dealing with the frustrations of the job. The principal recognized how the SIS helped her address school issues that were not just related to Focus School work as well. Overall, Principal 1 felt the SIS supported her as an instructional leader and helped push her and the school.

Principal interview 2. The second principal (P7) was an African American male in his mid-40s. From the field notes, he was described as having a calm demeanor and being thoughtful in what he said. Principal 7 had 6 years classroom experience, 14 years as an administrator, with 8 as a middle school principal. He held three advanced degrees with a Ph.D. in Education and Public Policy. The principal's professional experience was diverse with service in small and large school districts. Interestingly, Principal 7 had been the principal of the school where principal (P1) was now the principal. He indicated he had moved for opportunities for career advancement, and he has been at his current school for 4 years. Prior to the NCLB waiver and changes in how schools were identified, the school made AYP (adequate yearly progress). The

school was socioeconomically and demographically diverse with about 60% free and reduced lunch and a student population of about 55% African American, 35% White, and 15% comprised of Hispanic, Latino, Asian, and Indian. Gifted students or students receiving accelerated content comprised 20% of the student population while another 12% of the students were identified with disabilities ranging from severe and profound to learning disabilities. The subgroup of students with disabilities was why the school was identified as a Focus School.

Principal 7 had experience working with a SIS when he was an administrator in a different district due to the school not making AYP. With two different experiences as the principal of a school receiving support from a SIS, he did not characterize either experience negatively. Throughout the interview, the principal spoke positively of the SIS. The principal shared some initial apprehension, “You kind of have this person thrust upon you. You really have no say in who's being assigned to your school or in what you have to do” (P7, interview). The SIS (S5) was a retired administrator from his school district who had a positive professional reputation according to the principal. The SIS’s background as a school administrator was valuable to the principal as he reflected that she knew what being a principal was like and the challenges of working in this particular district. Principal 7 benefitted from her outside, objective perspective on what was occurring in his school, and how that allowed him to address some issues in which he was unaware. In reflecting on SISs supporting principals of Focus Schools, he stated,

If a person doesn't come in from the outside with, I don't know, almost an attitude of servant and, "How can I support you in this mounting level of work that you've been charged with?" yeah, then it kind of... that person then kind of becomes an obstacle. (P7, interview)

Numerous times Principal 7 mentioned the SIS was a partner to him as the school leader and wished the SIS could be at his school more than the allotted one day per Focus School policies.

Principal interview 3. The third principal (P5) interviewed was a Caucasian, middle age female with an education specialist degree who had been in education for 22 years. The principal's professional experiences were as a special education teacher, an assistant principal, alternative school director, and now a first-year principal of a small, rural middle school. The school was the smallest of all participating schools with 19 certified teachers on staff. There were many transient students with about 75% of them on free and reduced lunch and a very low socioeconomic level. The population of the school was about 75% White, 8% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 11% or so reported as multi-racial. Students identified with disabilities comprised 15% of the population. The achievement gap between this subgroup and the Hispanic subgroup was why the school was identified as a Focus School. The principal did not seem daunted by the school being in Focus School status in her first year as principal, and she appeared committed to doing whatever needed to be done to improve the school (P5, fieldnotes).

Principal 5 welcomed the support of the SIS to help her improve the school. The SIS (S8) was retired from the same district, and the principal indicated the SIS and she had a professional and personal relationship for many years. The principal spoke positively about her work with her SIS and viewed her as integral to her work in improving the school. She discussed how the SIS's work with teachers on professional practices was part of the reason the school's students with disabilities went from 0% proficient to 72% proficient in one year. The SIS and Principal 7 characterized their relationship as trusting and a partnership. With all the Focus School mandates and paperwork, the principal admitted to feeling frustrated because she just wanted to do what her school needed to be done. The SIS helped the principal complete the required documentation

and reports and served as a buffer for this part of Focus School work for the principal. Like the other principals, Principal 7 wanted to have the SIS at the school more than the allotted days. The principal discussed how the SISs should also provide support to the middle school's feeder schools since the school's students' academic problems did not begin in middle school. Overall, Principal 7 was clear about her goals for her school and using the SIS to help her achieve them.

School Improvement Specialist interview 1. The first school improvement specialist (S1) was a White middle-aged man with a doctoral degree who has worked as a SIS for the last 8 years. The SIS's professional background included work as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, and 1 year as a principal. School Improvement Specialist 1 believed his administrative experience was valuable to his work as an SIS since he understood the pressures principals were under. He worked with four Focus Schools, and two of the principals from these schools were part of this research study: P1 (questionnaire and interview) and P2 (questionnaire). Throughout the interview, School Improvement Specialist 1 spoke enthusiastically about the work SISs did with the schools (S1, fieldnotes). The SIS wanted to help his principals with the demands of being a Focus School and to serve as an additional layer of support. The NCLB Waiver and the memorandum of agreement determined several aspects of his job according to School Improvement Specialist 1. The SIS served as a monitor to ensure that the principal and school were meeting the requirements for Focus Schools. He expressed amusement and frustration with all the changes in state mandates that impacted what he did with his schools and shared with principals. His primary concern was, "... to make sure students were getting the learning they needed since teaching and school will go on independently of what policy changes occur" (SIS 1, interview). Also, School Improvement Specialist 1 indicated there were unofficial services he provided to the principals he assisted. Many times the SIS mentioned the significance of

developing relationships with the principals, and the importance of being a confidant who provided the principals a safe place to vent. Overall, the SIS was empathetic with the principals' job demands and he viewed himself there to help them fix their schools.

School Improvement Specialist 1 reported he previously worked in the same school where he currently served as the SIS with the principal (P1) who was discussed earlier. The SIS's relationship with the principal (P1) could be described as positive and professional (S1, fieldnotes). School Improvement Specialist 1 discussed how he specifically worked with the principal on time management and delegating so she could focus on being the instructional leader. In the principal's (P1) interview, she spoke of his help in this area and how she felt he respected her role as the instructional leader. Strategies the SIS saw in other places and state educational news that affected the principal were regularly shared. School Improvement Specialist 1 guided and monitored the principal and the school in the school improvement process and worked to improve the achievement of the Focus subgroup.

School Improvement Specialist interview 2. The second SIS (S5) was an older, middle class woman with an educational specialist degree who retired with 32 years of experience in public education. School Improvement Specialist 5 was well spoken and thoughtful about what she shared (S5, fieldnotes). The SIS's professional experiences included classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, and performance consultant in the area of leadership development for the state's leadership institute for school improvement. School Improvement Specialist 5 indicated the work as a performance consultant was instrumental in her understanding about school improvement. With three years experience as an SIS, School Improvement Specialist 5 served one Focus School (P7) and worked in the areas of leadership development and teacher leadership. With the SIS's background as a principal, she admitted that at times she could be a

little bossy and wanted to tell the principal and school what to do, but tried to catch herself when she did this. Mandated duties of the SISs with principals and Focus Schools such as monitoring the school's data and progress toward the expected goals were part of what the SIS did in her work. Yet, School Improvement Specialist 5 did not view the mandated work as her sole duty in her efforts with the principal and school. Throughout her interview, the SIS mentioned how she likes to find the right way of doing things in schools and about the importance of building capacity not just with the principal but the entire faculty. Creating protocols or ways of doing things versus bringing in programs to help a school improve were part of School Improvement Specialist 5's work. School Improvement Specialist 5 demonstrated a sense of commitment to the school by helping in the front office when the school was short staffed, attending the school's events, and doing other extra tasks beyond her job duties. The SIS's expressed intent was to build goodwill.

School Improvement Specialist 5 described the principal (P7) as a great guy who she believed had the potential to be a strong principal. The SIS's relationship with the principal was depicted as positive and productive. Notably, the SIS was retired from the district where the school was, and she was aware of some of the issues the school had and challenges of the school district. The district was known to limit the decision-making power of the principals. This prior experience and knowledge was useful to how School Improvement Specialist 5 supported Principal 7. With the issue of the school having several administrators, both principals and assistant principals, in a short time, School Improvement Specialist 5 helped the principal address staff morale issues that were pre-existing to the principal assuming his position and had been a long term issue in the school. The SIS's outside perspective was perceived to be beneficial to the principal, and Principal 7 shared the same sentiment in his interview. From the

SIS's perspective, the principal dealt more with managing the building but stated that he needed to focus more on monitoring classroom instruction. School Improvement Specialist 5 worked with the principal on being more present as an instructional leader and assisted him in developing a weekly protocol for being in classrooms every day. The SIS indicated she was committed to helping the principal improve as a school leader, and based on the principal's interview and questionnaire, he believed she'd helped him do that.

School Improvement Specialist interview 3. The third SIS (S8) was a woman in her late 50s who held a doctorate from a regional university in her area. School Improvement Specialist 8 had 30 years in public education in preK-12 settings including experience as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, and district school improvement and curriculum specialist. Also, she was employed as an adjunct professor. The district the SIS retired from was now a district she supported as an SIS. The SIS was in her fourth year as an SIS and she served four Focus Schools. In her interview, School Improvement Specialist 8 primarily discussed her experiences with Principal 5, though she reported in all the schools she worked with competent, professional principals. The Focus School mandates and the memorandum of agreement outlined the expectations for the schools and the SIS's duties. Part of the SIS's reported duties included monitoring the school improvement plan, monitoring the Flexible Learning program, providing professional learning, and ensuring the Focus sub-group was making academic gains. Within this work, School Improvement Specialist 8 viewed all the data analysis work she did with principals and teachers as being particularly valuable. As a support to her principals, School Improvement Specialist 8 wanted to do whatever was needed to help the schools improve. Much like the previous SIS (S5), School Improvement Specialist 8 strived to build the capacity of the school during the 3 year stint she will serve as the SIS per Focus School policies. School Improvement

Specialist 8 indicated being challenged by the limitations of one day with each of her schools and thought she could do more in terms of school improvement with fewer schools and more days of service to them. Because of the time limitations, the SIS made herself available to the principals via phone, text, or email. The SIS said she could suggest and support, yet she did not want to appear as someone from the state who dictated what the school should do. Building relationships and demonstrating respect for what the principal goes through aided the principals in accepting the School Improvement Specialist 8's assistance.

School Improvement Specialist 8 and Principal 5 had an evident level of mutual respect and appreciation for their respective professional knowledge and experience. They both reported an existing, long-term professional and personal history. The SIS was a place the principal could vent and the SIS served as the principal's sounding board. The principal requested her to provide specific professional learning for the faculty and to support the school with curriculum and instruction needs. SIS 8 assisted the principal with Focus School documentation, did classroom observations, and led data analysis in the school. The principal and SIS consistently mentioned how they worked together to improve the school. School Improvement Specialist 8 expressed enthusiasm about beginning her second year of work with the principal and believed the school would exit Focus School status.

School Improvement Specialist interview 4. The fourth SIS (S10) was a White male in his late 30s who had previously been a middle school math teacher. School Improvement Specialist 10 was in the process of completing his dissertation. With 5 years experience as an SIS, he spoke positively about his work. While there had been the expectation one of the principals he worked with would be part of the study, neither of the two middle schools School Improvement Specialist 10 served participated. One school was smaller and rural with 100%

free and reduced lunch with a principal in his first year. The other middle school was part of a larger school district in a place with a major state university. According to the SIS, the principal of the second school was more experienced and had benefitted from being in a district that provided more support professionally and financially to the school. Both schools were identified for the low-performing sub-group of students with disabilities. In terms of how he approached his work he stated,

I definitely do not go in with a deficit approach. I mean these are great people and great schools but you know we have to look at the part of the school improvement plan that will help our students with disabilities performance. (S10, interview)

The SIS provided extensive details about the Focus School mandates and the memorandum of agreement and how they directed much of his work with the schools. Assistance to the principals was provided through leading data analysis, monitoring the subgroup's data, providing professional learning, and assisting the principal in navigating the Focus School expectations. The consistent monitoring and follow up on the school's goals were beneficial to helping the principal in school improvement efforts according to School Improvement Specialist 10. Serving as "air traffic control" for the principals with the state and keeping them informed on what was coming was part of the SIS's work. He indicated there was the need to be respectful of the principals' time and recognizing the demands of their position. While the SIS did not have administrative experience, he believed the principals viewed him as someone with whom they could bounce ideas and that he served in a listening role to them. Overall, School Improvement Specialist 10 felt he was there to help build on what the principal and school were doing that was working.

Field Notes

As the researcher in this study, I recorded reflective fieldnotes during the interview phase of the data collection. Commonalities existed between the participants. The principals each had more than two decades of experience in public education and all seemed to be dedicated professionals who focused on leading and improving their respective schools. Principal 5 was emphatic about leading and engaging in meaningful work in the school to benefit all students. While the other two principals had SISs who discussed helping the principals with instructional leadership, School Improvement Specialist 8 did not mention Principal 5 needing support in this area and viewed her as a strong instructional leader. The principals all expressed positive sentiments about working with the SIS assigned to their respective schools. The relationships between the principals and SISs were characterized as respectful and professional. The SISs seemed to provide valuable support to these principals by assisting them with the required Focus School work, observing teachers, problem solving related to other school issues, helping them raise expectations in the school, and being someone they could privately share job related frustrations. The SISs were encouraging to the principals' efforts as the school leader and the principals seemed to appreciate having an SIS working in their schools.

There were no negative sentiments about being required to work with an SIS, due to being a Focus School, but there was apparent discontent with the numerous required meetings and reports. Two pairs of principals and SISs desired to have more time to work together than the allotted one day a week and evident frustration existed about the time limitations (fieldnotes, P5/S8, P7/S5). The SISs were accommodating to the principals for the limited time by being available to the principals via text, email, and phone. The memorandum of agreement and Focus School requirements were consistently referenced by the SISs and principals. All four SISs used

common language in reference to the work they engaged in with the schools and they appeared to utilize similar protocols for the required aspects of the Focus School work. The concept of serving as a monitor and keeping the principal and school accountable for Focus School expectations was evident. The training the SISs received to assist Focus Schools yielded SISs who knew the state's expectations and services they were to provide the principals and schools. This knowledge allowed the SISs to help principals with completing required Focus School documentation and reports.

The SISs found the work they did with principals of Focus Schools worthwhile and helpful. The SISs and principals spoke in terms of the SIS being a partner to the principal. Related to improving the schools, the SISs viewed themselves as vital to this work and they were committed to helping the schools make a turnaround. The SISs were well informed on researched-based, best practices related to school improvement and instructional approaches and all referenced instances where they shared this information with the principals and schools. Two of the SISs with administrative experience (S1 & S5) viewed themselves as coaches to the principals and helping the principals improve as school leaders. The SISs were all aware of the demands on the principals and indicated the need to be considerate of the principals' position. All SISs seemed willing to assist the principals with issues that were beyond the scope of their job requirements. The idea that the support the SISs provided to the principals was not confined to Focus School duties was apparent.

Findings

This section summarizes the major themes developed from the data analysis. The themes were filtered through the theoretical lens of Schein's consultation models (1978, 1990, 1999) as

described in Chapter 2. This framework was selected because it served as the sieve to examine educational consultants' roles when working with principals.

Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and field notes were coded and analyzed according to reoccurring themes. The data analysis revealed six major themes in the research: (a) required work, (b) unofficial service, (c) expertise and experience, (d) barriers, (e) supporting and monitoring, and (f) dynamics. The following sections will substantiate each of the themes that were developed to answer Research Question One, One A, One B, Two, and Three.

Principal participants are identified with a P and a number. SIS participants are identified with a S and a number. Data sources are referenced as questionnaires, interviews, and field notes.

Research Question One: How school improvement specialists assist and serve principals

So the data could be analyzed and research questions could be answered, data from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and field notes were coded then grouped into categories that helped develop the two themes that are addressed in this section. The two themes that answer research question one are *required work* and *unofficial service*.

Required Work

The first theme that aided in answering research question one was *required work*. All principals and all SISs in this study indicated that the way in which SISs assist and serve principals of Focus Schools is part of their *required work*. The SISs and principals of Focus Schools are required by the NCLB Waiver for Georgia (2012) to comply with certain expectations and engage in specific work with the goal to move the school out of Focus School status. Both groups of participants referenced what the SISs did with the principals and for the schools as being *required work* of Focus Schools. A thorough discussion of the categories that directed the development of this theme will be presented in the following section including

supporting evidence from the participants' questionnaires, interviews, and the researcher's field notes. Participants' responses that were part of the theme *required work* were initially coded and then grouped into these categories: (a) School Improvement and Accountability, (b) Curriculum and Instruction, and (c) Professional Learning (see Table 3).

School improvement and accountability. This category captured the mandated school improvement and accountability work the SIS does with the principal based on the school identified as a Focus School. *Accountability and monitoring* was an area where the SIS worked frequently with the principal and school. In *accountability and monitoring*, SISs and principals engaged in completing mandated tasks related to the Focus School status. According to the data, the *required work* centered on accountability processes, monitoring, data analysis, school improvement planning, and navigating Focus School mandates. All of the participants indicated the SIS worked with the principal in this area to ensure school improvement work was occurring as expected by the state. The SIS was responsible for monitoring several aspects of the work of the principal and school related to Focus School status. This area of *required work* was significant in determining how the SIS worked with the principal.

A component of *school improvement and accountability* was the SIS's work in the area of accountability and monitoring, part of their job expectations (GaDOE, 2012). The SIS monitored whether the school followed and met its short term and long term goals as well as helped the school make adjustments in its plans as needed. These excerpts from the data captured this work:

...we are more worried about, what are we finding out on a daily, weekly, monthly basis, quarterly basis that we can do something about...institutional achievement and then the same thing if we move over to attendance behavior, affective data, adult change data.

Trying to shorten the cycles so that you can actually kind of monitor and adjust versus just find out what happened. (S10, interview)

BST [Better Seeking Team] meetings are held every other week during which the latest assessment results are reviewed, revisions to the instructional process are discussed and the academic progress of the "focus" students is tracked. (S9, questionnaire)

...part of that is we have to monitor that program. Our SILT [school improvement leadership team] team is provided with information each month, and he makes sure, in those SILT meetings, that's another report that we have to share and show how these children are improving. He monitors us to make sure we're implementing that program with fidelity and doing the things that need to be done. (P1, interview)

In this area, a key piece of this work involved focusing on how the underperforming subgroup was doing. The special attention to this group was to assist the principal in moving the school out of Focus School status. The SIS led twice monthly Focus meetings where student academic, behavioral, and attendance data were discussed and issues were addressed. According to principals and SISs, the SISs made sure what they were doing was effective and meeting the school's needs. As one SIS put it, "Everybody needs an accountability partner" (S5, interview).

Data analysis was mentioned by all SISs and principals in the questionnaires, interviews, and was reflected in the field notes as being part of the SIS's work in *school improvement and accountability*. This was a large extent of the work the SIS did with the principal and the school. The data work is tied to the expectations of SIS's responsibilities per the GA DOE Waiver Fieldbook (2012). Principals and SISs reported the SIS did data digs, gaps analyses, and root cause analyses for the school. These excerpts from the data demonstrated this work,

...data disaggregation was, how to use data for decision making processes. We taught them about the four different kinds of data: demographic, academic, perception, process data, showed them how to triangulate different data sources... (S1, interview)

...looking at ways of analyzing data and using those data sources to facilitate conversations. (P7, questionnaire)

In doing these things, the SIS pushed the principal and the school to go further than just looking at the data, but to look for reasons why something was occurring in the school whether student achievement, teacher attendance, student behavior, or any other possible factor. Data was not limited to student achievement data from the state achievement tests as it included data from school culture/climate surveys, pieces of formative and summative data that classroom teachers collected, classroom walk-throughs and observations, and any aspect of the school that could have implications for how a school was performing. The SIS's data work allowed principals to see the areas that are priorities in their school and possibly figure why certain issues were occurring.

The majority of SISs and principals discussed the SIS's work with the principal and school during the school improvement planning process. Work in this area is part of the expectations of a SIS with Focus Schools. The SISs helped the schools create short term and long term plans for the school year based on the schools' data and with the purpose of reducing the achievement gap. The plans included who was responsible, how it was monitored, the specific goals that were related to the school's needs, the time frame of when activities should have occurred, and interventions that were put in place. In regard to this work, a principal shared, "[The SIS is] to assist us with our school improvement plan and to work with us on the required Focus School Data meetings that are held monthly" (P4, questionnaire). Additionally, SISs

assist the principals in any budgetary issues related to the school improvement plan. One principal shared that with the support of the SIS in this process she and her staff were able to pinpoint specific goals for the coming year and feel more productive because they knew this is what their school needed (P1, questionnaire).

In the SIS's work in the area of *school improvement and accountability*, the SIS helped the principal navigate the state's expectations and served as liaison to the state for the principal to ensure that the principal was in compliance with state-mandated paperwork. Additionally, the SISs coordinated with the school districts to ensure schools are receiving necessary resources and support, per the memorandum of agreement between the district, principal, SIS, and state, negotiated when the school was designated a Focus School. All participants interviewed recognized the SIS served in this capacity. In this role, the SISs were to inform principals of new state initiatives, coordinate necessary support, assist with compliance to state mandates, interpret state expectations and new policy changes, and serve as the contact to the state department of education. Some SISs shared they were buffers for what was coming from the state and one reported he served as "air traffic control" for the principals due to all the state expectations and compliance areas for Title I (S10, interview). The SISs lessened the frustration some principals reported when dealing with Focus School reports, mandated expectations, and constant changes at the state level. One principal reported her SIS was integral in the work of reporting to the state what her school was doing and making sure what she did was in compliance with state expectations (P9, interview). Another principal shared that her SIS kept her informed and prepared for upcoming changes (P1, interview).

Curriculum and instruction. According to 100% of the principals and SISs, the SISs were responsible for work with curriculum and instruction. The work in *curriculum and*

instruction was another piece of “required work” that the participants regularly referenced.

Curriculum and instruction work by the SIS focused on the sharing of instructional strategies, planning curriculum, coaching teachers, and conducting classroom observations. Typically based on school data, observations, and classroom walk-throughs, decisions were made to provide teachers or groups of teachers with direct instructional support from the SIS. From the data, the SIS might provide the teachers instructional support in the following ways:

- offer instructional strategies,
- model effective teaching,
- conference about classroom observations,
- work on classroom routines and student behavior,
- provide coaching as they teach, and
- take them to observe effective teaching in other classes or schools.

Additionally, the SISs worked with teachers on planning and curriculum. Part of the SISs’ work with Focus Schools was to ensure that standards-based teaching and learning was occurring, the GaDOE curriculum maps were implemented, and benchmark assessments were used to guide instruction (GaDOE, 2012). SISs worked with individual teachers, grade level teams, and subject area departments to use data to drive their instruction and plan effective lessons. One SIS shared the following,

We focus greatly on instruction after we have done the disaggregation of data. We look at what the data tells us, obviously, and then we show them how to correlate that to the instructional practice that's taking place in the classroom. We discuss differentiation in the three areas that happen: content, process and product. We look at assessments in that process as well. (S1, interview)

Principals reported that the SISs helped teachers develop more rigorous, higher order questioning, find ways to maximize planning and classroom time, make sure there was curriculum alignment, create standards based units and lessons, and develop assessments. Several SISs indicated the goal of this work with teachers was to ensure that a viable curriculum was being taught to help the school improve student achievement. In addition, SISs provided principals and their schools with instructional strategies for moving out of Focus School status, including ideas for struggling students and how to address academic achievement concerns. The SISs' work in this area accounted for a significant part of what the SIS did for their schools and in turn, helped principals in their efforts to move out of Focus School status.

Another part of their work with *curriculum and instruction* was that the SISs conducted full classroom observations and shorter classroom walk-throughs. This was an area of work required of the SIS's position (GaDOE, 2012). All SISs and principals discussed the observations and walk-throughs and the reasons why they were conducted. Based on the data, classroom observations were conducted for the following reasons: to monitor instruction, look for specific objectives related to work of the leadership team or the school improvement plan, and observe teachers or content areas identified as concerns indicated by the school data or by the principal. SISs were able to help principals compare their own observations about specific teachers and discuss what they both saw according to principals' responses. Also, SISs could use the observations to monitor the delivery of instruction and evaluate teacher effectiveness.

Professional learning. Another part of the *required work* was *professional learning*, based on the responses from the SISs and principals. SISs assisted principals in this area by providing professional learning for the school or coordinating it. The area of professional learning is an expected responsibility of the SIS per their job description and all principals and

SISs reported the SISs served their schools in this capacity. The SISs provided professional learning directly to schools throughout the year. If the SISs could not personally provide the professional development, they helped the school by enlisting other SISs with the requisite expertise needed or connected them to other outside providers of professional learning. The content of the professional learning was determined by several factors: needs of the teachers, goals of the school improvement plan, expectations of the Focus Schools, or topics requested by the principal or leadership team. One principal shared,

[My SIS was] a trainer for thinking maps. And we talked about what could we do with thinking maps? How would that impact our building? How would that impact our students? And the leadership team decided that was professional learning that we wanted to focus on as hard as instruction. (P9, interview)

According to principals and SISs, many times they worked together to determine the professional needs of specific groups of teachers or the entire faculty. A SIS shared,

Providing professional learning to teachers and principals to broaden their repertoire of strategies is one way to directly improve student achievement. (S10, questionnaire)

Professional learning was important since the SIS helped support the principals in increasing their own professional knowledge and in providing professional growth for their teachers.

Summary of Required Work

When answering the research question, “How do Georgia’s school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools,” 100% of the participants indicated *required work* was part of what the SISs do with principals of Focus Schools. The *required work* that the SISs performed can be grouped into these categories: (a) School Improvement and Accountability, (b) Curriculum and Instruction, and (c) Professional

Learning. Based on the data from this research, part of the work SISs engaged in with principals was the *required work* that was part of the SIS's job responsibilities and related to the mandates that principals of Focus Schools must follow.

Unofficial Service

The second theme that helped in answering research question one was *unofficial service*. All SISs and 70% of principals in this study suggested that how the SISs assisted and served principals of Focus Schools was through *unofficial service*. The *unofficial service* work was not part of the work mandated by the NCLB Waiver for Georgia (2012) nor was it stipulated in the School Improvement Fieldbook (GaDOE, 2012). The *unofficial service* was work and assistance that was not captured in the job description for the SISs. A detailed discussion of the categories that guided the development of this theme will be presented in the next section including substantiated data from the participants' questionnaires, interviews, and the researcher's field notes. Participants' responses that were part of the theme *unofficial service* were initially coded and then grouped into these categories: (a) Principal's Needs and (b) Capacity and Change (see Table 3).

Principal's needs. In this category, SISs provided support and assistance for principals' individual professional and, on occasion, personal needs. *Principal needs* appeared to be an area where the SIS worked and assisted the principal consistently. In *principal needs*, SISs provided the principals with coaching, served as a confidant, offered an outside perspective, and worked as a partner to the principal, all tasks that were not part of the SIS's mandated duties in working with the principal. SISs saw themselves as a direct support to the principals' work in leading a school in Focus School status. As reflected in the field notes, one SIS viewed himself as a support to them [the principals] (S1, field notes). The work the SISs performed in this area was

not designated by their job requirements, and occasionally was based on the SIS observing that the principal had a specific issue where he or she could offer support. All SISs perceived they provided assistance to their principals in this area, while 7 out of 10 principals viewed their SIS as serving this capacity.

Part of the work the SISs carried out with the principals was to provide coaching to the principals. Half of the SISs mentioned this in their questionnaires and pairs of SISs and principals who were interviewed discussed coaching. One SIS offered,

We're able to give them advice on what they want to consider. I try to be very careful in how I say, "You should do this, you ought to do that. You should have done this. You should have done that." I've trained myself to say, "Have you considered, you might want to consider." It's just all on how you present it. (S1, interview)

According to the data, they provided coaching in the following areas:

- suggesting ways to support the faculty,
- offering organization and delegation techniques,
- keeping the principal focused and on track in their work,
- providing mentoring,
- working on timeliness and scheduling,
- creating protocols and procedures, and
- improving instructional leadership.

Helping the principal to chart a path they may not have thought about and offering advice on how to handle situations were part of their services provided to the principals they served. One principal shared that his SIS, "helps us become more effective administrators" (P7, interview).

Another area of *principal's needs* the SIS filled was serving as confidant and sounding board. The SIS played an important role by listening to principals, allowing them a safe place to vent their frustrations related to issues in the school, and to be a sounding board to their thoughts. As one SIS shared there were “conversations behind closed doors” (S5, interview) and both SISs and principals mentioned them. These comments from the data collection captured the essence of this role:

She is a good listener and I can confide in her knowing that it will go no further. (P5, questionnaire)

“You're my confidant and I trust you not to repeat what I'm saying,” and of course that's part of our code of ethics, we don't do that. That's just something that they expect and they know that's part of the service, the unofficial service. (P5, interview)

Half of the participants in the study cited this as part of the work the SIS completed with the principal.

Considering *principal's needs*, the SISs were seen serving as supportive partners to the principals' work and efforts to improve their schools. The questionnaires, interviews, and field notes provided evidence to corroborate this as a significant aspect of the assistance SISs gave principals. SISs shared they were willing to work to build goodwill within the school and do what is right for children in their work as a supportive partner. Seven of the 10 principals shared that the SIS was a partner in their work as the school leader. As one principal put it, “She is integral to our school improvement process and the school's success” (P9, interview). Another principal supported this by saying, “I feel he has a real stake in our success” (P1, questionnaire). Principals mentioned that their SIS was available beyond the school day via phone, text, or email to answer questions and to provide assistance when they needed it. Another principal said his

SIS was more a partner who rolled up her sleeves to help with the real work that they have to do (P7, interview). The SIS's work as a supportive partner was a component of how they worked with the principal of a Focus School.

Additionally in *principal's needs*, the SIS provided the principals a second set of eyes, an outside perspective, of what was occurring in the school. According to the questionnaires and interviews from both the SISs and principals, this outsider view helped the principal become more aware of issues that might be occurring in the building, of which they may have been unaware, helped the principal see something from a different standpoint and provided a fresh perspective. As one principal shared, "She provides an objective, external lens through which to view the daily practices of [our school]" (P7, questionnaire). An SIS echoed this statement by saying, "You are kind of the person who can see the whole peripheral view and help stray minds think because this is an intense time" (S10, interview). All SIS and principal pairs corroborated that the SIS worked in this capacity with the principal.

Capacity and change. Though this category accounted for a smaller portion of the *unofficial service* the SISs provided their principals and schools, it was an important one discussed by SISs in the data. *Capacity and change* focused on work the SIS engaged in with the school as a whole and went beyond the SIS's mandated work in school improvement. In *capacity and change*, SISs helped with capacity building and served as the face of change for the school. Half of the SISs specified that they provided assistance to the school in the area of *capacity and change* while only one third of the principals recognized the SISs worked in this area.

The area of capacity building was seen as part of the work by SISs. Capacity building to SISs meant the school could continue positive work with better instructional practices and improved student achievement. SISs shared they felt the need to build capacity since Focus

Schools received support from an SIS for three years per the design of the waiver. From the data, these were the ways SISs fostered capacity building,

- creating sustainable practices,
- modeling doing what is right for the students and school,
- supporting initiatives that will improve the school,
- developing self-sufficiency for when SIS support is withdrawn,
- teaching productive processes so they are standard operating procedure,
- helping the teachers feel ownership in the success and achieve long goals, and
- explaining how to accomplish school improvement work so the principal and teachers can do it on their own.

According to one SIS, she was trying to build capacity within the school so when she goes the principal and teachers still do this work and know how to do this work (S8, interview). Capacity building was an area the SISs felt was part of their responsibilities and essential to helping a principal move their school out of Focus School status and sustain improvement.

Another part of capacity and change was SISs served as the face of change for the principal and school. Principals reported the presence of the SIS in the school heightened the awareness of the teachers about the ramifications of being a Focus School. According to the data, SISs shared how they helped the principal by,

- being a change agent and supporting the principal in the change process,
- offering to be a scapegoat on certain changes so that the information is not coming from the principal,
- getting teachers to buy into change by developing and using the school data, and

- providing credibility to the principal's efforts in informing the staff about Focus School requirements that they were responsible for in their work.

The SISs work in this area assisted the principals in creating an understanding in their schools that being a Focus School meant real change must and will occur.

Summary of Unofficial Service

In response to the research question, “How do Georgia’s school improvement specialists assist and serve principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools,” the SISs’ *unofficial service* was indicated in all of the SISs’ data and seven of the principals’ data. The *unofficial service* that the SISs provided can be clustered into these categories: (a) Principal’s Needs and (b) Capacity and Change. According to the data from this research, a portion of how the SISs assisted and served principals of Focus Schools was *unofficial service* that went beyond the mandated side of the SISs’ responsibilities and provided another layer of support to principals of Focus Schools.

Research Question One A: Benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals

Nine of the SISs and eight of the principals in this study identified benefits of the SISs working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status. Notably, three participants (two principals and one SIS) did not identify any area of the SISs’ work as being beneficial. One principal provided a reason why, “With only one year under our belt, I do not believe I can answer what has been beneficial adequately or fairly because we are continuing to monitor data from the first initial year” (P10, questionnaire). The 17 other participants’ responses recognized beneficial aspects of the SISs’ support. Many of the identified benefits were related to the support and assistance detailed in research question one. The third theme of

expertise and experience developed to capture the other area of identified benefits. This theme will be discussed further.

In the areas of *required work* and *unofficial service*, participants identified specific ways SISs assist and serve principals as being beneficial. Table 8 shows the services principals and SISs identified as benefits. Many participants noted more than one aspect to be a benefit.

Table 8

Identified Benefits

Identified benefits	Required work	Unofficial service	Principals	School Improvement Specialists
Professional learning	X		1	3
Instructional coaching & strategies	X		4	1
Data analysis	X		2	4
Accountability & monitoring	X		3	2
School improvement planning	X		2	2
Second set of eyes		X	3	3
Supportive partner		X	6	5
Confidant & sounding board		X		1

Comments related to these areas of perceived benefits are provided. In regard to professional learning, instructional coaching, and strategies being beneficial, participants shared,

The work the SIS did with teacher effectiveness was beneficial to the school. (P2, questionnaire)

She is also able to share with us strategies she has seen in place at other schools that may work for us. (P4, questionnaire)

Just being able to have somebody in here with those ideas, feeding those to us and sharing those ... I really feel like we would be cut off [without them]. (P1, interview)

Assisting the school in identifying overall staff professional growth needs; providing professional learning support for continued growth. (S5, questionnaire)

For data analysis, one SIS reported,

Data disaggregation is most important. Many times teachers are not comfortable reviewing data down to their classrooms and individual student. As SIS, we can assist school-wide data teams in this process. Our goal is for Focus Schools to become self sufficient in the data mining process. (S8, questionnaire)

The assistance the SIS provided in analyzing all the pieces of data and subsequent monitoring was indicated as being beneficial. In reference to school improvement work and data analysis, one principal noted,

I think his biggest role here is to not allow us to be superficial. He demands that we dig into that and talk about why... to improve the performance of this subgroup and move us off the Focus school list. (P1, interview)

The benefits of the SIS providing an outside perspective kept one principal from being consumed by the “bubble of her building” (P1, questionnaire). Related to the SIS being a supportive partner, participants suggested,

With it [Focus Schools] being a new thing last year, they [the state] were asking a lot and so it [having an SIS] really I think provided them [principals] some comfort that they had a person they could turn to for help. (S10, interview)

She is willing to go above and beyond. (P5, questionnaire)

He is supportive and will do anything in his power to assist us. (P2, questionnaire)

One SIS (S1) believed his work as the sounding board and confidant to the principals to be one of the most beneficial services he provided. The participants identified many of the areas of *required work* and *unofficial service* to be beneficial.

Expertise and Experience

The theme developed to answer research question one A was *expertise and experience*: it pertained to the SIS possessing valued knowledge and a respected professional background in education. The categories within this theme of *expertise and experience* explained how the SISs' service to the principals of Focus Schools was perceived as beneficial. This included the SISs' training and knowledge of the school improvement processes needed to move a school out of Focus Status. Additionally, it pertained to the SISs' professional experiences in public education. This theme had to do with features of the actual SIS, not of the activities and services they provided to the Focus School principals. Notably per the memorandum of agreement, the SIS should have expertise in the area of English language learners, students with disabilities, or economically disadvantaged students (GaDOE, 2012, p. 9).

The *expertise and experience* the SIS had from working as a school improvement specialist were perceived to be valuable and useful to the work they did with principal and the Focus School. Both principals and SISs mention this. This quote from an SIS captured it best, "A good school improvement specialist is pure gold to a struggling school because of the plethora of skills they bring to the table" (S6, questionnaire).

SISs with previous experience as a school administrator were viewed as beneficial because they had walked in the shoes of the principal and knew the challenges the principals faced as the school leader according to the participants. One principal mentioned this gave his SIS more credibility in his eyes since he knew she had been a successful principal and her advice

carried more weight with him (P7, interview). Three SISs shared their administrative experience was advantageous to their position as a school improvement specialist since they understood the demands of being a principal and the knowledge gained from being one.

Summary of Research Question One A

In response to the research question one A, “What are the benefits of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status,” the participants identified several services as benefits and indicated the theme of *expertise and experience*. Based on the data, many services provided by and attributes of the SISs are viewed as being valuable to the principals’ work in their school improvement efforts.

Research Question One B: Challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals

Barriers

The fourth theme developed in this research study is *barriers* to support an answer to research question one B. In this section, a detailed discussion of the categories that directed the development of this theme will be shared. The participants’ responses indicating *barriers* were initially coded and then clustered into the following categories: (a) Principal Issues, (b) SIS Issues, and (c) Beyond Control (see Table 5).

All of the SISs and eight of the principals in this study indicated that the *barriers* were challenges to the work of the principals moving their schools out of Focus School status. *Barriers* covered the unhelpful aspects related to SISs, principals, and identification as a Focus School as acknowledged by the participants in the study. Notably two principals did not identify any area of the SISs’ work to be a *barrier*. Each of these categories within the theme *barriers* answered research question one B.

Principal issues. *Principal issues* were related to principals being a hindrance to the work they were to engage in with the SIS. Included in this category were issues related to the principal being busy, resistant, or lacking instructional leadership skills. Six of the ten SISs recognized *principal issues* as being an obstacle to their abilities to effectively support principals of Focus Schools. No principals made any comments related to this category. One area was related to how busy principals were and how that was challenging to the SISs. One SIS described principals as being, “underwater with their work and time demands” (S10, interview). Another SIS’s statement about the time constraints and the constant activity of Focus School principals is articulated below:

Last year was our first year doing this focus school process and this has been the biggest struggle for them, just trying to juggle all of these pieces of the puzzle. We help as much as we can, but at the end of the day I leave. I don't have to deal with those things after I leave until the next time I go back to the school. They keep those issues. They don't get to do away with them. That's probably the biggest thing, just trying to figure out how to juggle everything at the same time and then school continues regardless of what the mandates are. (S1, interview)

Beyond the challenges of working with a principal with a hectic schedule, there are issues related to principals who were resistant to having a SIS working with them or even present in their school. From their experiences working with Focus Schools, SISs encountered principals who wanted to be left alone to do what they have always done and who didn’t want to see the SIS in their school. One SIS discussed how the quality of the principal impacted the school’s opportunity to improve in this statement,

The amount of progress that can be made is directly related to the quality of the leadership of the principal. A weak principal is not going to be able to get as much benefit as a strong principal because there is not likely to be as much follow-through.

(S7, questionnaire)

Principal issues were deemed impediments that SISs faced in their work to assist principals of Focus Schools.

SIS issues. *SIS issues* were tied to the SISs being obstacles in their work with principals of Focus Schools and consisted of the SIS acting all knowing and overstepping their bounds when working with principals. Half of the SISs and three principals identified *SIS issues* as part of the challenges SISs and principals dealt with in their work together. One principal discussed the friction caused by the SIS acting superior and saying the principal must do what she says because of state mandates (P6, questionnaire). According to 40% percent of the SISs, the SISs wanted to avoid being viewed “as an outsider coming in to make demands and changes in the school” (S4, questionnaire) because they recognized it created an unnecessary wall between the principals and them. One SIS recognized challenges he saw fellow SISs encounter in their work with principals,

I have some consultants that are all business. That principal sees that person as evaluative in a sense, even though they're not supposed to. They see that person as someone from the state coming in to tell them what to do. It's really difficult to get that relationship started. In that instance, that principal will not bring up individual teacher issues.

(S1, interview)

Another part of *SIS issues* were related to SISs overstepping the bounds of their jobs. SISs mentioned struggling with sitting back and allowing the principals to do what they felt needed to

be done. *SIS issues* were seen as obstacles to the work of the SISs with principals of Focus Schools.

Beyond control. The last category was *beyond control*. This section deals with areas that are not within the control of the SISs or principals to change but present as “barriers” to the work of SISs and principals. Areas that are *beyond control* are Focus School issues and outside factors. Seven of the principals and six of the SISs identified *barriers* that were categorized as *beyond control*. These were aspects that neither the SIS nor principal could change and impacted the work of the SIS and principal. Participants cited district budget limitations as a problem. As one SIS reflected,

One issue that is clearly a barrier to the school improvement process is funding. As public school budgets are cut each year, school leaders are faced with not just what they can do without, but WHO they are forced to do without. (S8, questionnaire)

Another principal shared a similar concern,

You are asked to continue to improve student achievement with less, with your teachers, with your resources, with shrinking budgets, shrinking staffs and you're being asked to do more. (P7, questionnaire)

Some SISs discussed how the school districts themselves could be hindrances to how they could effectively support principals. In reference to district challenges, one SIS shared,

We can't control the district. We know that sometimes there are things that come down to we have to do just because you're told to do them. All we can do is what we think is the right work. We think we know what the right work is. Morally that's what we feel like our obligation is to just not get caught up in the political things or the things that bring people down...(S5, interview)

Another issue that was deemed *beyond control* was the state's inconsistencies since SISs and principals perceived them to change almost daily. SISs mentioned situations like these:

One of the challenges we face as specialists is exactly what happened with that PARCC assessment. We go out and we say, "The DOE is engaging in this and this and this, the DOE is doing this and this and this, the DOE has mandated this and this and this," and then the next day, "Oh, we're not doing that anymore." It makes us look like idiots, and that is a struggle for us. I don't know how you fix that. (S1, interview)

I just found an e-mail that said, "Oh, yeah, by the way, they want this other report that you didn't do last year that now we're asking you to send back to them because they want to change the report." So I think the state is kind of ... I think the common statement around here is that they're building the plane as we fly. (S8, interview)

Factors related to the Focus School mandates including the number of meetings, required paperwork, and amount of time SISs had to work with their schools were classified as *beyond control*. One SIS seemed stressed by lack of time with schools and believed she could be more effective if she were there more, but the waiver determined how many days a week she could work with her assigned schools (S8, field notes). Other SISs and principals shared her sentiments on the time limitations of the SISs and perceived this to be an impediment to their work together on moving out of Focus School status. The amount of paperwork and number of meetings for Focus Schools were an issue as, well based on comments like these:

There are many times when the amount of time that must be utilized to meet with the SIS becomes cumbersome. (P4, questionnaire)

More paperwork has to be completed that can seem like busy work. (S7, questionnaire)

Time needs. Many meetings involved in being a Focus School. (P2, questionnaire)

This SIS's required monitoring and presence in the school were part of the Focus School mandates and one SIS shared the challenges this presented for principals,

The role of monitor is a challenge to the principal because of the constant pressure to ensure that change is achieved. At no point can the principal relax the change trajectory, this causes frustration or stress. Again, most people believe the data do not accurately represent who they are or what they do. (S6, questionnaire)

Challenges perceived to be *beyond control* of the SISs and principals existed and they could be obstacles to the work of the SISs assisting principals of Focus Schools.

Barriers Summary

In research question one B, "What are the challenges of the school improvement specialists working with principals on moving the school out of Focus School status," the principals and SISs recognized the *barriers* as challenges which can be assembled into these categories: (a) Principal Issues, (b) SIS Issues, and (c) Beyond Control. Based on the responses from the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes, *barriers* existed that created obstacles for the SISs and principals engaging in work to move out of Focus School status.

Research Question Two: Models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) that school improvement specialists operate

Supporting and Monitoring

In this research study, the fifth theme that developed was *supporting and monitoring*, which provided an answer to research question two. In this section, a thorough discussion of the categories that guided the development of this theme will be presented. Information from the participants' questionnaires, interviews, and field notes will be provided. The participants' answers demonstrating *supporting and monitoring* were initially coded and then grouped into the

following categories: (a) Purchased Expertise, (b) Good Doctor, and (c) Collaborative Guide (see Table 5). *Supporting and monitoring* had to do with the roles the SISs served and what models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) they operated under when working with principals. In this theme, there were times the SISs simultaneously provided support to the principal while also serving as a monitor for meeting the Focus School requirements. There were times they were operating in a more *supporting* mode and others when they were in a larger *monitoring* mode. In the SISs' interviews and questionnaires, they repeatedly mentioned supporting and monitoring. More frequently, their roles seemed to blend aspects of *supporting and monitoring* in their work with principals. Based on the data, 100% of the participants identified the "supporting and monitoring" nature of the SISs' roles.

SIS as purchased expertise. The first category was *purchased expertise* and it was related to situations where the principal identified an issue in the school and requested the SIS provide service or help predetermined by the principal. According to Schein (1999), the purchaser of expertise model of consultation assumes that the clients purchased some form of needed information or expert service that cannot be provided by the clients themselves from the consultant. With the SIS working from the model of *purchased expertise*, the principal asks for a specific type of work or service. The principals have already determined what the problem in the school is, determined how they want to solve it, and then asked the SISs to complete the assigned task. In this model, the SIS is dependent on the principal to have accurately recognized the problem or issue and assumes the principal knows the appropriate action needed to resolve it. On occasion, principals and SISs indicated that teachers and school districts asked for the SIS to provide a specific service. The SIS simply serves as the hired professional to deliver the requested service and does not play a role in assessing the situation or determining the issue.

Notably, the SISs operated from this model of consultancy less frequently than the other models, based on the data collected from the principals and SISs in this study. The reason for this may have to do with the design of the SIS's job requirements and the principals not knowing exactly what the schools' issues were and how to resolve them. A challenge of this consultancy model is the reliance on the principal to make all the decisions related to identifying the problem and choosing the correct solution to address the issue. The principal may misdiagnose the problem or be unaware of more appropriate options to address the school's issues. In this model, the SIS is limited to providing the requested service. In other models, the SIS is capable of playing a more active role that may better meet the principal and school's needs dependent on the situation.

Based on the data, principals and SISs articulated situations where the SIS operated from the *purchased expertise* model of consulting. In these situations, the principal gave a direct request to the SIS to work on a task in an area of concern identified by the principal. Principals requested services for work with teachers or for services to support the work of the principal.

In regard to services for teachers, requests for a particular area of professional learning for select teachers or the entire faculty were frequently mentioned by the SISs and the principals. Also, principals identified teachers who needed additional support either with instruction or classroom discipline and asked the SIS to provide support in these identified areas by coaching the teacher, modeling lessons, or conducting observations and feedback. Other areas where the principal requested specific work by the SIS with identified teachers were using data to inform instructional planning and providing instructional strategies for teachers working with special education students. Additionally, according to the SISs, principals made requests for services to work with teachers who were underperforming and at times were in the process of being non-

renewed for the following school year. In these situations, the SIS provided job specific coaching support and was not directly involved in the non-renew process, a sole responsibility of the principal. Much of the time the SIS operated from the *purchased expertise* model was centered on the principal's requested work with teachers.

Principals asked for the SIS to provide them with specific services according to several of the SISs' questionnaires and interviews. The types of services requested were for a breakdown of the data and an explanation of how the school was identified as a Focus School, how to document and appropriately conduct the non-renew process for experienced teachers, provide data for Focus School reports that were part of the principal's work, and the creation of schedules for various purposes including administrative meetings, planning, lesson plan review, and observations.

Additionally, the school districts and teachers have made specific requests of the SIS to provide services. In all of these situations, the SIS was providing a service that was directly requested, but the SIS was not part of the process of identifying the problem or determining if the requested service was the correct remedy. Based on information from the interviews, principals and SISs noted that the SISs completed a particular task or activity by district request that supported district initiatives related to curriculum and instruction or the monthly district walk-through focus. While infrequently mentioned in the data, teachers did ask for the SIS to provide them with specific professional learning or for the SIS to work with them on areas where they needed additional instructional support. In this model of consultancy, the SIS responded to requests from the district and teachers to give specified support.

SIS as the good doctor. The *good doctor* entailed situations where an issue was recognized by the principal or SIS and the SIS determined the solution to resolve it. In the

doctor-patient model, the consultant focuses on using a diagnostic approach to examine the organization's problems (Schein, 1999). For the purposes of this study, this category was referred to as *good doctor* since the SIS was there serving as a doctor trying to improve the health of the school. In the case of an SIS working with a principal of a Focus School, the principal typically knows there are areas where something is wrong, but the principal needs the SIS to help identify the exact problem and provide a solution for it. In the work of the SIS and the principal, sometimes the principal was able to identify the general problem and then needed the SIS to dig deeper to identify why the problem was occurring and how to resolve it. Other times, the SIS determined the school had particular issues he or she shared with the principal and then presented a solution to the problem. In this model, the principal is dependent on the SIS to accurately diagnose the issues and offer a solution that will effectively remedy the issue. While the SIS may have offered the solution, the principal was still responsible for ensuring the necessary actions were taken for it to work. In this model of the SIS serving as the *good doctor*, the SIS carries significant responsibility in caring for the school correctly.

Based on the data from principals and SISs, the SISs operated from this model of consultancy regularly. Often principals knew their school had certain problems, especially since they were identified as a Focus School, though they did not always know why the problem was occurring or how to improve the situation. By having a SIS available, the principals had someone they could go to and say, "Here's where we are ailing. How do we fix it?" Many principals appreciated having the SIS to provide them solutions to the school's issues. One SIS's view of her role in the school is directly reflected in this model when she stated that,

The biggest part of my job is to be the EMT for the school as they have time to address issues. I keep the school going, make sure they are on the shortest trip time to the hospital

and keep them alive till they can heal the issues keeping the school "sick". (S2, questionnaire)

With the SISs operating in this model, they were able to help the principal fix the sick parts of the school if the principal shared what was really wrong, the SIS correctly diagnosed it, and suggested a successful cure.

Often principals recognized areas where the school was having problems and utilized the SIS in the *good doctor* model to help them resolve the problem according to the principals and SISs. The principals went to the SISs for help about several issues, including, but not limited to:

- quality and rigor of instruction;
- school morale;
- at-risk teachers, including classroom, instructional, and professionalism issues;
- how to monitor for effective teaching;
- student achievement concerns;
- how to implement an effective flexible learning program;
- professional learning needs of the staff;
- correctly meeting the requirement of the Focus School mandates; and
- teacher planning, collaboration, and co-teaching issues.

In these identified situations, the SISs provided the principals with support and solutions they determined would help improve or solve the issue. In many cases, the SISs directly provided the solution by working with the faculty on issues related to classroom instruction or planning and areas of professional learning in which they had expertise. If the SISs could not provide the service, they would connect the principal to someone who could provide needed professional development and locate programs or outside services they deemed beneficial to solving the

school's issues. With the principals, the SISs analyzed the areas of concern and offered the principals solutions. These types of solutions ranged from advising the principal on how to manage teacher related issues, offering ideas of how to improve staff morale and maintain the improvement, providing ways to monitor and improve student achievement, and suggesting how to appropriately complete Focus School required work. Principals came to the SISs with a wide variety of issues for which the SISs were able to both offer solutions and advice directly or link the principals to an outside resource the SISs felt would address the issue.

Since schools in this study were identified as Focus Schools, principals knew there were existing issues but they were not always aware of what the issues were or how they might impact the school's improvement efforts. In their work in the schools, SISs had opportunities to observe classrooms, see how the principals operated the school, and analyzed data, including student achievement data, faculty questionnaires, and other such items. Through this process, they became aware of issues in the schools. According to the SISs, when this occurred they would go to the principal about what they were seeing or had determined to be a problem, and then offered solutions. In many cases, the issues found were similar to the issues the principals identified, except the SISs were also able to see issues related to the principal's work. Below is an example of how a SIS identified an issue related to the principal and what she did with the principal:

There is a culture issue at the school and there has been significant turnover in staff. The principal wants things to be good and is reluctant to admit that a problem exists. I have offered suggestions, including conducting a culture survey and cascading the decision making process more fully to teams. Transparency, support, appreciation, and a consistent plan to gauge and monitor school culture were suggested as well. (S5, questionnaire)

Furthermore, since the SISs were charged with assisting the school in moving out of Focus School status, they had a heightened awareness of issues related to the low-performing subgroup of students and offered solutions that would positively impact the achievement of this subgroup, mainly students with disabilities or English language learners. In this model, the SISs were observant of issues in the school and ready to offer the principal solutions and advice to correct these identified problems.

SIS as the collaborative guide. The third category was the *collaborative guide*. This category included situations when the SIS supported the principal as the principal worked through the process of identifying an issue and developing a solution. According to Schein (1990), the process consultation model views the consultant as a facilitator with the client actually providing much of the relevant expertise. The client is the focus with the consultant providing supportive help so the client can recognize their problems and develop their own solutions. The previous two models, *purchased expertise* and *good doctor*, were both centered on the consultant being the expert. Based on the data in relation to this model, this category was identified as the *collaborative guide*. With the SISs working with principals of Focus Schools as the *collaborative guide*, the SIS served as a facilitator to help the principal work through the school's issues and guided them to develop their own plans to address the issues. In this model, the SISs worked with the principal in two different ways: collaborating together and guiding on the side. When collaborating together, the work and decision making were completed together in a shared approach according to the data from both SISs and principals. In guiding on the side, the SISs served as a supportive adviser who assisted the principal and the school through the process of identifying and alleviating the school's problems. One SIS captured the essence of this model when she shared, "I'm here to suggest and support, not dictate or mandate" (S8, interview).

Based on the data from both groups, SISs operated from this model in many situations. Most times the situations involving this model were ones where the principal was not looking to the SIS to provide the solution, but where the principal and SIS walked through identifying what needed to be addressed, discussed how to do it, and then a choice was made. This work was done more in partnership than directed by either the principal or the SIS. According to principals' responses, respect for their position as the instructional leader was taken into consideration when SISs operated from this model. In the *collaborative guide* model, the SISs worked as facilitative advisers who assisted the principals in their school improvement work with the focus on the principals and schools devising their own solutions.

Principals and SISs shared that they worked collaboratively together in improving the school. Using the schools' data, principals and SISs shared decisions on the school improvement plan and for the purposes of goal setting for the school according to both principals and SISs. Also, they collaborated on what instructional strategies would be most effective for particular teachers or for school-wide implementation. Principals noted the work with the SISs was a mutual effort and saw the SISs working alongside them in the school improvement process. When discussing collaboration, one principal shared, "We have worked together all year long to do this with all situations regarding focus schools, student achievement, and instructional strategies" (P9, questionnaire). A SIS positively reflected on the work as being collaborative and not dictated by the principal or him (S10, questionnaire). While only seven participants reported about collaborative work, the ones who did demonstrated how the SIS served more as a partner in the school improvement work than the outside expert sent in to fix the school. As one principal put it, "We don't stake claim to ideas; we just try to get them started" (P1, interview).

Within this category, the SIS served as a guide on the side to the principal as the principal navigated the demands and challenges of improving the school, according to the responses of five SISs and one principal. SISs assisted the principals by listening to them, asking questions, making suggestions, and giving them advice on what they might want to consider. SISs assumed this role when they met privately with the principal based on the information shared by the SISs. Some of the issues they discussed were related to deep seated faculty and staff problems where the SIS could only listen and offer advice since the final decisions in these matters rested with the principal. The SISs were aware they were serving as the guide on the side as one SIS stated,

I don't tell him what to do, but I just think there were conversations I helped guide him to the answers and guide him to coming up with some viable solutions to what needs to be done now. (S5, interview)

Though this role presented challenges if the SISs were unsure of the route the principals were taking and some SISs expressed frustration related to this. As the guide on the side, the SIS provided supportive guidance to the principal in situations where the principal needed assistance in thinking through an issue.

Summary of Supporting and Monitoring

In response to the research question, “What are the models of consultancy (Schein, 1978, 1990, 1999) of the identified roles,” the theme *supporting and monitoring* was recognized in all of the participants’ data. SISs served dual roles in their work with principals of Focus Schools. The SISs could be providing support to a principal while also monitoring the requirements for Focus Schools. This theme was grouped into three categories: (a) Purchased Expertise, (b) Good Doctor, and (c) Collaborative Guide. After an exploration of the data to answer research

question two, the theme *supporting and monitoring* developed as an explanation to what models of consultancy SISs operated from when working with principals of Focus Schools.

Research Question Three: Factors determining models of consultancy

Dynamics

The final theme developed in this research study was *dynamics*, which helped answer the last research question. An in-depth discussion of the categories that directed the development of the theme *dynamics* will be offered in this section. Data from the SISs' and principals' questionnaires, interviews, and field notes will be included. The participants' responses indicating *dynamics* were initially coded and then grouped into these categories: (a) Relationships, (b) Positional Influence and (c) Job Requirements (see Table 3).

Dynamics pertains to the interactions of different facets that impact how the SISs functioned with principals. *Dynamics* were an influence on the model of consultancy the SISs operated from when working with principals. Components of the different categories encompassed in *dynamics* could mutually impact the consulting modes of the SISs. In this theme, three main categories were captured in the theme of *dynamics*. Each of these categories further explained the theme of *dynamics* and how the SIS's mode of consultancy was determined.

Relationships. The first category was *relationships*. It involved the relationships between the SISs and the principals which included aspects of professional respect and trust. The relationship between the SIS and the principal was a determining factor to what role the SIS operated in when working with the principal. As one SIS shared, "Positive relationships are critical when you are serving as a school improvement person" (P9, interview). More than half of the principals and the majority of SISs referenced the relationships they had in the questionnaires and interviews and all interviewees discussed the importance of their working

relationships. Within *relationships* as a factor, there are two main areas, relationships that reflect professional respect and relationships that are characterized as trusting and positive. One SIS captured the importance of relationships being a factor in this statement,

I have built that relationship and that principal has that trust factor with us. That's really what it boils down to. If you don't have that trust factor as a consultant you're not going to get anything out of that school, either the teachers, the principal, the central office or whatever. They don't care if you have a DR before your name or an EDD at the end of your name or whatever. They don't care how many years you've been in education. They don't care who you are or where you live. If you don't let them know that you value what they're doing and that you want to be a team player with them, then you're not going to be successful in that school. If you have that relationship built, then they will come to you and they will trust you to be that sounding board for them. (S1, interview)

With *relationships* as a factor, the model of consultancy the SIS employed was affected.

In the case of *purchased expertise*, when the principal had professional respect for the SIS, this enabled the principal to assume that the SIS could provide the needed service. When the SIS had professional respect for the principal, this allowed the SIS to believe the principal had correctly identified the school's issue and knew the best solution. When the principals asked the SISs to provide specific professional learning or work with underperforming teachers in designated ways, to a certain extent, professional respect was deemed a factor in the SIS operating from the *purchased expertise* model.

In the *good doctor* model, professional respect again was a factor. As one principal demonstrated her professional respect when discussing how her SIS helped provide solutions to issues in the school,

I think that if you limit what you allow your School Improvement Specialists to do, just certain things, then you are not utilizing them to the best for you and for your students.

(P9, interview)

In the *good doctor* model, professional respect was an influence that allowed principals to feel comfortable to tell the SIS the school's issues and accept the help of the SIS to solve them. From the data, these excerpts capture this:

Once the relationship is developed, the principal tends to accept help and guidance from their SIS. (S4, questionnaire)

She shared importance of relationship building and maintaining a professional demeanor to being helpful in her role as SIS. She said you must have a level of respect for what a principal goes through if you are to be accepted by them. (S8, field notes)

As part of *relationships*, professional respect between the SIS and principal was a contributing factor to the SIS functioning in the *good doctor* model.

When SISs and principals expressed their relationships were trusting and positive, this was a factor in the SIS working from the *collaborative guide* model. SISs and principals alike referenced trust and positive relationships as seen in these excerpts from the data,

There is a high level of trust and mutual respect for one another (S8, field notes).

It is a collaborative effort that has to have a certain level of trust. We have to trust each other. (P5, questionnaire)

...good enough relationship that we can have those conversations. (P1, interview)

When the SIS operated from the *collaborative guide*, the SIS served as an adviser or facilitator who helped the principal identify the schools' issues and assisted the principal in developing their own solutions. The influence of the trusting and positive relationships on this model of

consultancy are seen in these examples: collaborating on the school improvement plan and determining the long term and short term goals for the school, and the SIS listening to the principal vent about a problem and then offering advice. Within *relationships*, a trusting and positive relationship between the principal and consultant was a factor that moved the SIS into working more from the *collaborative guide*.

Positional influence. The second category was *positional influence*. This category references the interaction of the principal's and SIS's positional power on the mode of consultancy the SIS employed in different situations. The principal's position as the school leader and the SIS's position as the state-funded consultant were both influences on what model of consultancy the SIS operated from when working with the principal. In their positions, principals and SISs had a level of positional power that could be utilized and become a factor. *Positional influence* may not be the complete determining factor of which model of consultancy SISs operated, yet it demonstrated how *positional influence* can affect the mode of consultancy employed.

Since principals were the schools' instructional leaders and building managers, they had positional power and could influence the mode of consultancy. In terms of the principal's influence, when principals and SISs shared how they determined how the SIS would work with a principal in different areas, they made comments like these:

She follows my lead. (P7, interview)

I pretty much know what I need her to do. It's kind of based on me. (P9, interview)

I do what she needs me to do. (S8, interview)

Noteworthy in the above example is the congruence of experiences from a principal and a SIS who worked together.

The principal's *positional influence* was present when the SIS operated from the *purchased expertise* model since this model is primarily driven by the concept of the client identifying a problem, determining the service the consultant will provide, and for the consultant to provide the chosen service. Examples of this are when principals asked the SIS to:

- provide requested professional learning on a specified topic,
- provide coaching support to specific classroom teachers due to them being low-performing or in the process of being non-renewed,
- work with identified teachers on planning and instructional strategies,
- create schedules for various purposes for the principal, and
- provide data for Focus School reports.

In these situations, part of why the SIS was operating from the *purchased expertise* model was the principal's *positional influence*. Additionally, the principal's *positional influence* was present in the *good doctor* model when the principal went to the SIS about concerns in the areas of curriculum and instruction and student achievement, Focus School requirements, professional learning needs, school morale, and personnel issues. Since the principal asked the SIS to help solve the issues in these areas, this was a factor in the SIS working from the *good doctor* model. The principal's *positional influence* was a noted factor in two of the models of consultancy a SIS might operate from when working with a principal.

SISs possessed a level of *positional influence* since they were the outside, state-educational consultant assigned to assist and monitor the Focus School. From the data, SISs and principals shared that the SIS was an influence on the principal or in the decision making for the school as revealed these statements:

I feel like a bossy pants sometimes but I try not to be. I try to do it in a loving kind of way. I know he doesn't have to do what I say, but honestly, he has never once said, "No, I don't want to do that" or "I don't think that's a good idea." (S5, interview)

Now, I guess I'm just bossy, "We're doing this, [Name]."... He will do it because he knows it's the right work to do. (S5, interview)

He's real instrumental in that part of our planning. (P1, interview)

The SISs' *positional influence* was present in the *good doctor* model. With their *positional influence*, they are able to assume the role of the *good doctor* to diagnose the areas of the school that are sick and provide the principals with solutions to remedy those issues. Examples of this were when the SISs saw issues with classroom instruction and provided instructional strategies and professional learning to improve it; the principal was not observing classrooms regularly and developed an observation calendar so the principal could be in classrooms each week; and co-teachers who worked with the students in the Focus sub-group who were mismatched and recommended that the principal move teachers for more effective co-teaching to occur. In these instances, the SIS's *positional influence* was to a degree why the SIS was operating from the *good doctor* model.

Job requirements. The final category was *job requirements*. The Focus School mandates and the SISs' required responsibilities impacted how the SISs functioned with the principals they supported. In the Georgia School Improvement Fieldbook (2012), there are detailed, explicit expectations of the SISs duties in working with Focus Schools. These *job requirements* were an influence on the model of consultancy the SIS operated from with the principal dependent on what type of support or duty the SIS was performing. In reviewing the data on who or what determined how the SIS would work with a principal in different areas, both SISs and principals

repeatedly referenced the SISs' *job requirements* as being a reason why the SISs worked with the principals in certain ways. Some of these responses were:

Those things probably are included in her job description. (P7, interview)

The whole data analysis piece. That is part of the expectation from the Georgia Department of Education for school improvement specialists. (S10, interview)

He has certain things that they want him to do. Each year we're given new guidelines or new ideas, if you will, that they brought down from DOE that they expect for the school improvement specialist to implement. Of course, by the same respect, I would never tell him, "No, you can't do that," and then he ends up not being able to do something that he's accountable for. (P1, interview)

When the SIS worked with the principal on analyzing data, developing the school improvement plan, setting and monitoring long term and short term goals, providing professional learning, supporting standards based teaching, conducting classroom observations, or meeting about the Focus sub-group, these required duties in turn influenced the SIS's mode of consulting from which he or she operated.

The *purchased expertise*, *good doctor*, and *collaborative guide* models were influenced by *job requirements*. The influence of *job requirements* was present in the *purchased expertise* model when the principals requested the SISs to provide specific professional learning to particular teachers or the entire faculty, to work with teachers on targeted areas of instruction, and to provide them specific school data for Focus School reports. Again, the *job requirements* influence was evident in the *good doctor* model when SISs provided the principal solutions to issues related to classroom instruction, student achievement, professional learning, and meeting Focus School requirements. In the *collaborative guide* model, the SISs and principals work in the

areas of school improvement planning and goal setting were examples of the influence of job requirements on the mode of consulting. To a certain degree, the influence of *job requirements* on the model of consultancy was present in all of them.

Summary of Dynamics

The theme *dynamics* developed as the theme that captured the data to answer research question three, “What factors determine what model of consultancy Georgia’s school improvement specialists operate from when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools?” *Dynamics* affected what mode of consultancy the SISs functioned in when assisting and serving principals. They took into consideration the human interactions, positional power elements, and the professional duties; and *dynamics* captured how these were influences. The theme *dynamics* encompassed these categories: (a) Relationships, (b) Positional Influence and (c) Job Requirements. According to the data, *dynamics* impacted what mode SISs operated from when assisting and serving principals of Focus Schools.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, data obtained from the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes were analyzed based on the theoretical framework of Schein’s models of consultancy (1978, 1990, 1999). The goal of this study was to identify and explore the roles Georgia’s school improvement specialists served when working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. From the data analysis, six major themes were revealed and they were: (a) *required work*, (b) *unofficial service*, (c) *expertise and experience*, (d) *barriers*, (e) *supporting and monitoring*, and (f) *dynamics*. For research question one, the data analysis of the interviews, questionnaires, and field notes indicated that SISs assisted and served principals in two ways. One was by doing *required work* which was tied to their Focus School duties, and the other was through *unofficial service* which was work beyond their official duties. For research question one A, the data

indicated some aspects of the SISs' *required work* and *unofficial services* were perceived to be beneficial as well the SISs' *expertise and experience* was identified as valuable. In research question one B, *barriers* existed and they created challenges to the work of the SIS and principal in improving the Focus School. In research question two, the theme of *supporting and monitoring* offered explanation to what models of consultancy the SISs operated from when working with principals and how they simultaneously were providing support for school improvement while being a monitor for it as well. In the final research question, *dynamics* in regards to relationships, positional influence, and job requirements impacted the model of consultancy employed by the SIS. The data from the questionnaires, interviews, and field notes provided the necessary information to answer the research questions which guided this research study. Figure 2 visually displays the research questions with the themes that emerged from the data in this qualitative research study. Chapter 5 will present the discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

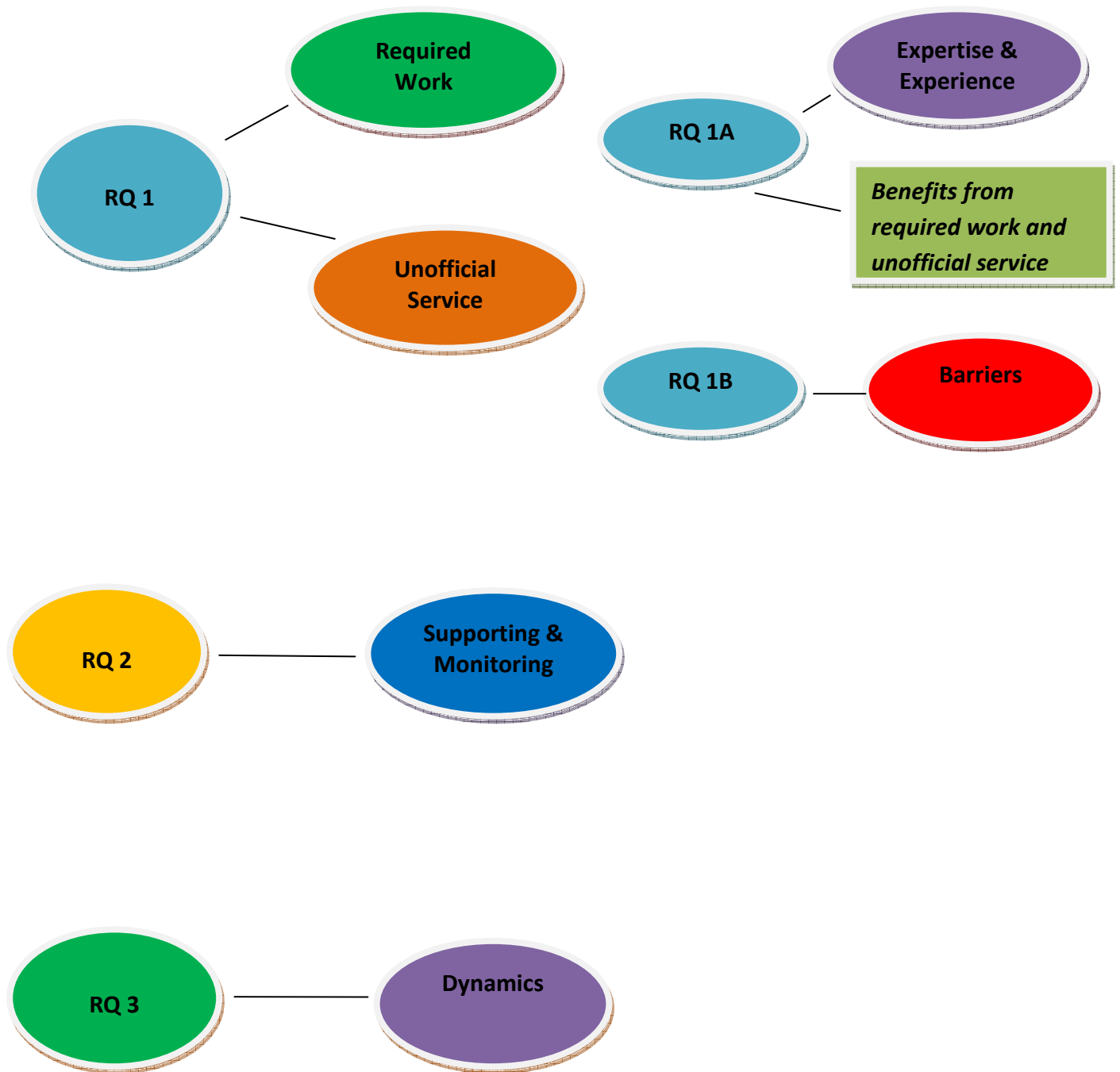


Figure 2. Research questions and themes. This figure demonstrates the research questions in the study and the themes developed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research study, the researcher explored the roles of Georgia's school improvement specialists working with principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. The intent was to add to the current research on how states can improve their low-performing schools through the use of educational consultants.

This exploratory qualitative study documented the experiences and perspectives concerning the assistance and the support the school improvement specialists provided to principals of Focus Schools. Data were obtained from questionnaires from 10 principals and 10 SISs, interviews from three principals and four SISs, and the researcher's field notes. Schein's (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy was the theoretical framework used to guide this research study. In the process of answering the research questions, the findings were organized into six themes. Through the data analysis, the six themes that emerged were: (a) *required work*, (b) *unofficial service*, (c) *expertise and experience*, (d) *barriers*, (e) *supporting and monitoring*, and (f) *dynamics*.

Discussion

The Work

Required work. Much of how the SISs worked with principals was determined by the Focus School policies and the memorandum of agreement for Focus Schools according to both the SISs and the principals who participated in the current study. Georgia's NCLB Waiver (2012), the School Improvement Fieldbook (GaDOE, 2012), and the memorandum of agreement (GaDOE, 2012) all directed what type of services and activities the SIS should accomplish with the principal and the school. The designated activities and services the SIS provided helped

develop the theme of *required work*. With participants from across the state of Georgia, similar responses as to what the SISs did in terms of *required work* were reported. The SISs detailed common experiences of what they did with the principals and their schools. The work the SISs engaged in with principals involved data analysis of the schools' achievement data and other data sources; assisting with the development of the school improvement plan and the schools' short and long term goals; monitoring the schools' Focus sub-group, the school improvement plans, and school goals; observing classrooms; providing professional learning; and working on curriculum and instruction. Data work was part of consultants' duties in business and education (Cameron, 2010; David et al. 2003; Futernik, 2007; Jang & Lee, 1998; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Redding & Walberg, 2008; Toppings, 2013). Additionally, professional learning was a common component of consulting services (Cameron, 2010; David et al., 2003; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Redding & Walberg, 2008). Monitoring (David et al., 2003; Redding & Walberg, 2008), and instructional planning (David et al., 2003; Redding & Walberg, 2008) were other similar activities identified in the literature. Part of this work included required meetings and documentation for Focus Schools, and according to the principals, the SISs helped them navigate the Focus School policies. The mandatory meetings and paperwork related to state educational policies were seen as part of the bureaucratic work of state-mandated consultants (Boyle et al., 2009; Hamilton et al., 2013). The SISs' expected duties were in line with what consultants typically did when working with principals of low-performing schools. The *required work* was what the SIS had to perform with principals and based on the research, they were engaged in these tasks to assist and serve the principal in their efforts to move out of Focus School status.

Unofficial service. While all participants reported that the SISs performed *required work*, many recognized the SISs support and services to principals went beyond the confines of

the state's predetermined expectations. SISs perceived the *required work* as just one aspect of the support and services they offered. The other side of their work was the *unofficial service* they provided to principals and schools. The theme of *unofficial service* was developed to capture the other aspects of the SISs work with principals. Much of this *unofficial service* centered on what the SIS did with or for the principal. The perception that the SIS worked as a supportive partner to the principal in their school improvement efforts was shared repeatedly by both principals and SISs. Consultants as supporters can be expected to contribute support or comfort in times of trouble according to Furusten (2009). With principals dealing with pressures of being a Focus School, the SISs presented themselves as encouraging partners to the principals. With the relationship of sustainable, effective leadership to increased student achievement (Duncan & Stock, 2010), principals were likely to welcome an external consultant who provided support for their work (Swaffield, 2013) and this could result in schools reaching and maintaining improvement goals. The SISs were seen as confidants and sounding boards with whom the principal could share school issues and frustrations. The educational consultants' work as a confidant and sounding board (Boyle et al., 2009; Crawford & Earley, 2004; Futernick, 2007; Le Floch et al., 2009) was reflected in the literature, and as Crawford and Earley noted, this role allowed school leaders someone they could discuss problems with that might not be shared otherwise. SISs provided a second set of eyes to the principals and offered an unbiased, objective view of what was occurring in the school. The impartial, outside perspective was seen as part of the services consultants provided in business and educational settings according to other studies (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009; Futernick, 2007; Gattiker & Larwood, 1985). The SISs' second set of eyes helped principals see, think differently, and develop a fresh approach to addressing the

schools' issues (Futnernick, 2007) and this change in perspective could make way for school improvement to occur.

Additionally, within *unofficial service*, the SISs coached the principals with a focus on developing the principal as an instructional leader. Educational consultants provided similar coaching for the principal in other research studies (Crawford & Earley, 2004; David et al., 2003). The leadership coaching was important to helping the principals be more effective leaders and could potentially increase the school's ability to sustain achievement gains (Toppings, 2013). For the schools, the SISs served as a tangible change agent whose presence in the school made teachers realize there were implications to being a Focus School and changes in the classrooms and school must occur. Futnernick (2007) noted how the presence of an educational consultant kept the improvement process alive in the principal and teachers' thoughts and actions. According to the data, the SISs perceived part of their work was building capacity in the schools so the schools could sustain the improvements they were making. This focus on capacity building was important because the SISs' support to the schools was only provided for three years. The support for capacity building and assisting principals and schools in developing sustainable practices for long-term improvement was a significant piece of an educational consultant's work (Redding & Walberg, 2008; Toppings, 2013; Wilson, 2011). Strunk, McEachin, and Westover (2013) documented there is a growing prevalence of using external consultants for capacity-building interventions in low-performing schools and that understanding more about the efficacy of the consultants' work in this area is needed. The *unofficial services* reported in the data allowed the researcher to have a more comprehensive picture of what the SISs did when they worked with principals.

Benefits and Challenges

Benefits. With this more evolved understanding of SISs' tasks, the question about benefits to the principals' work in moving their schools out of Focus School status was examined. From the data, many aspects of the *required work* and *unofficial service* the SISs provided were considered to be beneficial. Additionally, the theme of *expertise and experience* developed to explain the benefit of having assistance from an educational consultant with knowledge of the school improvement process and valuable prior experience in public education. The majority of participants perceived that the SISs provided some form of support which was advantageous to the work of the principal. In relation to the *required work* of the SISs, both principals and SISs reported that the work they did with the principal and school in instructional coaching, providing strategies, and professional learning, was beneficial. Principals frequently mentioned that the SISs provided them with strategies and ideas to improve the quality of the curriculum and instruction in the school. Chapman and Harris (2004) recognized the value of a consultant assisting schools with ideas and developing good instructional practices. Improving the instructional practices in a school could result in raising student achievement and moving the school out of Focus School status. Also, within *required work*, the help SISs provided for school improvement, including data analysis, monitoring of the school's data and goals, and the school improvement planning process, was considered beneficial by half of the participants in the study. Principals and schools benefitted from the assistance in school improvement work (Strunk et al., 2012; Swaffield, 2005). With school improvement work considered to be a significant piece of the Focus School expectations, there is a clear value to having an SIS assist the principal and school. In regard to the *unofficial services*, the outside perspective SISs provided principals, serving as a sounding board, and being the supportive partners to the principals in their work

were considered advantageous. The benefits were directly related to how the SISs supported the principal by enhancing the principal's understanding of what was occurring in the school, listening to the principal, and being a helping hand. Several principals shared that the SISs' service as a partner to them and their school was favorable to them in tackling the challenges of Focus School requirements and performing needed school improvement work. In other studies, principals recognized the valuable service as a partner who provided support and assistance that educational consultants provided (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Futernick, 2007; Strunk et al., 2012; Swaffield, 2005).

Notably, half the participants perceived the SISs' *expertise and experience* were appreciated by the principals as they negotiated the demands of improving the low-performing schools. For external consultants to be credible in the eyes of the principals, they should possess and display suitable experience, expertise and leadership skills (Davis et al., 2007; Mass Insight Education, 2012; Swaffield, 2013). There is value to principals and schools having access to knowledgeable and accomplished educational consultants with previous success in school improvement work (Mandel, 2000). In consulting, clients are looking for expert advice (Vogl, 1999) as the organizations' leaders recognize benefits of having support from someone with the necessary capabilities to help them improve. One aspect was whether the SISs had experience as principals since SISs felt their administrative backgrounds helped them understand the challenges the principals faced. Similarly, Forde, McMahon, Gronn and Martin (2012) found a strong theme from the leadership coaches that experience as a headteacher (principal) was a necessity due to need for credibility and for the valued insights that this experience gave them. In their study of consultant leaders' work with school heads in England, Earling and Weindling (2006) recognized that consultant leaders with prior experience as a school head were considered

more helpful because they knew the demands of the school head's position. Principals reflected that this experience provided a level of validity to the advice the SIS offered them.

Challenges. The theme of *barriers* developed in this study as the researcher explored what the challenges were in the work of the SIS with the principal. *Barriers* encompassed the obstructive aspects connected to SISs, principals, and identification as a Focus School as recognized by the participants in the study. All SISs and eight principals recognized some type of barrier that hindered the work of the SIS with the principal. More than half of the SISs perceived there were principal issues that posed a challenge to their work. One issue was that the principals were busy with the demands of leading a school and had little time for the SIS and Focus School work. The other issues were tied to the actual principal's characteristics such as resistance and lacking the professional ability as a school leader. David et al. (2003) recognized principal leadership issues as being one of most significant challenges to the work Kentucky's educational consultants in low-performing schools. Principal issues can impede SISs and other similar state-funded consultants from effectively working with schools on accomplishing the state-mandated school improvement work (Finnigan, Bitter, & O'Day, 2009; Finnigan & O'Day, 2003). If principals are a hindrance to SISs assisting them in Focus School work, SISs' attempts to accomplish the necessary work to improve the school could be encumbered and schools' student achievement could continue to languish. SISs were considered *barriers* to their own work when they were perceived to act like the all-knowing experts or did not respect the boundaries of their positions. Berwick (2004) identified similar problems for consultants in his research when consultants predominantly acted in a directive or hierarchical manner with school leaders and in these situations, the school leaders had poor experiences. Since consultants are outsiders who can never fully comprehend the nuances of an organization, they must guard

against assuming they know exactly what will or will not work for the organization (Schein, 1997). Interestingly, half of the SISs in the present study recognized they could be at fault for creating hindrances to their work with principals while only one principal mentioned this. SISs appeared to have an awareness of how they could impede their own work if they approached principals in the wrong manner. Notably, Banai and Tulimieri (2013) recognized that effective consultants were aware of their limitations, learned from their mistakes, and knew their roles were defined and limited.

Roughly two thirds of the participants cited *barriers* that were beyond their control. This included limited school district budgets, school district issues, and inconsistencies of state information and policies. Issues related to Focus School mandates, especially the limited time SISs were in schools and pressures of being identified as a Focus School, were perceived to be challenges as well according the data. Prescribed agendas and limited time were considered barriers to the work of consultants with school leaders as well (Swaffield, 2005, 2013). With numerous meetings and excessive required paperwork, principals saw little value in these tasks actually aiding them in the process of improving their low-performing schools. Similarly, Hamilton, Heilig, and Pazey (2013) indicated that too many meetings and competing expectations from the state and district were hindrances. The Focus School design could actually be creating unintended obstacles to the SISs and principals' school improvement efforts. Strikingly, these *barriers* were not directly related to the assistance and services the SIS engaged in with the principals of Focus Schools.

Consultancy Models and Influencing Factors

Consultancy models. In examination of the models of consultancy from which the SISs' operated, the theme of *supporting and monitoring* was revealed. In *supporting and monitoring*,

there were times the SISs simultaneously supported the principals in their work while also monitoring the principals and school to see if they were meeting the Focus School requirements. This harkens back to Cameron's (2010) concept of consultants being part of the "sanctions and benefits" (p.334) of school reform, with the SISs providing principals assistance for moving out of Focus School status while ensuring they are meeting the Focus School mandates.

Based on the data gathered and analyzed for this study, three main models of consultancy were recognized in the study. The three were based on Schein's (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy and adapted for the purposes of the study. They were purchased expertise, good doctor, and collaborative guide and these models imply that help is the main purpose of consultation (Schein 1999). In these models of consultancy, the SISs functioned differently yet, in each of these, evidence of the theme *supporting and monitoring* was present.

The SISs moved in and out of the models of consultancy depending on the role they were serving with the principals. This shifting in and out of the consulting modes as necessary was the key to effective consultation (Schein, 1988). When principals requested specific services to be delivered for a matter, they recognized and knew how they wanted it addressed, SISs functioned in the purchased expertise model. Out of the three models, this one was less frequently employed by the SIS, possibly since principals were unsure how to address particular topics, were unaware of issues that needed to be fixed, or the area of concern was not related to the work of the SIS. The next model was that of the good doctor and it involved the SIS finding the remedy to a concern the principal may have identified or an issue the SIS observed in the school. SISs consistently functioned in this mode of consultancy based on the perceptions of both principals and SISs. The third model was the collaborative guide where the SISs worked hand in hand with the principals to identify topics to concentrate on or when the SISs served as facilitative guides to

the principals by helping them think through a matter, leading them to develop their own solutions. Similarly, Forde et al. (2012) recognized the facilitative role leadership coaches assumed when helping and enabling head teachers with problem-solving school issues. Based on the data in the present study, 10 of the participants referenced situations where the SISs operated in this model. In the end, there was no fixed model of consultancy the SISs operated from when assisting and serving principals. All three models were employed to differing degrees of frequency in their work.

Influencing factors. *Dynamics* was the final theme revealed in the study and it provided explanation to the factors that influenced the mode of consultancy the SISs employed. *Dynamics* were the different facets that could impact how a SIS functioned with a principal. Some SISs may have operated more predominantly from one model or another based on the *dynamics* that affected it. The three areas of *dynamics* were relationships, positional influence, and job requirements, which could collectively have an effect on the consulting modes of the SISs. Relationships were perceived to impact how the SISs functioned and this finding was supported by the related literature (Donnelly, 2011; Earley & Weindling, 2006; Roy & Kochan, 2012; Toppings, 2013). In terms of relationships, professional respect and relationships characterized as positive and trusting were influential on the three models of consultancy. According to Schein (1999), strong relationships and trust were important factors for the good doctor model used in this study. Trust between the consultant and principal was essential to the success of how consultants and principals worked together (Swaffield, 2013). The positional influence was another factor that could to some extent affect how the SISs functioned. Those with positional power are in a favorable position to impact what work occurs, how it happens, and who participates (van Dijk, 1993). In terms of the principal's positional influence, the models of

purchased expertise and good doctor were affected. The SIS's positional influence was a factor in the good doctor. The final area of *dynamics* was job requirements and these were related to the SISs' expected duties detailed in the Georgia School Improvement Fieldbook (2012). Similarly, Cameron (2010) found the consultants in consultancy-based national reform (the Secondary National Strategy in London, UK) had policy-based, predefined roles based for the work they were required to do with school leaders and other faculty and that these required roles influenced how the consultants engaged in supporting the school leaders and schools. Like the SNS national reform, Georgia's NCLB Waiver (2012) developed specific job requirements and expectations for the SISs working with Focus Schools to provide a consistent, systematic large scaled system of support across the state. Per the participants' responses, job requirements were an influence on the three models. These *dynamics* factored into how the SISs operated with principals when trying to move their schools out of Focus Status.

Implications

The following section will outline implications of this study that could be useful for state educational policy makers, educational researcher interested in school improvement, educational consultants, and principals who are working to improve the low-performing schools in our nation.

Job Responsibilities

The first implication is understanding that the work of a SIS with a Focus School principal is not limited to the duties ascribed to the SIS's position. Many SISs went beyond the confines of their job descriptions to support the principals not just in working on school improvement, but to help the them improve as school leaders and address other significant issues in the schools. Nowhere in the responsibilities detailed for the SISs in the School Improvement

Fieldbook (GaDOE, 2012), however, are concerns such as school culture issues, coaching principals to be instructional leaders, or serving as the confidant and sounding board to the principal addressed. The interviewed SISs consistently said that their job went beyond their required duties. The principals who were interviewed cited support that was provided which was not related to the Focus School work. In accordance with the Focus School directives, the emphasis of the SISs' work was on improving the performance of the Focus sub-group. In the expected Focus School work, limited consideration for handling deeper, school-wide issues was provided. While this study only examined a small portion of the schools receiving support from a SIS, there appeared to be a need to reexamine and possibly redefine the job expectations of the SIS so they can more fully support the principal in developing effective school leadership skills and in holistic school improvement work.

More Time

The second implication is related to the amount of time the Focus School policies allot for the principal and SIS to work together each week. According to the SISs and principals, the SISs are only present at the schools one day a week. This limited time was recognized as a barrier to the work of the SIS and principal in this research study. Research studies have recognized that providing support from an educational consultant needs to be more than a few hours a week for it to have long-term benefits for the school (Le Floch et al., 2009; Mass Insight Education, 2012). Also, principals wanted more hands on assistance (Le Floch et al., 2009; Mass Insight Education, 2012). While there may be challenges with revising the policies and financial constraints to consider, state policymakers should consider ways to provide a SIS to its Focus Schools more frequently. There could be opportunity for deeper level, lasting change to occur in these low-performing Title I schools if the principals could have increased access to an

educational consultant with valuable expertise and experience in the change process and school improvement work. If the state could feasibly offer the principals and SISs the option for more days to work together, there might be a greater likelihood these principals and schools could successfully move out of Focus School status and have the capacity to sustain their improvements.

Relationships, Knowledge, and Experience

The fourth implication is that matching principals and SISs needs to be taken into consideration. Sulla (1998) noted the importance of having an educational consultant who is an appropriate match for the principal's and school's needs because a consultant who does not meet the school's needs could result in a poor outcome. SISs and principals both emphasized the importance of relationships which were considered a factor in determining the mode of consultancy under which the SIS operated. Relationships that contained mutual professional respect and trust were considered essential to SISs and principals' work. In business and educational consulting literature, the consultant and client relationship was a determining factor in the success of consulting work (Donnelly, 2011; Ford, 1985; Nikolova et al., 2009; Roy & Kochan, 2012; Toppings, 2013).

SISs with the appropriate expertise and experience were essential to providing principals with the right kind of help. Davis et al. (2007) recognized that when the school improvement facilitator's experience, expertise, and leadership style were relevant to the school's context and needs, then more effective working partnerships were possible. Research on consulting from business and education recognized the importance of the consultant having the necessary knowledge and background (Jang & Lee, 1998; Mass Insight Education, 2012; Vogl, 1999). With the expectation of principals and SISs working closely in school improvement efforts, the

principals need an SIS with whom they have a productive professional relationship and an SIS who has the requisite skills and experiences for the demands of this type of work. While the regional educational service agency offices only have so many SISs at their disposal to support the Focus Schools, the state department of education and the RESA need to consider which SISs to assign to principals of Focus Schools that will best serve the schools' needs. Finding SISs whose experiences and skills match the principals' and schools' needs may improve the SISs and principals' opportunities to engage in the difficult work of school improvement and for the school to exit Focus School status.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the analysis of the data, the researcher encountered several unanswered questions regarding the work of state-mandated educational consultants with principals of low-performing schools. These are questions that should be considered for future research studies.

Priority Schools and School Improvement Specialists

In Georgia, there were two types of schools identified as needing state intervention and support. In this study, the SISs who supported middle schools in Focus School status were the focal point. Yet, there are also Priority Schools (5% lowest performing schools in the all-student category for state tests) in Georgia who receive more intensive support from SISs and have different mandates under which they must abide. No middle schools in Georgia were identified as Priority Schools. Commonly, once a school has moved to this status, the principal is replaced by the school district as part of the Priority School policies. Undoubtedly, the SISs face different challenges when dealing with a principal who may be completely new to the school and is dealing with school-wide poor academic performance. How does the SISs' support help principals of these schools? Does the increased support benefit the principal and improve the

school's achievement? How do SISs deal with issues related to principals who are new to a school with challenging problems? There is an evident need for further research about how SISs support principals in the Priority Schools.

Elementary and High Schools with School Improvement Specialists

This study was limited to investigating the work of SISs in middle schools which serve students in grades 6 to 8. The study did not look at how SISs support principals of low-performing elementary schools or high schools. Do SISs support elementary or high school principals any differently? Do the principals of these schools identify different types of work, benefits, or challenges with the SISs? Is there a need to differentiate the type of support an SIS provides to a principals and schools based on grade level configuration? Notably all of Georgia's Priority Schools are elementary and high schools. Knowing how to effectively support all types of low-performing schools through the use of a state-funded consultant is crucial to understand if states continue to use them as part of their interventions for low-performing schools.

Long Term Results of School Improvement Specialists in Focus Schools

Since the SISs were expected to serve the Focus Schools for 3 years, questions remain about whether the SISs' support will have the intended impact of closing the achievement gap during this finite amount of time. While many SISs and principals reported their schools had made academic gains during the first year, will the schools continue to improve? Further study of this group would be beneficial to the research on school improvement. How will the SIS's role with the principal change over time during their 3 years together? Will principals' perceptions of the value of having an SIS change if the school does or does not move out of Focus School status? If the schools' academic performance declines during these 3 years or SISs and principals have a dysfunctional work relationship, how will this be addressed by the state? These are

important questions that warrant further examination in future research because there is limited data about the long-term effects on schools receiving multiple years of consistent support from state-funded educational consultants.

Impact of Traits and Experience

Since principals and SISs recognized the tangible value to having an SIS with specific knowledge and experience, further examination is needed about whether specific traits an SIS possesses or his/her prior experience as a school administrator impact the outcome of an SIS assisting principals in school improvement efforts. What are the traits SISs need to effectively assist and support principals of low-performing schools? Are SISs with administrative experience more effective at supporting principals and leading school improvement? How does the SIS's professional background shape his/her perception of his role in supporting principals of low-performing schools? What is more important to the successful work of a SIS in helping a school improve: personal traits or professional experiences? Since SISs have complex jobs of working with principals of low-performing schools, understanding what personal traits impact their work and how their professional experiences affect support provided are important to recognize.

Conclusion

In this qualitative research study, a better understanding of the roles SISs served when working with principals of Focus Schools was attained. While the study is limited to the experiences and perceptions of 20 participants in one state, the study presents a better picture of what occurred when a SIS engaged in state-mandated support for a principal of a middle school in Focus School status. The SISs were found to assist principals by completing required work for Focus Schools and providing unofficial services the principals and their schools needed. The

benefits of the SISs helping principals of Focus Schools were support from a consultant with valuable experience and expertise, another layer of support for the principal and school, and assistance with school improvement work. There were challenges that created barriers to the SISs' work with the principals. These included issues with the principal and SIS or were related to aspects beyond the control of the SIS or principal. Overall, SISs and principals across the state consistently shared similar activities and services the SISs provided to the principals, including commonalities in the unofficial services offered. The SISs engaged in comparable work due to the Focus School policies and because many SISs recognized similar needs in the principals and the respective schools. These findings were noteworthy since the principals came from different backgrounds and diverse schools.

Schein's (1978, 1990, 1999) models of consultancy captured the roles of the SIS. The SISs operated from these models: purchased expertise, good doctor, and collaborative guide at varying frequencies. Different dynamics, including relationships, positional power, and job requirements, were influences on the consultancy models employed by the SISs. Schein (1999) spoke of how consultants move in and out of the consultancy models based on the type of help the clients need at the time. In the case of the SISs, this research supports Schein's findings. SISs transitioned between the models of consultancy based on contextual factors and the demonstrated needs of their principals.

SISs served a multitude of roles in their work with principals of Focus Schools and only time will tell if their support will have the intended outcomes of helping these principals move their schools out of Focus School status. This research study answered the call from other related studies (Boyle et al., 2009; Cameron, 2010; Rudo, 2001) for more information about how state interventions using state-funded educational consultants can support and improve low-

performing schools. Yet, more research is needed so that states can design effective consultancy programs that are responsive to the needs of their principals and low-performing schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Principal Questionnaire

Principal Questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a research study about school improvement specialists and principals titled **The Georgia School Improvement Specialists: A Case Study Exploring Their Roles with Principals of "Focus" Middle Schools**. This questionnaire will be sent to other Georgia principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools and receive services from school improvement specialists. The participating school improvement specialists will complete a similar questionnaire. The study focuses on identifying and exploring the roles of the school improvements serve when working with principals of Focus Schools.

This questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

You may exit the survey or leave a question unanswered at any time. There is minimal risk attached to your participation. Any details about you, your work situation, and your organization will be kept completely confidential. Questionnaire results will be kept under password protection for three years following the questionnaire. Any papers or conference presentations based on the collected data will contain only summary data without direct links to an individual survey response.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the primary researcher, Jessie Beaumont Schmid (521 River Bend Lane Hixson, TN 37343; 865-755-7986; jessiebeaumont@hotmail.com) or faculty advisor Dr. Vincent A. Anfara, Jr. (1122 Volunteer Boulevard 325 Bailey Education Complex The University of Tennessee Knoxville, TN 37996-3430; 865-974-2214; vanfara@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the U.T. Office of Research Compliance Officer at 865-974-3466.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

By clicking on NEXT, you give permission to gather and analyze the answers you give to the questions that follow.

PAGE

QUEST1

Name

QUEST2

School

QUEST3

What is your level of education?

- ☐ Bachelors
☐ Masters
☐ Educational Specialist
☐ Doctorate

QUEST4

How many years have you been principal of this school?

(0 - 255)

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QUEST17

How long has your school improvement specialist been assigned to your school?

- ☐ Current school year
☐ 1-2 years
☐ 3 or more years

PAGE2

QUEST6

How many days a month is the school improvement specialist at your school?

- ☐ 1 day
☐ 2-3 days
☐ 4-5 days
☐ 6-7 days
☐ 8-9 days
☐ 10 or more days

QUEST17

How frequently do you meet with the school improvement specialist?

- ☐ Once a month
☐ 2-3 times a month
☐ Weekly
☐ Every time he/she visits the school

QUEST18

Why is a school improvement specialist assigned to a school identified as a Focus School?

Q40109 What does your school improvement specialist do with you to move your school out of Focus School status?

Q40110 What situations have you told the school improvement specialist about an issue and the school improvement specialist offered a solution? Explain.

Q40111 What situations has the school improvement specialist told you about an issue and then offered a solution? Explain.

Q40112 What situations have the school improvement specialist and you worked together to recognize an issue and develop a solution? Explain.

Q40113 What roles of the school improvement specialist are beneficial to your work in moving your school out of Focus School status? Why?

Q40114 What roles of the school improvement specialist are challenges to your work in moving your school out of Focus School status? Why?

Q40115 Please share any additional thoughts about your experience working with a school improvement specialist.

Q40116 Would you be willing to participate in the interview phase of this study?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Appendix B

School Improvement Specialist Questionnaire

School Improvement Specialists Questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a research study about school improvement specialists and principals titled The Georgia School Improvement Specialists: A Case Study Exploring Their Roles with Principals of "Focus" Middle Schools. This questionnaire will be sent to other school improvement specialists working with Georgia principals of middle schools identified as Focus Schools. The participating principals will complete a similar questionnaire. The study focuses on identifying and exploring the roles of the school improvements serve when working with principals of Focus Schools.

This questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

You may exit the survey or leave a question unanswered at any time. There is minimal risk attached to your participation. Any details about you, your work situation, and your organization will be kept completely confidential. Questionnaire results will be kept under password protection for three years following the questionnaire. Any papers or conference presentations based on the collected data will contain only summary data without direct links to an individual survey response.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the primary researcher, Jessie Beaumont Schmid (521 River Bend Lane Hixson, TN 37343; 865-755-7986; jessiebeaumont@hotmail.com) or faculty advisor Dr. Vincent A. Anfar, Jr. (1122 Volunteer Boulevard 325 Bailey Education Complex The University of Tennessee Knoxville, TN 37996-3430; 865-974-2214; vanfara@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the U.T. Office of Research Compliance Officer at 865-974-3466.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

By clicking on NEXT, you give permission to gather and analyze the answers you give to the questions that follow.

PAGE

QUEST1

Name

QUEST3

What middle school/s identified as a Focus School do you serve?

PAGE2

QUEST3

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Bachelors
☐ Masters
☐ Educational Specialist
☐ Doctorate

QUEST4

What type of previous educational experience do you have? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Classroom Teacher
☐ Instructional Coach
☐ Assistant Principal
☐ Principal
☐ District Administrator
☐ Director of Schools

QUEST16

How long have you been a school improvement specialist?

(0 - 255)

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PAGE2#1

QUEST19

How many days a month are you at the school?

	1 day	2-3 days	4-5 days	6-7 days	8-9 days	10 or more days	N/A
School 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School 2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School 3	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

QUEST20

How frequently do you meet with the school principal?

	Once a month	2-3 times a month	Weekly	Every time I visit the school	N/A
School 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School 2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

School 3



QUEST9

Why is a school improvement specialist assigned to a Focus School?

QUEST10

What work do you do with the principal to move the school out of Focus School status?

QUEST11

What situations has the principal told you about an issue and you offered a solution? Explain.

QUEST12

What situations have you told the principal about an issue and then you offered a solution? Explain.

QUEST13

What situations have the principal and you worked together to recognize an issue and develop a solution? Explain.

QUEST14

What roles of the school improvement specialist are beneficial to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?

QUEST15

What roles of the school improvement specialist are challenges to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?

QUEST16

Please share any additional thoughts about your experience as a school improvement specialist working with principals of Focus Schools.

QUEST17

May I contact you for the interview phase of this study?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Appendix C

Principal Interview Protocol

Principal Interview Protocol

Name-_____

School-_____

Background Information

1. Tell me about yourself professionally.
2. Tell me about your school.
3. Tell me about your school improvement specialist.

Roles of the School Improvement Specialist

4. Why is a school improvement specialists assigned to a school in Focus School status?
5. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on the school improvement plan.
6. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on the school improvement plan?
7. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on the leadership team.
8. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on the leadership team?
9. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on analyzing student achievement data.
10. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on analyzing student achievement data?
11. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on areas of need in your school.
12. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on areas of need in your school?
13. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on making instructional decisions.
14. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on making instructional decisions?
15. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on issues with teachers.
16. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on issues with teachers?
17. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on professional development.

18. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on professional development?
19. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you on meeting state requirements for schools in Focus School status.
20. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you on meeting state requirements for schools in Focus School status?
21. Describe what the school improvement specialist does when working with you as a coach.
22. Who determined the school improvement specialist's role when working with you as a coach?
23. Are there other areas the school improvement specialist works with you? If yes, what are they and what determines this role?
24. From your experience, what roles of the school improvement specialist are beneficial to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?
25. From your experience, what roles of the school improvement specialist are challenges to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?
26. Please share any additional thoughts about your experience working with a school improvement specialist.

Concluding Questions

27. Do you have any questions for me?
28. May I call or e-mail you if needed to clarify information or ask additional questions?
29. Do you want a copy of the results of this study when it is completed?

Appendix D

School Improvement Specialist Interview Protocol

School Improvement Specialist Interview Protocol

Name-_____

School/s-_____

Background Information

1. Tell me about yourself professionally.
2. Tell me about the school/s you serve.
3. Tell me about the principal/s of the school/s.

Roles of the School Improvement Specialist

4. Why is a school improvement specialists assigned to a school in Focus School status?
5. Describe what you do when working with the principal on the school improvement plan.
6. Who determined your role when working with the principal on the school improvement plan?
7. Describe what you do when working with the principal on the leadership team.
8. Who determined your role when working with the principal on the leadership team?
9. Describe what you do when working with the principal on analyzing student achievement data.
10. Who determined your role when working with the principal on analyzing student achievement data?
11. Describe what you do when working with the principal on areas of need in your school.
12. Who determined your role when working with the principal on areas of need in your school?
13. Describe what you do when working with the principal on making instructional decisions.
14. Who determined your role when working with the principal on making instructional decisions?
15. Describe what you do when working with the principal on issues with teachers.
16. Who determined your role when working with the principal on issues with teachers?
17. Describe what you do when working with the principal on professional development.
18. What determined your role when working with the principal on professional development?
19. Describe what you do when working with the principal on meeting state requirements for schools in Focus School status.
20. Who determined your role when working with the principal on meeting state requirements for schools in Focus School status?
21. Describe what you do when working with the principal as a coach.
22. Who determined your role when working with the principal as a coach?
23. Are there other areas you work with the principal? If yes, what are they and what determines this role?
24. From your experience, what roles of the school improvement specialist are beneficial to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?

25. From your experience, what roles of the school improvement specialist are challenges to the principal's work in moving the school out of Focus School status? Why?
26. Please share any additional thoughts about your experience working as a school improvement specialist.

Concluding Questions

27. Do you have any questions for me?
28. May I call or e-mail you if needed to clarify information or ask additional questions?
29. Do you want a copy of the results of this study when it is completed?

VITA

Jessie Beaumont Schmid is a native of Tennessee. She attended The University of Tennessee—Knoxville. Ms. Beaumont Schmid completed undergraduate degree in U.S. Culture and minor in Elementary Education in 1996 and her Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction in 1997. She graduated with a PhD in education with a focus in educational administration and policy studies in August 2014.

Ms. Beaumont Schmid has 16 years experience in public education. She served as a classroom teacher in grades 3 through 6, and worked with students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. She worked as a reading specialist, instructional coach, interventionist, and literacy coach in Title I schools.

Her research interests include turning around low-performing schools, instructional leadership in the middle schools, and teacher leadership. She served as a graduate assistant while completing her doctoral course work. She was recognized as a Clark Scholar by the University Council of Educational Administration in 2009. Additionally, she presented a paper written with Dr. Pamela Angelle at the University Council of Educational Administration in 2006. She has co-written three articles, researched teacher leadership and middle school instructional practices, and assisted in developing an instrument on teacher leadership. Her dissertation topic explores the roles of state-funded consultants working with principals of low-performing middle schools.

She resides in Hixson, TN with her husband, two dogs, and one horse.