

---

[All ETDs from UAB](#)

[UAB Theses & Dissertations](#)

---

2007

## A Perception Of Parents, Teachers, And Community Leaders Regarding A School District's Strategic Plan As Related To The Use Of Assessment Data

Zanetta Andrea Simmons  
*University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/etd-collection>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Simmons, Zanetta Andrea, "A Perception Of Parents, Teachers, And Community Leaders Regarding A School District's Strategic Plan As Related To The Use Of Assessment Data" (2007). *All ETDs from UAB*. 3802.

<https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/etd-collection/3802>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

A PERCEPTION OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
REGARDING A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN AS  
RELATED TO THE USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA

by

ZANETTA ANDREA SIMMONS

WILLIAM B. ROGAN, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
LOUCRECIA COLLINS  
DAVID DAGLEY  
MARGARET RICE  
JAMES WRIGHT

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama and The University of  
Alabama at Birmingham, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2007

Copyright by  
Zanetta Andrea Simmons  
2007

A PERCEPTION OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
REGARDING A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN AS  
RELATED TO THE USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA

ZANETTITA ANDREA SIMMONS

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out if school personnel and community stakeholders were using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress.

This study examined the perceptions of ten public school stakeholders. Information for this study was gathered by interviewing and analyzing qualitative data of ten purposely-selected subjects from the faculty, central office personnel, community leaders, and parents who were involved in the strategic planning process and helped with the development of various plans that had an influence on student learning outcomes. The constant comparative method was used for qualitative data analysis. The researcher served as the instrument for the qualitative study.

A qualitative data analysis revealed eight themes as related to strategic planning and assessment. The identified themes were (1) comprehensive good plan, (2) effective consultants, (3) input from stakeholders, (4) lack of understanding of stakeholders, (5) effective professional development, (6) effective communication, (7) identification of the SWOTs, and (8) achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Conclusions drawn from the study were that (1) the strategic plan was a good comprehensive plan, (2) ownership for stakeholders is valuable, (3) the strategic plan is a reference point for baseline data, (4) professional development should be ongoing, and

(5) effective communication is the key to having a successful strategic plan that links assessment to ensure that the district makes AYP.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Harold Bishop, a true friend, a great professor, and a real confidant. I would like to thank you for making my dreams come true. I just wish you could have been here to see me through this journey of twelve years. The first day I met you, you told me that you would facilitate me through the process, and on the day you passed you were trying to make sure I completed this process. Thank you and your wife for believing in me. I will always remember you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my dissertation committee members: Dr. Boyd Rogan, Chair; Dr. James Wright; Dr. Margaret Rice; Dr. Loucrecia Collins; and Dr. Dave Dagley. My committee played a crucial role in the development of this document. I would like to thank Dr. James H. Carter for allowing me to complete this study

I am so very thankful for the love, the support, and nurturing I received from my family. My parents, Henry and Daisy Simmons, I know that you pushed me when I didn't have any push left. You listened when I complained and still told me I could do this. Daddy, I know you wanted me to finish and Mother, you helped me finish. To my brothers and sisters, I thank God for you. I could not have done this without your believing in me—Alicia (Gerod), Henry, Jr. (Sonya), Willie Simone (Yumeko), Bruno (Andrea), and my favorite little sister, Brittany. I would also like to thank Ralph for what you did for me. When I thought I could not make it, you helped me through the tough spots. To my friend, I thank you for all those times you gave the pep talks, and I know the boys in the peanut gallery appreciate you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions.....	6
General Methodology .....	7
Significance of the Study.....	7
Assumptions and Limitations .....	8
Definitions of Terms .....	9
Organization of the Study .....	10
Summary .....	11
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	12
Strategic Planning in the Military.....	12
Strategic Planning in Business.....	16
Strategic Planning in Education.....	21
Definition of Strategic Planning .....	26
Strategic Planning as Related to Educational Reform .....	31
Strategic Planning .....	37
Summary and Organization of the Study.....	41
Summary .....	42



## CHAPTER

3	METHODOLOGY .....	43
	Qualitative Research Design.....	44
	Restatement of Research Questions.....	47
	Selection of Study Participants and Site .....	47
	Data Collection Techniques and Interview Protocol .....	50
	Data Analysis .....	52
	Summary .....	57
4	RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	58
	Introduction.....	58
	Profile of Interview Participants .....	61
	Research Findings.....	70
	Findings Related to the Overall Perception of the Strategic Plan.....	73
	Findings Related to Interpretation of Mission and Goals of the District .....	75
	Findings Related to Interpretation of Goals of the Assessment Program.....	78
	Findings Related to the Strengths of the Strategic Planning Process .....	80
	Findings Related to the Weaknesses of the Strategic Planning Process.....	82
	Findings Related to the Strengths of the Assessment Program .....	84
	Findings Related to the Weaknesses of the Assessment Program.....	86
	Findings Related to the Interpretation of the Strategic Plan and Assessment Program.....	88
	Findings Related to the Perception of the Effectiveness Mechanisms to Integrate the Process.....	91
	Findings Related to the Most Relevant Assessment Data .....	94
	Findings Related to Missing Assessment Data.....	96
	Findings Related to the Communication of Assessment Data.....	98
	Findings Related to the Overall Perception of the Strategic Plan and making AYP.....	100
	Data Analysis and Identified Themes .....	102
5	STUDY SUMMARY, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY .....	112
	Study Summary.....	112
	Review of Findings.....	113
	Conclusions.....	115
	Implications for Practice .....	118
	Recommendations for Further Study .....	119

LIST OF REFERENCES .....	121
--------------------------	-----

## APPENDIX

A	INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE APPROVAL .....	128
B	INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	133
C	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	135
D	LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT .....	138
E	LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT .....	140
F	LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS .....	142
G	INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION (SAMPLE) .....	144

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
1 A Profile of Participants Who Were Interviewed .....	61
2 Emerging Themes by Participants .....	71
3 Themes by Participants .....	110

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Education is a big business in the United States. Public schools across the United States are facing traumatic and irreversible change in the area of accountability. It has been said that times are chaotic in nature (Synder, 1999). There are currently more than 4,000 two and four-year colleges and universities; this number has doubled in the last fifty years (Rhodes, 2001). There are more than 6,000 vocational institutions, corporate training programs, and online courses and programs with new programs developing everyday. Due to stiffer requirements for graduation, the pool of high school graduates decreases every year and the dropout rate increases. As the pool of high school graduates declines, the percentage of college-age population enrolled has increased from 30 percent to 43 percent (Rhodes, 2001).

The Selma School District once was concerned with only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but now the focus is on the impact on federal government demands, state financial audits, teacher shortages, special education guidelines, and curricula and policies audits. The Selma City School System, in compliance with directives from the Alabama State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education, initiated a strategic planning course of action to improve the education systems in Alabama.

The purpose of the planning process was to develop a written plan that included the identification of strategic planning areas, goals, objectives, and activities. The plan included the values, beliefs, and goals of the Selma, Alabama community. A primary component of the planning process focused on ensuring that all citizens residing within the Selma City School District had the opportunity to provide input for the strategic plan. The plan was designed to guide schools through the process of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and to ensure that a full self-assessment is completed.

The components for planning stressed the following principles:

- (1) Planning is a collaborative process;
- (2) Technical assistance and educational expertise should evolve from personnel employed by the district;
- (3) All aspects of planning should be approved by the Selma City School District prior to being included;
- (4) A committee structure should be established to insure proper channels of input from the community and school system; and
- (5) All forms of the State's Accountability Program are included such as the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing (ADAW), the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT), Stanford 10 (SAT 10), and the Alabama High School Graduation Examination (AHSGE).

As the district advanced in the area of accountability in line with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, strategic planning was the only avenue to take. As Selma ventured down the road of strategic planning, they examined purpose, history, strategies, and the process to formulate a plan for student achievement.

Howell (2000) discussed how the process of strategic planning had become more important than the product. She stated that strategic planning should begin with an

environmental scan, a process of determining the external environmental factors that could be threats or opportunities for an education institution (Howell, 2000).

Education has been marked by reform through different time periods. In the 1950s and 1960s, public schools faced the launch of the first satellite in space. The push was in the area of science to keep up with the Soviet Union. The next reform movement began in the 1980s when the Secretary of Education published “A Nation At Risk.” In this report, the Commission on Excellence in Education reported that the educational foundations of our society had been based on mediocrity, and they recommended assessments in various forms to assure that students were capable adults. The 1980s marked the introduction of the Exit Examination for graduation, and the “Back to Basics” movement was reformed. *Assessment* and *accountability* were the key words for the 1990s, and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* made a great impact on this time period. Accountability placed labels on schools and systems as they tried to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); therefore, strategic planning became a must during this reform for schools that did not make adequate yearly progress.

Strategic planning has had a long history in today’s society. It began during Biblical war times. The word *strategy* is derived from the Greek verb *strategō*, meaning “to plan the plan, the defeat of one’s enemies, the effective use of resources” (Keller, 1983, p. 74). Generals in the military used strategic planning to formulate battles in war time. The use of business innovations in strategic planning is said to have originated on the campus of Harvard University where it was introduced into the classroom in the 1920s as an approach to assist businesses and the government in addressing the changing circumstances of new environments (Bryson, 1995). A recent study by the Association

of Management Consulting Firms found that executives, consultants, and business school professors all agreed that business strategy was the single most important management issue today (Byrne, 1996). Over the last thirty years, strategic planning has emerged as a major change strategy in education.

For decades schools and educational institutions have been facing changes and challenges to the education system in the United States. As a response to the call for the change in nature in which business needs are delivered, community expectations are made. The purpose of this study was to examine assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. This study examined the perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that contribute to a strategic plan.

Since the beginning of school reform in the eighties, stakeholders (teachers, parents, principals, students, and community and business leaders) who have an interest in schooling have been presumed to be the group most knowledgeable about identifying and establishing effective learning environments for students (Carlos & Amsier, 1993). As stakeholders in the school improvement process have begun to engage in shared decision making, they also have begun to develop skills and techniques that promise effective group communication, consensus building, and problem solving that support more effective decision making as it relates to improving schooling (Schlechty, 1990).

### Statement of the Problem

During the past decade, a number of events occurred that prompted Alabama public school districts to initiate the Strategic Planning Process. The accountability

section of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) that was signed into law on January 8, 2002, was one of the major events. This act affected all Title I schools and mandated that all states establish academic standards in core curricular subjects including subgroups. This new act placed more academic accountability on schools and districts. It act also stated that all students must be proficient in the core academic areas by 2014; therefore, the State of Alabama began looking for methods that would help school systems across the state with this new mandate. As a result of the NCLB Act, the State's Chief School Officer required all school districts in Alabama to complete a strategic plan.

In the spring of each year, the state mandated assessments to be given: the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT), Stanford 10 (SAT10) in grades 3-8, the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing (ADAW) in grades 5, 7, and 10, and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) in grade 11. Data from these assessments are reported in the school's annual report card. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* states the following:

- (1) Use State academic assessments and other indicators described in the State's plan to review annually the progress of each school served under this part to determine whether the school is making adequate yearly progress as defined in section 1111(b)(2);
- (2) At the local educational agency's discretion, use any academic assessments or any other academic indicators described in the local educational agency's plan under section 1112(b)(1)(A) and (B) to review annually the progress of each school served under this part to determine whether the school is making adequate yearly progress as defined in section 1111(b)(2), except that the local educational agency may not use such indicators (other than as provided for in section 1111(b)(2)(I)) if the indicators reduce the number or change the schools that would otherwise be subject to school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under section 1116 if such additional indicators were not used, but may identify additional schools for school improvement or in need of corrective action or restructuring;



- (3) Review the effectiveness of the actions and activities the schools are carrying out under this part with respect to parental involvement, professional development, and other activities assisted under this part (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*).

This study is based on the theoretical principle that if the mission and vision of a school district are based on student-learning outcomes, then all strategic decisions need to be in agreement with what has been researched and proven to increase student learning. Since the assessment process results in data that can determine what conditions positively affect student learning, these data should also be used in the development of school/district plans and strategic decisions that affect the student-learning mission and vision.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. Although research has been done in the area of strategic planning, the researcher found little in the area of the usefulness of a strategic plan when analyzing assessment data. A major question for this study was, “What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment?”

#### Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of strategic plans and assessment programs?

2. What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment?
3. What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

### General Methodology

This study examined the perceptions of ten public school stakeholders residing within the Selma City School District. The specific subjects of the study were stakeholders of Selma City Schools—parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. Information for this study was gathered by interviewing and analyzing qualitative data of ten purposely-selected subjects from the faculty, central office personnel, a community leader, and a parent who was involved in the strategic planning process and helped with the development of various plans that had an influence on student learning outcomes. The constant comparative method was used for qualitative data analysis.

### Significance of the Study

This study examined the use of the required strategic plan to find out if school personnel and community stakeholders used assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress.

A large amount of time, as well as human and financial resources, went into this five-year endeavor. While assessment data were measured each year to assess students on various standardized and criterion referenced tests, strategic planning required some

assessment of employees' attitudes and acceptance of the innovations during this important benchmark year.

The involvement of stakeholders in planning was very vital to the success of the school district because it took the whole community to create a successful plan. The information gathered and learned through developing this plan was considered to be most valuable. This research on stakeholders' concerns, attitudes, perceptions, and viewpoints had broader implications for the schools as they developed the skills necessary to involve stakeholders in school planning as it related to assessment. If one believed that the stakeholder component was a major factor in the success of this planning in the area of assessment, then seeing strategic planning from the stakeholders' perspective was enlightening and perhaps a provocative factor in whether a district engaged in this type of the planning process and used the strategic plan to ensure that the district and each school in the district continued to meet AYP.

### Assumptions and Limitations

This study confined itself to interviews of parents, community members, teachers, and administrators in the Selma City Schools. The researcher reviewed the Strategic Plan and Annual Plan updates from the said district. This was a quasi-experimental study, static group comparison, and was limited in both internal and external validity. The questions used to gather data had limitations:

1. The perceptions held by parents, teachers, and community stakeholders were limited to one district and one culture.

2. The assessment data were limited to assessments offered by the State of Alabama.
3. The questions were stated in a positive manner.
4. The number of questions was excessive.
5. There may have been some biases in the internal and external validity.
6. The researcher's bias in qualitative portions was minimized through the use of coding verification procedures (Johnson & La Montagne, 1993).
7. In qualitative study, the findings could be subjected to other interpretations (Creswell, 2003, p. 149).

### Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were used throughout the study and are offered for further understanding of the terms used in the literature review in Chapter II. The researcher for clarification in this study has specifically defined some of the terms. Other terms are defined as cited in the literature with the sources provided.

*Assessment*: the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 4).

*Curriculum*: consists of the knowledge and skills in subject areas that teachers teach and students learn; encompasses a scope or breadth of content in a given subject area and a sequence for learning (National Research Council, 2001, pp. 51-52).

*Environmental Scanning:* an analysis of data in anticipation of the future as opposed to the present state of the organization (Poole, 1991, p. 40).

*Objectives:* outcomes of no more than one year; they tend to be time-bound (due dates assigned) and are measurable activities (their achievement can be unambiguously determined) that keep the organization or unit heading toward its strategies and goals (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1998, p. 60).

*Stakeholder:* any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output, or is affected by that output. (Sevier, 2000, p.158).

*Strategic Planning:* a form of planning that involves a process looking at the setting, environment, or climate in which an agency functions and determining the mission and goals appropriate for the agency based upon the needs and the setting (Sybouts, 1992, p. 4).

### Organization of the Study

This study was presented in five chapters. Chapter One contains the introduction that contains the background, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, general methodology, assumptions and limitations, definitions of terms, and the organization of the study.

The review of the related literature is the title for Chapter Two, which examined published authors' works in the areas of strategic planning during Biblical and military times. It examined planning in the business and educational world. Education reform efforts and definitions were also introduced in the literature review. Chapter Three contained the methodology and procedures for gathering and analyzing data. The fourth chapter included the presentation and analyses of data. The fifth chapter presented findings related to the research, conclusions, and recommendations for further research based on the results of the study.

### Summary

This study examined the perceptions and use of the required strategic plan to determine if school personnel and community stakeholders used assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. The research was expected to reveal useful information on the effectiveness and the use of the strategic plan in the area of ensuring that schools met AYP.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature on strategic planning indicated that there are many avenues other than the educational institution avenue that are unexplored. At the turn of the twentieth century, the value of strategic planning for international policy was recognized and developed into a commonly used decision-making tool (Mahan, 1890). Allied military planners helped direct World War II through strategic planning efforts (Matloff & Snell, 1953). In the 1950s and 1960s, businesses began to implement strategic planning to help increase the profitability of their companies (Heany, 1985). Heany (1985) states that General Electric in its early days followed the principles of strategic planning proposed by its leaders—Alfred Sloan and Peter Drucker—who later became pioneers in strategic planning. According to Ensign and Adler (1985), strategic planning was an important part of the economic policy of a majority of American businesses. Educational institutions soon followed that trend (Roueche, et al., 1997).

#### Strategic Planning in the Military

The military and strategic planning are terms that have been intertwined throughout the planning process. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, these definitions had not evolved. The taxonomy of the military art was simpler, more ambiguous. The word *strategy* was used to describe "military science," especially the

branch practiced by generals. Based on their study of the wars, Frederick and Napoleon Clausewitz defined strategy as "the use of engagements for the objects of the war" (Clausewitz, 1976, p.40). According to Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, strategy was "the art of making war upon the map" to determine the theater of war, and inside that theater to select the proper base and line of operations, the objective point, and the maneuvers and methods required to gain that point. Both men agreed that the term *strategy* was needed to differentiate between the conduct of combat and the marches and maneuvers required to bring an opponent to battle, then exploit victory or minimize defeat (Cox, 1994).

In many ways, Yazykov's contribution to the early development of the military theory at the Nicholas Academy was diametrically opposed to the teaching of Medem; namely, his aspiration to develop a unified, positivist theory of military art based substantially on Jomini's works. For this reason, Yazykov proved to be a highly influential figure in the development of military theory at the academy. He introduced the subject of military geography and statistics which was, in turn, later responsible for inspiring the formulation of strategic planning and the theoretical base for the territorial military administration system of military districts instituted in the 1860s (Van Dyke, 1990).

According to Michael Howard (1975), a famous historian, there have been numerous conversations over the "Grand Strategy" between the United States and Great Britain. World War II arose over the United States leaders' beliefs in classical strategic principles. Those principles brought the enemy to battle and defeated it. Matloff and Snell (1953) stated that American strategic planners during World War II



hypothesized that the role of the United States would be to protect, to defend, and to re-establish its power.

Cox, in his book entitled *In The Halt in the Mud*, illustrated that France began formulating long-range strategic plans in the years immediately following Waterloo. Carefully supporting his thesis with evidence gleaned from the French Army's own archives, Cox declared that these plans were instilled in the Napoleonic conception of strategy and staff work and were strongly influenced by the French's strategic planning all the way down to the outbreak of the Great War (Cox, 1994). Cox stated:

It is difficult not to read much of the history of the French's strategic planning in the twentieth century back into the nineteenth. Certain fundamental continuities in defense planning began as early as 1818, and this should not be surprising. *The Halt in the Mud* furthermore fills an important gap in the reader's understanding of how France and her army prepared for war in the nineteenth century and sheds new light on France's preparations for the Franco-Prussian War and her reaction to the catastrophic defeat of 1870 (Cox, 1994).

Cox also analyzed the development of the crucial rivalry between France and Germany in the years leading up to the Franco-Prussian War. The author followed the roots of this conflict, showed the similarities in approach between early German and French strategic planning, and then discussed why French and German strategic planning methods diverged so fundamentally (Cox, 1994).

Strategy, according to Cox, is used in the modern sense, as the highest, most complex aspect of this war trinity. It involves the assembly, allocation, and utilization of all available means to obtain national objectives. In this orchestration of political, economic, and military means and ends, the statesman and the soldier face the continuing challenge of welding disparate elements of national power into a coherent effort (Cox, 1994).

*Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941- 1942*, is a contribution to the study of wartime national planning and military strategy. The 1941-42 volume told the story of plans and decisions as they affected the missions and dispositions of the U.S. Army in the defensive phase of coalition warfare when the Grand Alliance was still in its formative stage. The present volume deals with strategic planning in the mid-war era from January 1943 through the summer of 1944. This is the story of the hopes, fears, struggles, frustrations, and triumphs of the Army's strategic planners coming to grips with the problems of the offensive phase of coalition warfare. Basic to this story is the account of planning by General George C. Marshall and his advisers in the great debate on European strategy that followed the Allied landings in North Africa and continued to the penetration of the German frontier in September 1944 (Matloff & Snell, 1953).

In 1990, Menarchik witnessed an intermingling of the old and the new. The new situation required a new strategy and revamped logistic systems to support it. The changes in strategic landscape for U. S. policy were profound. Massive nuclear attacks or conventional wars seemed less likely. Economic interdependence predicted continued global engagement. The new political realities predicted limitations on U. S. access and influence. The altered military landscape predicted new challenges to U. S. interests from new and unidentified sources. Using raw military power unilaterally proved more problematic. The proliferation of additional power centers predicted the timing and location of new flash points that would be uncertain and ambiguous. On August 2, 1990, President Bush announced a new defense strategy that addressed the profound changes in the Cold War state system. Overturning the 1950-1989 global containment strategy that focused on deterrence, Euro-centric military planning and global war with the Soviet

Union, Bush's new strategy focused on global stability. He believed he could maintain a secure environment by deterrence, regional planning, and a focus on regional conflict. To achieve these objectives, United States military strategy, founded on the premise that America continued to serve a unique leadership responsibility, built upon several central ideas. First, continued conventional deterrence required visible presence, timely responsiveness, and on hand decisive and sustainable force. Second, the United States required the capability to respond to crises by moving men and equipment from United States bases and forward deployments to the scene quickly enough and in sufficient numbers to influence the outcome. Assembling a fighting force at great distances required ready, mobile forces and an appropriate mix of airlift, sealift, and forward-positioned supplies (Menarchik, 1993, p. 5).

### Strategic Planning in Business

As stated earlier, strategic planning was introduced into the classroom in the 1920s at Harvard University as part of the Policy Model in the business planning section (Bryson, Freeman, & Roering, 1985). Strategic planning became the dominant business-planning model around 1965, and educators began using this model around 1970 (Cope, 1981). It became one of the most popular forms used in today's society.

The Pennsylvania Railroad's management formed a corporate structure to perform long-range planning functions in the 1860s and the 1870s). DuPont was also among the earliest manufacturing concerns to form a corporate planning function, which it did in 1903 (Chandler, 1962, pp. 22-23).

Henri Fayol (1916), in one of the first texts on management principles, arranged elaborate systems of well-integrated long- and short-range planning procedures and plans, which he used in actual practice from 1866 to about 1918. For fifty years, his French mining companies created comprehensive plans of businesses. They followed deliberate planning procedures, which included each fundamental element of strategic planning (Roney, 2004, p. 6).

Fayol's most widely read work (1916) could be used as a strategic planning text, with principles not unlike many that appeared more than a half-century later. He defined the comprehensive business planning process very similar to the manner in which it is practiced today! Fayol developed annual, two-year, five-year, and ten-year plans that were updated on a rolling-revised basis. They had a full scope of objectives, approaches to goal pursuit (strategy), and action programs. Fayol applied these planning methods with great success in his own mining companies (Roney, 2004, p. 6).

Subsequent to Fayol's work, further academic attention to planning functions developed slowly. Modern notions of comprehensive planning began to emerge again in the 1950s. Drucker (1954) wrote extensively on business planning principles in *The Practice of Management*, a text that may have been one of the first to prescribe modern planning functions.

In the business world, large corporations started using strategic planning in the 1960s. It included objectives, action plans, and the allocations of resources. Forecasting was popular and was used to project existing trends for the future (Valentine, 1991). Strategic planning differed from the long-range planning systems of the 60s. Over the years, strategic planning changed to be more than just an exercise in forecasting and

allocating resources through a budgeting process. Creative thinking was added to significantly impact on the decision making process (Valentine, 1991).

The steady growth of formal planning practices in American businesses was defined statistically and chronicled by several writers after the mid-1950s. One study, conducted by the National Industrial Conference Board in 1955 found that 75 percent of 166 large corporations had installed “long-range planning” functions. Ten years later, that proportion allegedly had risen to over 90 percent (Roney, 2004). However, most other studies' results produced less spectacular growth rates. A survey by Business Management magazine in 1967 found that about half of 101 large corporations had begun to plan formally. This survey also found that only 23 percent of 386 respondents to their survey of a broader sample had highly developed “strategic” planning functions, but that another 50 percent had long-range financial “plans” that were unsupported by strategy. In that study's results, manufacturers were twice as likely to have long-range financial plans as service firms. Surveys in other industrialized nations confirmed that the practice of comprehensive plans was widespread on a global scale. By the end of the 1960s, formal strategic planning had become an established management discipline (Roney, 2004, p. 9).

Although much has been written about strategic thinking, little has actually dealt with current strategic issues. Specifically, in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, strategic planning usually was utilized in de novo situations—start-up enterprises, without precedent, based on assumptions about the potential market or actual demand. But, by the 1970s, owing to the sterility of financial analysts, this kind of planning had degenerated into the development of formulaic “business plans” (Cook, 2000, p. 2).

As time passed, the evolution of strategic planning began. The 1970s saw the emergence of strategic planning in corporate America. Starting in 1969, General Electric began to teach strategies as a discipline to its employee (Dumaine, 1995). General Electric Company created the modern strategic planning cycle over four decades, and their model has been used by many private sector organizations even today. In this model, the levels of strategic planning proceed vertically from corporate, through business, to functional area plans. The strategic planning and control cycle runs horizontally, left to right. This represents an entire planning year. The GE planning process embodied six basic principles: (1) Everyone is involved in the process that increases understanding of and commitment to the plan, (2) Ideas and goals are well defined at every level, (3) Accountability and responsibility for implementing the strategic plan are clear, (4) The strategic planning process is cyclical; it is built into the organization's annual cycle, (5) The process covers all the bases (e.g., goals, action plans, and incentives), and (6) The process allows managers to maintain control over the direction of the strategic plan (Mercer, 1991).

The 1980s corporate America marked the beginning of the quality revolution and the growing importance of organizational development. This new field of organizational development was defined for the first time as an “open systems” framework emphasizing that managers could adapt to changes and pressures in the outside environment (Clark & Krone, 1972).

The United States experienced a major fall in competitiveness during the “heydays” of strategic planning. The successful use of strategic planning was based on a

predictable environment that can be identified. Businesses recognized strategic planning, but it did not reach all aspects of the business environment.

Authors have questioned the value of strategic planning in general and its use by government in particular (Mintzberg, 1984). Clark and Krone (1972) based their conclusion that "strategists have committed themselves to the road in the public sector that leads nowhere" upon their findings that government financial managers feel vulnerable to a liability suit, are constrained by political concerns, and are less willing to use financial tools with greater associated risk. This conservative, risk-averse behavior by financial managers in the public sector runs counter, they argued, to the values and assumptions of rational decision-making and strategic planning (Clark and Krone, 1972). However, critics have questioned the value of strategic planning (Mintzberg, 1994). Hamel has argued that strategic planning processes are too costly and time-consuming for today's fast-paced, competitive environment in the corporate world. There are many examples of attempts both to warn of the pitfalls of corporate planning as well as to actively displace it. The most notable example of the first is that of Professor Henry Mintzberg who, in his book aptly titled *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, chronicled the disappointments and frustrations of eternal analysis and number crunching without synthesis and creation. Unquestionably, the most dramatic example of the second is the decision by Jack Welch, President of General Electric, to completely eliminate the corporate planning office and place the responsibility for creating new futures within the operating units of the company. Unfortunately, these examples are still the exception (Cook, 2000, p. 15). Strategic planning processes produce plans, not necessarily strategies that make a difference. *Fortune* magazine reports that, by downplaying the

planning process, some corporations, such as Nike, Amgen, and Harley-Davidson, have created "killer strategies" or strategic initiatives that led to market dominance. It was suggested that the key is to shift the emphasis from "planning" to "strategizing" (Hamel, 1996, pp. 135-137).

Bryson emphasized the value of strategic planning in public and nonprofit businesses. He said, "It can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonably analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation" (Bryson, 1995, p. 78). It has been argued that strategic planning will not last long in the public sector.

### Strategic Planning in Education

A guide and timeline for strategic planning was developed in the military, adapted to the business world, and ultimately expanded into various governmental and municipal agencies before it was, as a formal process, translated for education. The authors in the field of educational planning began to be printed one or two decades after the works of the proponents of strategic planning had permeated the industrial world. According to Chaffee, even before the concept of strategic planning made a major impact on education, there were those in the world of business who were suggesting that the process was flawed and of questionable value (Chaffee, 1985). Recent developments in organizational development show a continued emphasis on an attempt to integrate conflicting theories of change. At the beginning of the school reform movement in the eighties, stakeholders (teachers, parents, principals, community, and business leaders) expressed a vested interest in educating our most prized jewels—our students.



In educational change, three perspectives have grown out of basic research (Chin & Benne, 1969). They are (1) the rational scientific or research and development perspective, (2) the political perspective, and (3) the cultural perspective (Sashkin & Ergermeier, 1993).

In the late 1960s, with the launch of *Sputnik*, the United States wanted to improve its math and science programs and make them the “state of the art” in advanced curricular. These improvements were great, but they did not bring all the stakeholders to the table. These improvements were given from the “top-down” without teacher input. This way of doing business only made teachers feel that they were invaluable and kept the myth alive that they were incompetent to help or to have valuable input. Without support and ownership, failure is inevitable. The Back-to-Basics movement of the seventies suffered because of the lack of teacher input; teachers had virtually no role in determining whether or not this initiative would be viable over time (Garner, 1995). The public’s perception was that incompetence in schools existed at all levels. The schools were poorly controlled and supported by the community and away from centralized education bureaucrats (Tyack, 1993).

Public support for the return of control of local schools to the community grew. By 1974 the Commission on Educational Governance of the National Committee for Citizens in Education encouraged citizens to play a more active part in their children’s education by getting involved in decision-making at the school site (Baldwin, 1993). One of the most influential national thrusts in education resulted from a report called *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report led to educational reform in a majority of the states within this country. As a result

of this report, the use of nationally normed standardized tests emerged as a major method for determining student achievement. The drafters of this report attacked the non-productivity of American public schools, using the memorable metaphor “rising tide of mediocrity” to emphasize the ineffectiveness of schooling in American vis-à-vis that of schools in certain other countries (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report challenged the nation to examine its public schools in the light of new technologies and the changing workplace and suggested that educational systems dismantle structures that locked schools into the Industrial Age.

Sashkin & Ergermeier (1993) described four operational strategies for an overview of education change:

1. Fix the parts which involves improvement by adopting proven innovations of various types;
2. Fix the people, through training and development;
3. Fix the school, by developing school organization’s capacities to solve their own problems; and
4. Fix the system, by reforming and restructuring the entire enterprise of education, from the State Department of Education to the district and the school building (p. 5).

Strategic planning is a model of planning that is still emerging in the public school system, with its beginnings in the mid-1980s. There is little research documenting the arrival of strategic planning in education. Studies conducted in the 1970s and as recently as 1983 indicated that intermediate and long-range planning had not reached a formalized level in most districts (Bozeman & Schmeizer, 1984).

Successful strategic planning does not filter down from bureaucratic ivory towers. It is a reality-based activity carried out by and in consultation with those who are responsible for the organization's daily operations. Strategic planning has the greatest chance of successful development and implementation when it is an activity involving the staff that will be impacted by the plan. Rather than being the exclusive domain of specialized and sophisticated planners, strategic planning is an opportunity for staff at all levels to have a voice in the future of the organization. The development of a strategic plan is more an art than a science; while there are techniques and guidelines available, the process depends largely on the abilities and thinking of the persons involved. People who had different values or wondered about strategic planning based their concerns largely on the fact that the process, as it was practiced in the 1970s, was not designed to take into consideration political implications or strategic management considerations (Ansoff, 1976).

As a more advanced or mature view of strategic planning has developed, however, experience has proven to be a competent teacher. Strategic planning has been accomplished, in recent years, with a greater appreciation of its strengths and an understanding of how to avoid its limitations (Bozeman & Schmelzer, 1984).

There was little research that documented the arrival of strategic planning in education. Studies conducted in the 1970s and as recently as 1983 indicated that the intermediate and long-range planning had not reached a formalized level in most districts and that there was a lack of understanding among educators regarding the scope and complexity of intermediate and long-range planning (Bozeman & Schmelzer, 1984).

Educators could not afford the luxury of avoiding planning because of the fear of failure. Planning, like all human endeavors and especially efforts that involve values and social organizations rather than physical or mechanical devices is not precise, nor can it be totally predetermined. Plans will never work perfectly because they involve people, and people are not entirely predictable, nor are they subject to precise measurements and calibrations (Sybouts, 1992).

Education is a tall business that is conceived through motivation and perceived through the need for planning, and it is not without dissonance among the legions of educators who are charged with the responsibility for the educational enterprise. Frustration continued to grow from the issues surrounding the need for planning and from the process that was involved. Part of the hesitance that has accompanied planning has stemmed from "evidence of the inadequacy of planning theory" (Neufville, 1986, p. 25). Strategic planners are confronted "on the one hand by an acute awareness that their environment is dominated by politics and that rational, comprehensive planning, may well be futile, and on the other, by a conviction that they should attempt it anyway" (Neufville, 1986, p. 26). Conflict or confusion about the process cannot be used as an excuse for avoiding the imperative need for planning. Strategic planners must identify with the surroundings in which they work and acknowledge the turmoil. The mind of the strategic planner should be motivated to respond to chaos and to gain insight into the need for planning. Commitment will emerge from a comprehension of needs and confidence to move forward, bolstered by an understanding of the planning process (Sybouts, 1992).

The growth of strategic planning in education has been a reflection of a state of mind, a matter of strategic thinking. For many superintendents of schools, strategic planning has been seen as a protracted form of long-range planning with the added steps of environmental scanning. Some educational leaders have, however, understood the potential of strategic planning to bring about organizational renewal. McCune stated that they applied the technique not only to planning, but also to restructuring programs, management styles . . . fiscal arrangements, and relationships with the community (McCune, 1986).

It can be hypothesized that the application of strategic planning resulted partly from the perennial interest of public education in private sector techniques combined with increasing pressure for reform and restructuring of America's education. This call for systemic change was found in *A Nation at Risk* (1983).

Strategic planning is a model of planning that is still emerging in the public school system, with its beginning found in the mid-1980s. It is interesting to note that a reemergence of strategic planning in the private sector also occurred in the 1980s when Wall Street takeovers of large corporations and conglomerates forced a restructuring known as "downsizing" (Dumaine, 1995).

### Definition of Strategic Planning

The word *strategy* is derived from the Greek verb *stratego*, meaning, "to plan the plan, the defeat of one's enemies, the effective use of resources" (Keller, 1983, p.74). The term *strategy* has a military origin. *Strategy* in Greek means generalship (Keller, 1983).

In business organizations, “strategy usually means the mode or plan of action for allocating scarce resources to gain a competitive advantage, and capitalize on a perceived opportunity at an acceptable level of risk” (Harrison, 1986, p. 9-10). In military organizations, strategy is “the science and art of employing armed strength of a belligerent to secure the object of a war” (Harrison, 1986, pp. 9-10).

Dolence, Rowley, and Lujan (1997) defined strategic planning as a formal process designed to help an organization identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment. Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer (1993) defined strategic planning as “the process by which the guiding members of an organization envisions its future and develops the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future” (p. 3). A strategic plan is a framework for carrying out strategic thinking, direction, and action leading to the achievement of consistent and planned results. Strategic planning is concerned with the long-term development of an institution, its essential character, its personality, and its essence; therefore, strategic planning involved with decisions, which have enduring effects that are difficult to reverse (Cope, 1978). According to Cook (2000), strategic planning was a method that indicated direction and provided meaning to the every day activities of the organization (p. 14). Most often used in the context of planning the word, *strategy* always carries a certain mystique, perhaps even a sense of panache, but any attempt at definitive, practical specifications typically ended either in confused generalities or in a suffocating restriction in the narrowest of contexts. For example, "strategic planning" is now defined, at least in practice, as long-range planning by most corporations and as comprehensive

planning by non-profit institutions. Furthermore, in both instances, it is not uncommon for "strategic planning" to be reduced to program or project planning (Cook, 2000, p. 1) .

Mintzberg (1994) identified strategic planning as position and perspective that specifically outlined an organization's way of doing business. Bryson (1995) defined strategic planning as it relates to public and nonprofit organizations such as school districts as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 4). Kaufman and Herman (1991) believed that strategic planning must be a dynamic and active process.

The term *strategy* has been employed in the planning literature to mean various things. Some writers use the word synonymously with the word *goal*. Others have suggested a definition that seems to be more in line with the meaning of the word as found in the dictionary; in so doing, they have used the word in a seemingly clearer and more defensible way. A strategy is an "organization's pre-selected means or approach to achieving its goals and objectives while coping with current and future . . . conditions" (Digman, 1986, p.79). The word *strategy* can be traced from military sources. A general, yet polite, debate can be generated about the true meaning of the word with respect to whether it is a statement of goal, a statement of process, or an approach to achieving a goal; however, such an extended discussion is probably a great deal more than most people want to know. As used here the word, *strategies* refers to the means or approaches selected to achieve goals (Jemison, 1978). The perceived shortfall in strategic planning frequently resulted from the budgetary process and allocation of human resources was not committed to the plan. While some observers suggested strategic planning was failing, other observers argued the actual failure occurred simply

because the plan was not implemented. While some planners use the terms *long-range planning* and *strategic planning* interchangeably, a distinction should be made between the two terms. Long-range planning has been recognized as involving four basic elements: (1) monitoring, (2) forecasting, (3) goal setting, and (4) implementing. (While implementing should involve evaluation, often evaluation is, in practice, ignored). Strategic planning has been described as involving (1) environmental understanding, (2) organizational goal definition, (3) option identification, (4) decision making, (5) implementing, and (6) performance evaluation. The terms *long-range planning*, *strategic planning*, and *strategic management* are still used by different persons in different ways to mean the same or different concepts. This can be confusing but perhaps assigning more literal meanings to the terms may help clarify and distinguish them. Once strategic planning is accomplished, the mission statement will provide an expression of why an institution exists. Goals can specify what is to be accomplished (Sybouts, 1992).

Strategic planning was also defined as an interactive process that comprises mission, vision, situational analysis, long-range objectives, strategies, and measurements. It has four main questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where are we going?
3. How will we get there?
4. How will we measure success? (McGrath, 1998, p.211).

Strategic planning is, according to writers, a method for aligning an organization with its environment (McGrath, 1998).

Strategic planning involves making strategic decisions. It recognizes the outside



environment and explicitly incorporates elements of it into the planning process. It has a long-term focus, often three to five years, but sometimes as many as ten to twenty years. It is conducted (or at least initiated) at the top of the organization and at the top of the organization's major divisions (although the process requires the involvement of a wide range of participants from the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the agency and its constituents). It involves making decisions that commit large amounts of organization resources. Strategic planning sets the direction for the organization by focusing on the organization's identity and its place in a changing environment (Anthony, 1985). It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions shaping the nature and direction of governmental activities within constitutional bounds. Strategic planning is the means by which an organization constantly recreates itself to achieve extraordinary purposes. Only strategic organizations can do strategic planning. A strategic organization is autonomous. Strategic organizations have the prerogative and the responsibility to determine their own identity [and] have the prerogative and responsibility for acquisition and allocation of resources for providing the vision, values, and leadership that control, guide, and sustain (Cook, 1990). As previously mentioned, strategic planning has been perceived by some to have fallen short of its potential to achieve what it was intended to accomplish. Forty-five percent of the Fortune 500 firms in the United States were using some form of strategic planning in 1979; however, the leadership of these firms acknowledged that the technique had not lived up to its expectations. In fact, it was suggested that U. S. firms had been steadily losing ground to firms in others countries (Sybouts, 1990).

Local government strategic planning may be defined as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions shaping the nature and direction of governmental

activities within constitutional bounds" (Mercer, 1991, p. 35). Local government strategic planning is "the process by which the governing body and top management of a city or county envisions the organization's future and develops the necessary organization, staff, procedures, operations and controls to successfully achieve that future" (Mercer, 1991, p. 20).

### Strategic Planning as Related to Educational Reform

There is evidence that some school districts have adopted strategic planning as their primary means of analysis, improvement, and goal setting. McCune (1986) estimated that approximately thirty-one percent of the nation's school districts were engaged in some form of strategic planning (Conley, 1992).

Strategic planning techniques in education sought to place goal setting in a broader context so that stakeholders were involved in the goal setting process. This created an awareness and ownership of the goals for the plan. All employees and constituencies were then able to align their behavior with the goals, enhancing the probability of goal achievement (Conley, 1992).

The proponents of strategic planning also presented it as the best, perhaps the only, method that school districts could use to restructure. The literature promoting strategic planning for schools linked its use with restructuring and fundamental change consistently (McCune, 1986).

Education reform was a major policy activity of the 1980s (Odden, 1991). Reform reports of the 1980s fostered calls for increased standards of student

performance, revised systems of teacher certification, improved teacher compensation, and enhanced accountability mechanisms by states (Odden, 1991).

Chubb and Moe (1990) stated, “By most accounts, the American education system is not working well. Children appear to be learning less in school today than they did a generation ago with the new measurers of accountability” (p. 7). Some twenty-five percent of the nation’s high school students drop out before graduating, and in large cities—whose poor and minority children desperately need quality education—the figure can rise to fifty percent. On math and science achievement tests, America’s teenagers trail students from other nations—a pattern with alarming implications for America’s ability to compete in the world economy (Chubb & Moe, 1990). More troubling still, these problems have stubbornly resisted determined efforts to solve them. Chubb and Moe contend that the political institutions that govern schools are the problem. To overcome this problem, they suggest that schools shift from government control to a system of indirect control that relies on markets and parental choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The first wave of reforms after 1983 was followed by a “second wave” of reforms focused on improving schools through school-based management, teacher empowerment and professionalism, and controlled choice for parents and students (Chubb & Moe, 1990). School success depends on the development of a professional and team-like organization. Effective school organization cannot flourish without substantial school autonomy from direct external control. Many public school systems seem to have become so bureaucratized that their schools cannot flourish with substantial school autonomy from direct external control. Many public school systems seem to have become so bureaucratized that their schools cannot possibly develop clear objectives and

high academic expectations or attract and keep the kinds of principals and teachers that are required for effective performance (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The authors believe this is a logical consequence of the direct democratic control of schools. Existing conditions of democratic control are simply inconsistent with the autonomous operation and effective organization of schools. Institutions of democratic control work systematically and powerfully to discourage school autonomy and, in turn, school effectiveness (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Chubb and Moe (1990) believe that parents and children should be free to choose any schools in the district, patterned after the Cambridge, Massachusetts, choice plan. The Cambridge System has emerged incrementally over the years, beginning in the late 1960s. The district provides a Parent Information Center complete with a parent liaison whose job is to know about the special characteristics of individual schools, to discuss with parents the special needs of their children, and to facilitate the application process (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Massachusetts will set minimal criteria for what constitutes a school. Any organization that meets the criteria should be allowed to open a school. Private schools should be encouraged to participate. The district government will continue to run their schools; monies will flow from a Choice Office that will maintain data on the level of funding for each child, and money will flow to the school, not to the parent or student (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Wealthier districts would contribute more. Each school would determine its governing structure and establish its admission standards (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Beginning in the mid-1980s, several consultants emerged at the national level who began working with school districts on the development of strategic plans. Conley

(1992) identified Shirley McCune and William Cook as the two most prominent pioneers in strategic planning (p. 45).

McCune (1986) authored a book, *Guide to Strategic Planning for Educators*, which made the strategic planning philosophy and concepts relevant for educators. From her position as Policy Services Director of the Mid-continent Regional Educational Labs, she worked extensively with Midwest school districts. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) widely distributed her books to educators. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development contributed significantly to the spread of strategic planning as a planning model for the renewal of the curriculum, the improvement of schools, and the setting of district-level goals. The Executive Director of ASCD, Gordon Cawelti, was a strong advocate of strategic planning. Under his leadership, ASCD adopted McCune's concepts and integrated them into reform agendas (Conley, 1992).

Endorsement of strategic planning by prestigious national education leaders made strategic planning attractive to districts commonly identified as "lighthouse" districts in their state or region. These districts tended to be the first to implement strategic planning. This provided an added credibility to its use and hastened its adoption by other school districts (Conley, 1992).

William J. Cook, Jr., former professor and vice-president at Auburn University, left higher education to become a private consultant. After starting his own company in 1977, Cook worked with various educational and business clients on organizational development issues. He established a relationship with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and presented his strategic planning ideas to educators

through academy training provided through the National Academy for School Executives (NASE). For many of these educators, this training served as a stimulus for them to pursue strategic planning and provided their conceptual framework and reference point for defining effective strategic planning for education (Conley, 1992).

Cook's (1988) book, *Strategic Planning for America's Schools*, establishes a context, process, and discipline for strategic planning. What is strategic planning for America's schools? Cook offers this definition. He describes what strategic planning is not: It is not a model, not a process, not an academic exercise, not a prescription, not an edict, not a political manipulation, and not a budget. He then offers this explanation: Strategic planning is an effective combination of both a process and discipline which, if faithfully adhered to, produces a plan characterized by originality, vision, and realism. The discipline includes the vital ingredients of the plan itself; the process is the organizational dynamic through which the vital ingredients are derived. Both the discipline and the process are aimed at total concentration of the organization's resources on mutually predetermined measurable outcomes (Cook, 1988).

In Cook's view, strategic planning entails a fundamental redistribution of decision-making responsibilities, particularly in the area of basic policy development. He believes that planning is a simultaneous top-down, bottom-up process, and that people at all levels of the organization are equally qualified to participate in the planning process.

Shirley McCune (1986), in her book *Guide to Strategic Planning for Educators*, pioneered many of Cook's later views and presented an approach similar to Cook's in many ways. She differentiated between long-range planning which typically began with the assumption that the organization existed in a stable environment, and strategic

planning which attempted to establish the organization's role within the context of a larger society that was constantly changing, based on data collected internally and externally.

Shirley McCune and William Cook's pioneering efforts were successful. Strategic planning was employed by an ever-increasing number of school districts and was advocated by a growing cadre of trainers and consultants. At the same time there was little evidence to support or refute the use of strategic planning by school districts (Conley, 1992).

In 1992, Conley (1992) surveyed 120 school districts nationwide with strategic plans in place. His conclusions were as follows:

1. School districts are moving to a more open system notion of public education, involving many groups not previously included in decision-making.
2. Strategic planning seems to be effective as a tool to limit planning incrementalism and may be the first real alternative to purely political decision-making.
3. There is evidence that strategic planning is moving beyond the lighthouse districts and is greeted in a positive manner.
4. Principals may be leery about the process and feel excluded.
5. Strategic planning may be the glue that is needed for decentralized decision-making to succeed.
6. The process of strategic planning has been adapted by educators.
7. Educators integrate rational and political/interactive concepts of planning that are neatly separated by theorists.

8. Strategic planning seems to be working well in the districts who responded to the study. The sample of districts was diverse geographically and demographically (p. 89).

Conley's study is the only major study of strategic planning in school districts conducted in the 1990s. Conley (1992) himself considered his study to be the establishment of baseline data. He offered two recommendations for further study:

1. Some research at specific sites should be conducted to determine the interaction between rational and political planning paradigms, and to investigate the "texture" of strategic planning—the perceptions of the process held by the different constituent groups.
2. A follow-up study needs to be conducted one year from now to determine perceptions of strategic planning at that time and to determine the progress in achieving the goals of the plan (pp. 75-76).

### Strategic Planning

Initiating the strategic planning process must be done with care and forethought. The desire to do strategic planning is no doubt tied to a set of perceived outcomes or benefits. Achieving these outcomes and benefits depends directly on arriving at a common understanding regarding two key issues:

1. The reasons why strategic planning is necessary and beneficial for your organization at this time, and
2. How to select the best individuals to serve on the strategic planning committee (Burkhart & Ruess, 1993, p. 1).



Burkhart and Ruess (1993) stated in Step 1 the need to identify key stakeholders. Stakeholders are people who have a “stake” in the organization. This stake may refer to the organization’s past, present, or future (p. 2). Step 2 devises a structure for the process. The strategic planning committee can begin its work and, the board must give a clear mandate to the committee about what it is empowered to do and what type of product will be produced from the effort. The strategic planning committee mandate involves writing a brief statement that identifies:

1. Why the committee is convening,
2. What the committee is expected to produce,
3. To whom the committee is accountable, and
4. What types of support or resources will be made available to the committee (Burkhart & Ruess, 1993, p. 3).

Step 3, internal assessment, provides the organization with a profile of what the organization thinks about itself. External assessment is Step 4, and the purpose is to gather information from the community and to determine how well the organization is responding to the identified needs that your organization has created (Burkhart & Ruess, 1993).

According to Burkhart and Ruess (1993), the next step is to identify key issues and target opportunities. Step 6 is consensus building for the mission statement. Step 7 is the setting of goals and objectives. Step 8 is completing the strategic plan. Step 9 is the use of the strategic plan. The effectiveness of any strategic plan is linked directly with how fully the organization accepts the plan. No plan can substitute for good judgment and creativity (Burkhart & Ruess).

The components of this plan contain results that are based on respective key strategic planning phases. These phases encompass actions endorsed by Herman (1991). The Herman model of strategic planning has identified several key components. The components include the follow steps:

1. Developing a planning structure with the applicable agency;
2. Internal scanning;
3. External scanning;
4. Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs); Identifying strategic planning areas;
5. Development of goals;
6. Identification of objectives;
7. Selection and scheduling of activities and tasks related to goals and objectives;
8. Identification of priorities;
9. Identification of critical success factors; and
10. Cost identification and analysis (Rowley, 1998).

This plan provides a description that comprehensively addresses each element above accompanied by a narrative that will explain key aspects of its components.

Dolence, Rowley, and LuJan (1997) offer the strategic planning engine model in ten steps that are as follows:

1. Develop key performance indicators (KPIs).
2. Perform an external environmental assessment.
3. Perform an internal environmental assessment.

4. Perform a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, (SWOT), and an analysis.
5. Conduct brainstorming.
6. Evaluate the potential impact of each idea on each strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (cross-impact analysis).
7. Formulate strategies, mission, goals, and objectives.
8. Conduct a cross-impact analysis to determine the impact of the proposed strategies, goals, and objectives on the organization's ability to achieve its KPIs.
9. Finalize and implement strategies, goals, and objectives.
10. Monitor and evaluate actual impact of strategies, goals, and objective on organizational KPIs (p. 2).

The Cook and Cambridge Group provided a holistic approach to strategic planning. Alabama school district employees are trained in the use of the Cambridge Management Group (CMG) model for strategic planning. The CMG model is one of the most used strategic planning models in the state of Alabama (Cook, 1999). There are five forms of strategies used: (1) strategic thinking; (2) strategic planning; (3) strategic action; (4) strategic organization; and (5) school planning. The steps are as follows:

1. Strategic Thinking

- Confirm Commitment
- Confirm Readiness

2. Strategic Planning

- Prepare for Planning
- Build Strategic Teams
- Conduct First Planning Session

Communicate Draft Plan  
Form Action Teams  
Develop Action Plans  
Conduct Second Planning Session  
Prepare Implementation Schedule  
Obtain Board Approval

3. Strategic Action

Develop Capacity Through Action

4. Strategic Organization

Creating Strategic Organization

5. School Planning

6. A Systemized School Planning/Action

7. Ensure Continuous Creation (Cook, 1999, p. 78)

### Summary and Organization of the Study

School districts have been accused of being slow to change, but strategic planning provides an opportunity for employees to contribute individual talents in the decision making process thereby giving everyone a sense of participation and satisfaction not otherwise achieved (Steiner, 1979, p. 48). Strategic management and planning provided superintendents and school boards an opportunity to lead sustainable change within the school system. When leaders expressed that strategic planning was a valued activity and established high expectations, significant and humanistic school reform was more likely to succeed (McGrath, 1998, p. 81). After the implementation of the strategic plan, the Selma City School District was the only Pre-K-14 school district in the State of Alabama with a plan.

## Summary

Chapter One contains an introduction to the strategic planning study, provides a problem statement, details the significance of the study to the school district, and identifies research questions. Chapter Two presents a detailed review of the literature on strategic planning. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used to implement the study. Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data collected in the study. Chapter Five provides a summary of conclusions, implications for practices, and will make recommendations for future research based upon the findings in the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the procedures that were followed in conducting the research. The first section is a discussion on the general characteristics of qualitative research design—action research—the research method employed in this study. This section will be followed by a description of the school district and the participants, methods of data collection, and data analyses.

Straus and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. The methods can also be used to gain new perspectives on the planning process or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. The ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective but from the reader's perspective as well. According to Lincoln and Guba, "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 120). "Qualitative research reports are typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences" (Stake, 1979, p. 5) and thus it is more meaningful. The characteristics of this qualitative study are as follows:

*Naturalistic:* The setting of this research is a direct source of data and the researcher is a key instrument. The clientele will provide context that is important; therefore, the setting is crucial.

*Process:* Concern with process evokes the following questions: How is the strategic plan linked to the NCLB mandates for assessments? What are the individuals' perceptions of assessments in the strategic planning? In what order are assessment data, strategic plan, and achieving AYP used for federal mandates?

*Meaning:* The value of this research is based on the implications and intent that the individual experiences convey to participants as they participate in certain aspects of the strategic planning process.

Qualitative research design is the basis for data collection and analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) describe the data collected in qualitative research as “rich in description of people, places, and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2).

### Qualitative Research Design

Merriam (1998) states that choosing a study design requires an understanding of philosophical foundation underlying the type of research, taking stock of whether there is a good match between the type of research and the researcher's personality, attributes, and skills, and becoming informed as to the design choices available to the researcher within the paradigm (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). The particular design depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what information will be most helpful, and what information will have the most credibility (Patton, 1990). Merriam (2001) shares a description of qualitative

research from M. Q. Patton (1985) *Quality in Qualitative Research: Methodological Principles and Recent Developments*,

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen or to understand the nature of that setting...and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (p. 6)

According to Merriam (1998), a mixture of sources reveals the following characteristics of qualitative research that were influential in selecting the design for this study:

1. Qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with process, in addition to outcomes or products; they are interested in *how* things occur.
2. Qualitative researchers must employ fieldwork.
3. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.
4. The process of qualitative research is inductive; the research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing theory.
5. The product of qualitative research is richly descriptive; words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned.



6. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 45).

According to Yin (1993), the definition of the case study in terms of the research process states, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Stake (1995), however, focuses on trying to pinpoint the unit of study—the case. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (p. 21).

According to Patton (1990), “Phenomenological inquiry or qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context-specific settings” (p. 37), which allowed the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the feelings of the participants. This study also emerged with a phenomenological approach that allowed the researcher the opportunity to capture what each person had to say with meaning and understanding.

The State of Alabama required each school district to develop a strategic plan for its district. This study examined the use of the required strategic plan to determine if school personnel and community stakeholders used assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress.

### Restatement of Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of strategic plans and assessment programs?
2. What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment?
3. What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting (AYP) Adequate Yearly Progress?

### Selection of Study Participants and Site

Approval was received from the Superintendent of the Selma City School System to begin this research study because personnel and stakeholders were involved. After receiving the approval, the researcher began with the selection process.

According to Merriam (1998), “The two basic types of sampling are probability and nonprobability samplings. Probability sampling (of which simple random sampling is the most familiar example) allows the investigator to generalize results of the study from the sample to the population from which it was drawn. Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, the researcher will use probabilistic sampling. Probabilistic sampling is not necessary or is it even justifiable in qualitative research” (p. 61). Thus, the most appropriate sampling strategy is non-probabilistic—the most common form of which is called purposive or purposeful (Patton,

1990). Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify the nine Selma City Schools' clientele that are used for this study. This study uses purposive sampling to select the individuals that were interviewed. According to Patton (1990), the rationale for using sampling is to select information-rich cases from which the researcher can learn the most possible about "issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 46). It is necessary that the researcher selects a sample that offers the most information and the greatest opportunity to learn about issues of this study. The individuals who were purposely sampled met certain criteria: (1) have stakeholders in the Selma City School District, (2) have a basic understanding of the strategic planning process, (3) have knowledge of the state assessment program, or (4) work in the Selma City School District. They had to be involved in and/or had knowledge of the school district and some of the basic needs and student make-up. The ten interviewees hold various positions as stakeholders in the district. Interviewee number one is the superintendent of the district. He has been the superintendent for more than 15 years in the Selma City Schools. Interviewee number two is the curriculum coordinator. Interviewees three through five are principals at various grade levels, number six is a teacher/counselor in the district, number seven is the testing coordinator, number eight is a parent who has a child enrolled in the district, number nine is the PTO President of an elementary school, and number ten is a school board member for the school district.

Prospective participants identified through sampling were contacted via telephone to secure an initial agreement and to secure the time and location of the interview. In this initial phone call, a brief synopsis of the research questions, methods, and procedures were explained to each individual. Each interviewee received a letter confirming our

conversation and acknowledging his or her willingness to participate in the study. All participants were given care when selecting time to conduct the interview.

The site was purposely selected because of location and convenience to the research. The Selma City School System was the district used for this study. The research may have limitations because of this culture but not representative of all districts. The researcher brings biases because she works in the district, and she knows most of the stakeholders and the political arena that surrounds the school district. The Selma City School District is located in Selma, Alabama, which is located in Dallas County, a rural county in West Central Alabama, and is one of nine counties identified as part of the zone known as the “Black Belt.” The area is known as the “Black Belt” because of the rich, black soil that is found in this region of Alabama. Contrary to the beliefs of many that the area is known as the “Black Belt” because of its high population of African-American residents, the area achieved its characterization due to the large successful plantations that thrived on the rich, black soil in the region. The city consists of 13.8 square miles, and Selma is 45 miles west of Montgomery, Alabama; 88 miles south of Birmingham, Alabama; 169 miles north of Mobile, Alabama, and 215 miles west of Atlanta, Georgia.

The school district is 99% African-American, and according to archival data, 64.8% of all adults in Dallas County have attained a high school education. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2000 that there were 3,845 high school graduates, which included those with a high school equivalency diploma. This equated to 18.75% of the total population of Selma, Alabama. The Selma City School District has approximately 4200 students with 12 different campuses, which consists of eight Pre-K through fifth

grades campuses, one sixth grade campus, one seventh through eighth grade campus, one nine through twelfth grade campus, and one alternative school campus.

### Data Collection Techniques and Interview Protocol

Qualitative data collection can include participant observation, in-depth open-ended interviews, and review of written documents (Patton, 1990, p. 10). Patton (2002) explains that qualitative data may consist of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge obtained through interviews, and...excerpts, quotations, or entire passages” extracted from a variety of documents (p. 47). Merriam (2001) contends that qualitative data gathering involves “asking, watching, and reviewing” (p. 23). And, it is the researcher’s responsibility to determine “whether or not a particular piece of information develops into data in the research study” (p. 69).

According to Merriam (2001), interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in educational qualitative studies. Patton (2002) explains, “The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information” (p. 341). The researcher wants to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 342).

Qualitative data collection can include participant observation, in-depth open-ended interviews and review of written documents. This study collected data using in-depth, open-ended interviews and review of written documents. The main method of data collection used in this study was open-ended interviews as conducted by the researcher. The interviews were held in a mutually convenient, comfortable setting. Each person was audio taped and transcriptions were detailed and summarized. Each interview was

approximately one hour in length. The participants were given an opportunity to review and edit the transcripts or summaries. A follow-up interview was conducted with the interviewees who had problems with the summarization before the actual analysis was completed. The researcher used the unstructured interview techniques that involve direct interaction between the researcher and a respondent or group. Unstructured interviews differ from structured in several important ways. First, the detailed questions had no formal structure. Second, the researcher was free to move the conversation in different directions. Third, it took the topic in a broader direction. According to Patton (1990), qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail (p. 13). Patton also stated, “Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry.” “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases” (p. 14) according to Patton.

*Open-ended questions.* The researcher interviewed the nine stakeholders in the Selma City School District with questions that were created and validated. The interview questions were designed to ascertain information about strategic planning and assessment data.

*Review of written documents.* The review of written documents helped to verify and corroborates the data gathered through the interviews (Yin, 2003). The research verified test data and school improvement plans.

A structured open-ended interview or “semi-structured” approach, as outlined by Patton (1998) was utilized. A predetermined set of questions was used to ensure the relevant data. The interview questions are located in the Appendix.

### Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen define qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (1982, p. 145). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the significant themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). Qualitative analysis requires some creativity, for the challenge is to place the raw data into logical, meaning categories. Qualitative analysis was also examined in a holistic fashion. Qualitative analysis helps to communicate this interpretation to others.

According to Wiersma (1995), qualitative research views phenomena holistically. Participants’ perceptions were the focus. Data were analyzed and described in qualitative terms in the context of the study. The process was inductive, developing a general picture of the individual participants and the school district studied (Seidman, 1991). The nature of this study required that data analysis be conducted simultaneously with data collection, interpretation, and reporting. As Creswell (1994) explained, “The process of qualitative analysis is based on data reduction and interpretation. The researcher takes a voluminous amount of information and reduces it to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interprets this information by using some schema” (p. 154). Yin (1994) states that data analysis “consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise

recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 102). Miles and Huberman (1994) define analysis as consisting of “three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 10).

After the data were collected, the interview responses and other materials were carefully reviewed. The data collected needed to be organized into the semi-final transcript. It was necessary to select, focus, condense, and transform the raw data into text, which was meaningful to the purpose of the study. After this process was completed, each interview transcript was returned to the interviewee to verify the accuracy. In this analysis, the researcher looked systematically for differences and similarities that would clarify what had been discovered. This process was not separate from the analysis but is a part of the analysis. The researcher considered what data to include, what and how to code the data, and how to categorize the data. Analysis began with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process that was referred to as “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the researcher identified and named the categories that emerged. The goal of this process was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories, which form the framework for analysis. In this analysis, the researcher searched systematically for differences and similarities that would clarify what had been discovered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The constant comparison method of data analysis was utilized throughout this study. Merriam (2001) described this approach as “the continuous comparison of incidents, respondents’ remarks, and so on, with each other” (p. 179). Codes were developed to help with data analysis. The correct coding was vital to the specification of a category system.



Categories were established to identify those factors of the strategic planning process that affected the ability of assessment data to successfully implement and maintain an on-going school improvement process. The general data were “funneled” to recurring patterns or themes that are described by the researcher in terms of the research questions.

Data analysis began with the collection of data and ended with the interpretation and presentation of findings. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the researcher must translate the conceptual model into the story line that will be read by others. This translation should be rich, tightly woven accounts that “closely approximate the reality it represents” (p. 57).

In an experimental study you can “talk about the validity and reliability of the instrumentation, the appropriateness of the data analysis techniques, the degree of relationship between the conclusions drawn and the data upon which they presumably rest, and so on” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). The researcher took careful steps to ensure rigor in this study. The researcher tries to establish a sense of trustworthiness and validity by insuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Patton (1990) stated, “Any research ultimately needs credibility to be useful. No credible research strategy advocates biases or distortion of dates in order to serve the researcher’s vested interests and prejudices” (p. 55). Establishing validity was a very important component of credibility. It was also important to remember that accuracy of findings as an important component and being able to be an observer proved to a valuable tool. Patton stated that the researcher was the instrument in qualitative research. The researcher was the instrument; one had to make sure that they are aware of some biases. The researcher was an African-American female from a lower class family. The

researcher has been employed with the district for seven years and worked as a leader on the strategic plan. The researcher also served as a coordinator in the district; therefore, the researcher may have some form of biases that are related to this study. The researcher chose this study because there was a lack of research in the area of strategic planning and assessment data. The researcher tried to ensure that each participant was at ease and felt comfortable in the interview and that the biases remained minimal.

Member checking was another component of establishing credibility. Each participant was given copies of the transcript or a summary for approval. Each participant was given the opportunity to make changes at this point. Peer debriefing was another component of establishing credibility. The researcher found this part to be most helpful. It was a way of bouncing ideas off a person that knew exactly what to offer the researcher. Having this time to play with ideas helped strengthen this study. The researcher's peers talked in person and on the phone. Dr. Cynthia Anthony, one of the researcher cohort members, offered the following suggestions: "To re-examine Chapter 3, stay focused and work at least once a week on the project, make sure you interview your participants well, and call me anytime."

Each participant reviewed the transcription and had an opportunity to make comments. The researcher used content analysis to establish common threads. Transferability, according to Patton (1990), "is a discipline and rigor of analysis depending on presenting solid descriptive data, what is often called 'thick description' (p. 375). Thick description provides for transferability. The researcher had no major expectations in responses, and the researcher accepted the responses each participant offered.

Dependability and conformability validated that the study could be trusted. The researcher completing this study will ensure that if some other researcher conducted this study the result would be similar. Data sources and the process represented in this study can be duplicated. The goal of research is to be nonjudgmental. This research did not add or take away from the comments made by the interviewees. An audit trail gave details of how the study was conducted. Establishing credibility of the researcher increased the validity and acceptance of the information. Audit trails ensured accuracy; special attention was given to documenting and providing trails that can reproduce a study that is similar. To continue adding accuracy in reporting the interview, a tape recorder was used with permission from each participant. Member checking was also used as stated earlier to allow the participants a chance to comment and make changes. The researcher included transcripts or summaries of all interviews for perusal. Peer debriefing was used to ensure credibility. Having this time to bounce ideas around helped in strengthening the researcher's study. Content analysis was conducted to identify and report emerging themes. A methodological log, included as a journal, provided accounts of the total process.

The researcher has been in the educational arena for eighteen years—eleven as an administrator, seven as a classroom instructor on the high school level, and four as an adjunct instructor on the post secondary level. The researcher has good knowledge based on assessments at various levels—a student, as a teacher, and as an administrator. The researcher received a B. S. Degree in mathematics education, a Master's Degree in mathematics education, and an Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership. The researcher taught high school mathematics from 1988 to 1995 in two different school

systems. The researcher also served as a Mathematics Specialist in Birmingham, Alabama, for three years and Federal Programs Coordinator for Selma City School System for nine years. These experiences have made the researcher very conscious about high stakes testing and strategic planning. The researcher sought to establish great relationships with the participants.

A dichotomous category system was chosen for this study. The category system was developed with concepts, contents, and various subject matters for each response. The coding units were actual responses that were taken from each person interviewed. If a concept or subject appeared more than once, it was assigned a category. As the researcher transcribed the information, more categories emerged, but they seemed to have a common thread; therefore, the researcher combined some of the categories. These categories were combined to make the eight themes.

### Summary

The purpose of this research study was to determine how strategic planning relates to the use of assessment data. This chapter also contained the study design, the restatement of the research questions, selection of study participants and site, a data collection, a data analysis, and a method of rigor selection.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if school personnel and community stakeholders were using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. Although research had been conducted in the area of strategic planning, there is a lack of research in the area of the usefulness of a strategic plan when analyzing assessment data. Ten Selma City Schools' stakeholders were interviewed to explore the perceptions of these stakeholders about the strategic plan as related to assessment data. The findings of the study resulting from data collected from interviewing participants, a review of researcher notes, and notes from observations are illustrated in this chapter.

The major research questions addressed are as follows: (1) What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of the strategic plans and assessment programs? (2) What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment? and (3) What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting (AYP) Adequate Yearly Progress? Three research questions were formulated after an extensive review of the related literature. These

questions were sub-divided into related questions to help facilitate the detailed interview process. The design of this study was of an investigative nature. Each participant was given the same basic questions although their perspectives took the interview into different discussions and additional information was added. The researcher had a pre-defined set of questions. Each interview session started with the statement, “Tell me about yourself.” This question helped with writing the biographical sketch of the participant. This question also gave the participant a chance to adjust to the interview process and to establish a level of confidence between the interviewee and the interviewer. Each participant diverged into meaningful dialogue about the strategic plan and assessment data. The researcher interviewed the ten participants for approximately one hour each. Each participant was very easy to interview. Each shared information freely. The researcher tried to make each participant comfortable by assuring them that there were no right or wrong answers and the perception was the focus of the interview. The researcher used the first part of the interviewing process to gain background information about the participant. By providing this information, the participants and researcher established respect, trust, and a positive relationship between the researcher and participant. This time was also used to get timelines and demographics about the participant. The interview process, according to Seidman (1991), was the “the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). During the second interview, the researcher clarified, as needed, data obtained in the initial interview, confirmed interpretations, and further explored emerging themes. Each interview was audio recorded, and the records were transcribed or summarized. Pseudonyms were used to

protect the confidentiality of the participants. The researcher recorded observations and made notes during and after the interview sessions.

The process of taking raw data, transcribing interviews, and turning it into useful information required the researcher to identify specific themes. These specific themes were determined by the data collected during the interview. Themes were used to identify categories for the purpose of data analysis. Categories revealed numerous characteristics found among the stakeholders of Selma City School System in regards to the Strategic Plan and the Assessment Plan. A category system was formulated based on concepts, content, and subject matter of each response. Concepts, ideas, or subjects occurring more than twice were assigned as categories then coded. The coding unit used for analyzing the open-ended responses to the interview questions was the item or the individual response of the participant. The researcher provided quotations to give a deepness of perception and allowed readers to determine the meaning and intent of this useful information. Sometimes entire quotations were listed so that the readers could determine the participant's intent, because if one picked out one or two lines from the quotation, this could change the meaning of the statement.

After reading and reviewing notes from each interview, the researcher discovered approximately eight emerging themes. They are as follows: comprehensive good plan, effective consultants, included input from stakeholders, stakeholders' lack of an understanding of the plan, effective professional development, effective communication, identified the SWOTs, and achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP).

## Profile of Interview Participants

The researcher interviewed ten participants on two separate occasions for approximately 20 hours total. The first interview established the ground rules such as respect and trust between the researcher and the interviewees. The first interview also helped the researcher gather information about the background of each participant. The second interview was short and provided the researcher a chance to review the transcribed documents. Each interview was audio recorded and the records were transcribed or summarized. The researcher recorded observations and made notes during and after the interview sessions. A profile that provided the names, number of years in education, position, gender, and if the participant was a part of the strategic planning process are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

### *A Profile of Participants Who Were Interviewed*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i># of years in education</i>	<i>Part of Strategic Plan</i>
Gerald Shark	Middle Principal	Male	33	Yes
Arthur Cook	Elementary Principal	Male	28	Yes
Verdell Dees	Coordinator	Female	24	Yes
Joe Patterson	High Principal	Male	16	Yes
Jackie Wells	Teacher	Female	30	No
Williams Graves	School Board President	Male	10	No
Kathy Jones	Counselor	Female	5	No
Robert Fire	Fire Chief	Male	25	Yes
Ellen Ware	Coordinator	Female	35	No
Henry Clark	Superintendent	Male	33	Yes



*Mr. Gerald Shark*

Mr. Gerald Shark has been an employee of Selma City Schools for thirty-three years. Mr. Shark started his educational career in Pickens County. He found a university and fell in love with it. He received his B.S., Master's, and Educational Specialist Degrees from Alabama State University. Mr. Shark's work experience began with teaching social studies. Then, Mr. Shark was chosen to become an administrator. He has served as an assistant principal of Eastside Junior High School, principal of Clark Elementary, and principal of the School of Discovery. Mr. Shark was active in the development of the strategic plan. He was involved from the conception of the plan.

*Mr. Arthur Cook*

Mr. Arthur Cook is a true example of strategic planning. He was an only child born to a single parent in the 1950s. He is the second person in his extended family to graduate from high school and the first to graduate from college. He completed his undergraduate degree in history and political science from Alabama A&M University. He later made a strategic move and went to school to get certified to teach elementary education at Alabama State University. After receiving his certification, he continued to grow in education. He received his Master's Degree in elementary education from Livingston University. Mr. Cook's leadership skills made others take notice and tap him to become an assistant principal, and as a result, he went to school to get certification, in educational leadership. He matriculated at the University of Auburn in Montgomery to obtain his Educational Specialist Degree in educational leadership. He is currently working toward his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Nova University.

Mr. Cook's work experience spans from being a bus driver/teacher of special needs children and adults; a paralegal for the largest African American law firm in Alabama; a Pre-K teacher at a private school; an elementary school teacher; a middle school teacher; and principal. He has worked for the private sector in the business world, the private sector in the education arena, and the public school system.

*Dr. Verdell Lett Dees*

Dr. Verdell Dees serves as the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in the Selma City Schools. She is a native of Selma, Alabama. She began her educational journey in the segregated halls of the Selma City School District. Dr. Dees stated that the "Negro teachers of her time believed in students and taught all students well regardless of where they lived and who their parents were." She also stated they were assessed everyday, and the strategic plan was to be educated. With a solid foundation from public schools, she ventured out to start her college career that has stretched for more than thirty years. Stillman College was the first stop on this educational journey where she received a B. A. with Cum Laude honors attached. She moved on to receive an M. A. Degree from Hofstra University in New York, and a Ph.D. from Long Island University in Greenville, New York. She returned to her home state of Alabama to continue her educational career at The University of Alabama where she received her Ed. S. and her Ed. D.

Dr. Dees has served in various fields of education such as a higher education administrator, a dean of women, a teacher in the elementary school, a high school teacher of English, a middle school assistant principal, curriculum supervisor, curriculum

coordinator, technology coordinator, and an administrative assistant to the superintendent. In those positions, she served as a champion for children.

When asked about strategic planning as it relates to assessment, she stated, “My perception of the strategic planning process was that it was an excellent process. It was well organized and it was also very comprehensive because it included all stakeholders.” Every mechanism was used to be able to include everybody; therefore, I thought it was an excellent process.

#### *Mr. Joe Patterson*

Mr. Joe Patterson is a 42-year old co-principal in the Selma City School District. He stated that he chose education as a career because he wanted to help others, especially children with their education careers. He feels that children are our future, and he wanted to be a part of shaping their future. Mr. Patterson’s love for education has a lot to do with his parents, who were educators who influenced him to follow in their footsteps.

Mr. Patterson began his educational journey in the Selma City School System. He graduated from Selma High School in the mid-80s. He began his college career in the Selma area at Wallace Community College after graduating with an Associate Degree. He matriculated at Livingston University where he received his B.S. degree in education. He later attended Auburn University in Montgomery and received a Master’s Degree in Administration and Supervision. His teaching career extends over an eighteen-year period with various positions and systems. Mr. Patterson started his teaching career in the Demopolis City School System as a classroom teacher and football and track coach. The next year, he left Demopolis and headed for Selma, Alabama, where he taught in the

Dallas County School System at Southside High School. Mr. Patterson decided that he wanted to pursue a career in administration while working at Southside High and enrolled in the State's program for administration. After he completed the Administration Internship, he became an assistant principal at Billingsley in the Autauga County School System for one year. After completing that year, he was asked to come home and serve as principal of Knox Elementary, and finally he ended at Selma High School, his alma mater.

*Ms. Jackie Wells*

Ms. Jackie Wells has been in the Selma City School District for 33 years. Her experiences varied from being a special education teacher for fifteen years, to director of the S.T.A. R. Program for two years, and currently to Drug Prevention Specialist for more than fifteen years. She has been a stakeholder for the district as an employee, a parent, a parent facilitator, a community liaison, and a grandparent. She was directly involved in the development of the Strategic Plan. She was directly involved with the assessment program through the office of Federal Programs. Ms. Wells reviews, analyzes, and translates data from different forms of assessments into meaningful information that is disseminated across the district to parents and other stakeholders.

She stated that the Strategic Plan was used as a source of baseline data for her. She also stated that she used it as a reference point because it sums up the system's assessment program. Ms. Wells is also the president of the Selma Education Association (SEA), where she serves as president for the organization.

*Mr. Williams Graves*

Mr. Graves is a retired educator with more than thirty-five years of experience. He is currently serving as president of the Selma City School Board. He has been on the board for over seven years. Mr. Graves brings a wealth of knowledge as a stakeholder to the school system. He has served on the following boards: Old Depot Board, One Selma, United Way, Red Cross, Habit for Humanity, and Direct Leadership Selma. He has been in education for most of his entire life and his educational background is varied. For example, he matriculated through Alabama State University where he earned a degree in Elementary Education. He started and finished his career in the Selma City School System. He has been involved in almost every educational arena—he taught the sixth grade at the historic Clark Elementary School, and at the onset of integration he was assigned the position of principal at Byrd Elementary School—a prominent all white school—to comply with the integration decree. Later, he was promoted as principal of Knox Elementary and transferred to East End Elementary. During his tenure there, East End Elementary School flooded and FEMA intervened. A new school was constructed and named Sophia P. Kingston School under the leadership of Mr. Graves. Mr. Graves led the planning and construction of this new premier school. Mr. Graves knows and understands the strategic planning and assessment data because of his past experiences in the field of education. He stated that after he received his graduate degrees, Master's and Educational Specialist, he felt compelled to give back and become a strong stakeholder in the system that provided him a career and educated his children.

*Miss Kathy Jones*

Miss Kathy Jones is a 31-year old native of Selma, Alabama. She has been employed with the Selma City School District as a counselor for three years. Miss Jones, a graduate of Selma High School, continued her education at Troy State University in Troy, Alabama, where she received her Bachelor's Degree in early childhood/ elementary education. She also received a Master's Degree in guidance counseling with a certification in educational leadership from Alabama State University in 2003.

Miss Jones has worked as a kindergarten teacher and first grade teacher for four years in the Dallas County School System. She presently works as a guidance counselor for the Selma City School System. She was not employed with the school district when the Strategic Planning Process was developed, but she is currently working with the testing program.

*Chief Robert Fire*

Chief Robert Fire is a very important stakeholder in the Selma City School District. Chief Fire stated that he was called to do two things in life—preach and teach. He stated that he ran from both of those callings, but one day he gave in and accepted the call of preaching, but struggled with teaching. He stated that until last year he ignored the call to teach, but finally decided to serve as a substitute for one year in the district. He has been the fire chief for the past twelve years. Chief Fire, a long-time stakeholder in the district, served as the PTO president of Clark Elementary School for three years, and PTO president of School of Discovery for two years. He has also served as President of the PTO at Sophia Kingston for over twenty years. He stated that he could retire as

PTO president in the retirement system. When asked why he has devoted so much time in the school system he said, “It is so good to be able to participate because I take my children at heart. The *No Child Left Behind* Program is exciting. We just have to make sure it's being put in gear.” When asked about working with fire department for the City of Selma, he stated, “As fire chief I have the responsibility of the safety and welfare of the people of the City of Selma, and we also serve the police jurisdiction. We serve approximately 40,000 people in the City of Selma. I've been a fire chief for past the twelve years, and I've been employed for the past thirty-six years.” Chief Fire stated that he was familiar with the Strategic Plan, and he participated in the activities that led to its development. He also said that he was very interested because he served on the executive committee for the City of Selma, and they are developing plans and amending the city plan all the time.

*Ms. Ellen Ware*

Ms. Ellen Ware has served as the testing coordinator for over eighteen years; she also served as the counselor coordinator. She has been in the Selma City School District for more than thirty-five years. Ms. Ware started her educational career as a student at Hudson High School in the Selma City School System. She earned a B. S. Degree from Xavier University in New Louisiana and returned to her old alma mater as a Spanish and English teacher. Ms. Ware remained the Spanish teacher for seven years at the former Hudson High School. She ventured back to college to receive a Master's Degree in counseling and served as counselor of East Side Middle School. Next, she earned a certificate of certification in testing at Troy State University in Montgomery, Alabama.

Later, she moved to Selma High School as the guidance counselor. This position helped elevate her to the next level as the supervisor of testing and counseling where she has been for the last eighteen years. She said, we have a pretty good program for doing it, and I guess I can say that because I do it. Most of our assessments, except for the college entrance courses are dictated by the State. We do just what the State says do.

*Dr. Henry Clark*

Dr. Henry Clark has been the superintendent of Selma City Schools for more than seventeen years. He has led the school district through many changes for almost two decades. He is a graduate of Alabama State University with a degree in biology. He moved to Selma to take a job as a science teacher in the Dallas County School System. Within a year, he was promoted to the position of vice principal of Shiloh High School. He served in this position for about year and was promoted to principal. He was transferred to other schools in the county as principal until he took a job as principal at West Side Middle School in the Selma City School System. He worked as principal at West Side for more than ten years until he was transferred to the central office as an assistant to the superintendent. The next year he was selected to lead the Selma City School System through some turbulent years for almost two decades. Dr. Clark stated that his staff in different forms has always used strategic planning, and planning is the key for any school district. When the State Superintendent mandated all school districts to devise a strategic plan for their district, Dr. Clark said he welcomed the challenge. He stated that his system had an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP), which to him was scaled-down version of a full strategic plan. To make sure that his strategic plan was



complete and done with a version of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOTs), he hired a consultant to help facilitate the process so that there would be limited biases. Dr. Clark was the chief engineer of the strategic planning for the district. He provided additional staff members to help the consultant with the strategic planning process. He also instructed his assessment team to provide the necessary information to the consultants and other members of the strategic planning team.

### Research Findings

The following research question was addressed: What themes and patterns emerged from stakeholders' responses regarding the perceptions concerning the strategic process and the assessment process. The researcher examined and analyzed the data for (1) overall perception of the Strategic Planning Process, (2) interpretation of the mission of the district, (3) interpretation of goals of assessment program, (4) perceived strengths of the strategic planning process, (5) perceived weaknesses of the strategic planning process, (6) perceived strengths of the assessment process, (7) perceived weaknesses of the assessment process, (8) integration of the strategic plan and assessment, (9) effectiveness of integration, (10) most relevant assessment data, and (11) communication of assessment data, and (12) perception of strategic planning and achieving AYP. Each participant was eager to share information. After spending a considerable amount of time transcribing, reading, and rereading the dialogues, twelve categories emerged. These categories are listed in Table 2. This table also shows the analysis of each participant as it relates to that question.

Table 2

*Emerging Themes by Participants*

Theme (categories)	Participants										Total
Overall Perception of Strategic Plan											
Good Plan	1	2	3	4	6	8	9	10			8
Addressed the District’s Needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10		9
Included Mission and Goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10		9
Comprehensive	1	2	3	4	6		9	10			7
Included all Stakeholders	1	2	3			7		9	10		6
Good Process	1	2	3	4	6	8		10			7
Long Range	1	2	3		5	6	7	8	10		8
Excellent Consultants	1	2	3	4	5			9	10		7
Interpretation of Mission and Goals for District											
Safe and Conducive Environment		2			5	6					3
Student Achievement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Inclusive with Stakeholders			2	3	4		7		9		5
Comprehensive in All Areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Physical Plant	1					5	6			10	4
Identified SWOTs	1	2	3		5	6		8	9	10	8
Good Teachers			2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8
Goals of the Assessment Program											
Student Achievement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Identified Strengths and Weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5		7	8	9	10	9
Assessment Drives Curriculum	1	2	3							10	4
Professional Development			2		4					10	3
Making AYP	1	2	3		5	6	7	8	9	10	9
Strengths of the Strategic Planning Process											
Good Consultants	1	2	3	4	5	6			9	10	8
Included all Stakeholders				3		5			9	10	4
Identified Strengths and Weaknesses	1	2				6	7		9	10	6
Focused on Long Goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Benchmark Information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Well Organized	1	2									2
Evaluation	1	2								10	3
Weaknesses of the Strategic Planning Process											
Too Comprehensive								8		10	2
Not Communicated			2		4	5		8	9		5
Tight Timelines	1	2	3								3
Lack of Stakeholders’ Input			2			5			9		3
Lack of Understanding	1				4	5				10	4
Lack of Other Information	1				4	6					3
Strengths of Assessment Process											
Continuous Assessment Checkpoint	1					5		7	8	9	5

*(table continues)*

Table 2 Continued

Theme (categories)	Participants										Total
Strengths of Assessment Process											
Help From the District Level	1	2			5			8			4
Monitored Student Achievement			3	4		6	7	8	9	10	7
Accountability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Weaknesses of Assessment Process											
Lack of Understanding	1	2	3	4		6	7	8	9	10	9
Lack of Parental Input		2						8	9	10	4
Driven by Non-educators		2	3	4							3
Human Resources			3			6		8	9	10	5
Excessive				4	5		7	8	9		5
Integration of the Strategic Plan and Assessment Data											
Focused on SWOTs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			8
Lack of Understanding	1		3						9	10	4
Vision and Goals		2	3			6		8		10	5
Student Achievement		2						8	9	10	4
Effectiveness of Mechanisms to Integrate the Process											
Good Professional Development	1	2	3	4					9	10	6
Communication			3	4			7			10	4
Funding	1	2	3	4		6				10	6
Assessment Data Most Relevant To Strategic Planning											
SAT10, AHSGE, and ARMT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Accountability		2		4			7				3
Course of Study		2								10	2
What Assessment Data Are Missing											
Good Teaching	1		3	4		6				10	5
Teacher Absenteeism	1										1
Nothing					5	6	7	8			4
Emotional Needs				4							1
Communication of Assessment Data											
Report Cards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
Teacher Made Information Sheets	1	2	3		5	6	7	8		10	8
Newspaper			3	4	5		7	8	9	10	7
Perception of Strategic Planning Process and AYP											
Helps Improve Student Achievement	1	2	3	4	5	6		8	9	10	9
A Place to Revisit Information		2	3	4					9	10	5
Benchmarks		2	3	4	5	6		8	9	10	8
Lack of Knowledge/Understanding		2	3	4	5	6			9	10	7

## Findings Related to the Overall Perception of the Strategic Plan

Each participant interviewed made explicit statements regarding the overall perception of the strategic plan. The participants felt that the overall strategic plan was a good plan. The participants also felt that the plan addressed the needs of the district. Each participant felt that it was a long-range plan and comprehensive in examining the mission and goals. Participants gave the following selected responses regarding the overall perception of the strategic plan.

### *Participant 1*

I'm very appreciative of it. I think it is warranted. What I mean by warranted, I think that the process that was used and the results that were generated were a fair or accurate picture of the Selma City School System. What I'm especially appreciative of is the fact that it addresses several areas of the school district. It not only talks about the physical plant, but it also it talks about the parental involvement, the community involvement as well as academic. Overall, I think that it is a good plan and it is one that is needed and I think that the results of it would show that it is what the community wants also. We had good facilitators.

### *Participant 2*

In looking back in 2004, we did look at our school-wide plan and system-wide plan devised from Selma City Schools Academic Plan, where we placed our goals and objectives and things that we would like to obtain in the school system. We came up with a mission statement and designed a plan. I believe in our plan and I think that we have a very good system-wide plan for our school system. Everyone had a chance to give input.

### *Participant 3*

My perception of the strategic planning process was that it was an excellent process. It was well organized and it was also very comprehensive in that it included all stakeholders. Every mechanism was used to be able to include everybody; therefore, I thought it was an excellent process. This is a long-range plan.

*Participant 4*

The Strategic Planning Process was a well thought out plan and a very good design process. The system brought in a consultant; he was very thorough in helping guide us through this strategic planning process. I thought by each school principal in charge of the strategic planning process for his/her school gave him/her an opportunity to get the full gamut of what a strategic plan was and how to develop a strategic plan for his/her school. Overall, I thought it was a thorough process.

*Participant 5*

It was a five-year study of values, beliefs, and goals for the community.

*Participant 6*

I thought it is a very good plan. It focused on some of the long-range goals that we have had for some time, particularly student achievement, and student goals. I felt that it reflected the exit exam. We wanted to go from the eightieth percentile to the ninetieth percentile. We achieved our goal. Also, I think it gave a comprehensive curriculum guide that provided for students not only on the state level, but the global level. So in this case, it did reach its potential.

*Participant 7*

I was not employed in the district during the strategic planning process. I did review the plan and found that it addressed the needs, goals, and mission of the district. I felt it was a long-range plan. I found evidence that it included the community.

*Participant 8*

You know the thing that I basically remember about the strategic planning process was we talked about programs that would benefit the welfare of our children, but I felt it was a good plan. We talked about future plans. I can't recall whether we dealt with a five-year plan or two or three-year plan. But I knew we were looking at some long-term plan for the future welfare of our children in the Selma City School System. I remembered the mission and goals mentioned.

*Participant 9*

I think the plan was pretty good. I felt like the members of the group were not knowledgeable enough about the procedures and the roles they had to play in it. These were some of the shortcomings. Yes, the plan was comprehensive.

*Participant 10*

I think it certainly gave the stakeholders an opportunity for input on what the future of the Selma City School System should become. Anytime you have an opportunity for the stakeholders to have input that certainly gives them a sense of ownership. I think the process actually gave many of our stakeholders, not all of them, an opportunity to participate in and learn more about the education process, more about what we offer in the school district in the Selma City School System.

**Findings Related to Interpretation of Mission and Goals of the District**

The interpretation of the mission and goals for the district was an important part of the strategic plan and the assessment process. Each participant gave his/her interpretation of the mission and goals for the district genuinely. Overall, the interpretations stated that student achievement was very important and comprehensive in all areas. Information on the physical plant and the safe environment was also described. When asked to give their interpretation of the mission and goals of the district, the participants provided the following responses.

*Participant 1*

I would just say we looked at it from an academic standpoint, physical plan improvement standpoint, and parental and community involvement. I think if you put those four together that would be it in a nutshell. The mission for the district is broad and comprehensive. It discussed meeting the academic goals of each student. Basically one prepares students for life. I think this one right here ends by saying that we're going to have a good comprehensive plan.

*Participant 2*

We wanted to make sure that our parents are involved in the total development of our children. We wanted to make sure that our teachers are involved and that they are highly qualified and have the necessary skills in order to teach our children and carry them to the next level. Our mission was to make sure that our parents, our teachers, and our students were well informed, and they succeed in a safe environment that is conducive to learning. We wanted to make sure that all of the necessary realms were in place to make sure that our kids get a fair chance or fair shake at the educational process here in Selma.

*Participant 3*

To be inclusive and to get an exact idea of how the community or how the various areas of the community felt about the school system in terms of what its needs are and what its current conditions are, and what its accomplishments are vital. I think that we're about giving the best quality education to everybody in the community with whatever resources that we have, and we try to make sure that we bring in qualified personnel and we seek as many different funding facilities as we possibly can that go beyond the resources of the community.

*Participant 4*

The goal was basically to find out the strengths and weaknesses of each individual school and the system as a whole and to devise a plan to strengthen those weaknesses to make sure that we were able to better use areas like assessment. We wanted to make sure that data drives our instruction, and we use research-base methods for instructional purposes. Our mission's main priority was to make sure that we provided the best education possible for the boys and girls in this school's district and to prepare them to become future leaders and productive citizens in their communities.

*Participant 5*

The major goals of the strategic plan was the development of planning structure with an applicable agency, internal scanning, external scanning, identification of strength and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. I agree with all the aspects of the beliefs. We believed that all students can learn, and all students learn in different ways. We also believed that all students must be afforded the opportunity to learn in a physically comfortable environment. I believe that students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process. We believe all students should graduate and become contributing members of society. The Selma City School System is committed to providing

excellence in education, effective instructional leadership, responsible leadership management, and a quality-learning environment for all students.

*Participant 6*

I think the mission is good. I think the mission really focuses on a long-term plan. Planning did not include capital improvement, but it did focus on student achievement. It focused on the curriculum and instruction. I think it gives a broader idea where we are going and where we need to be. Students must be provided the opportunity to be taught in an environment that is conducive to learning.

*Participant 7*

My interpretation is that it identifies the needs of the Selma City School System. The mission and goal should get everybody involved. All of us need to be working toward the common goal.

*Participant 8*

I don't know the mission statement, but any school system's mission is to make sure that they have the quality of the education for all our children. In our system, we want to ensure the best education you possibly can for our children. This would have to be one of the top mission statements. Our school would actually be a quality school in the City of Selma and the State of Alabama.

*Participant 9*

Our goal is certainly for improvement of the school system and to wipe out some of the evils—if you want to refer to it as evils—of some of the things that we had not paid any attention to before and that we really need. I think we have a good mission. In practice, we may not be quite as strong as we ought to be. I think we need to do a lot of things to firm it up. This would include the community, the parents, the teachers, and all of the officials in the school system.

*Participant 10*

I would certainly look at the overall assessment of what the future plans are and some of the strengths and weaknesses in the district. We want the strategic plan to give us a road map on how we could further enhance student achievement, improve facilities, enhance what we do in the budgeting process, and also give us



a snapshot of all of the resources that we have in the school district. Well, you know, people have a lot of misnomers, I guess, about a mission. I have always looked at a mission. We have certain verbiage that we use, but I certainly look at a mission or school district as making sure that you have safety and discipline, curriculum, quality teaching, and that students are actually learning, and the environment is conducive for learning. So we can come up with a statement of mission but actually when you look at our mission I think I would sum it up in those areas that I just mentioned and certainly be good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars.

### Findings Related to Interpretation of Goals of the Assessment Program

All participants stated that there was a direct correlation to assessment to meet the state standard of achieving AYP. Most participants interpreted the goal as student achievement. In interpreting the goals of the assessment program, the idea that is most often used in the United States is that assessment drives instruction. The following statements were made regarding their interpretation of the Goals of the Assessment Program.

#### *Participant 1*

The district assessment program really is the major goal for academic improvement to improve student performance. What I like about it is, it addresses a variety of needs of students. You go and everybody doesn't excel at the same rate. We try to look at the students' results set on the SAT10. But look at that data, too, and see where your students are. Collectively, you try to move them to another level. Our test results the last several years have shown that our students don't do well in reading comprehension. At one time our math problem solving was higher than computation. But now it has reversed itself. It seems as though computation is higher than math problem solving. But now what we try to do is try to structure our academic improvement plan. It's generated from those assessment results.

#### *Participant 2*

Our goal is to make sure that our students are ready; prepared to take the different assessments whether they are criterion-referenced or standardized. Our goal is to make sure that they are prepared to take the different tests. Then once the children take the test, our goal is to make sure that the teachers are able to take the

test data, analyze the data, and put forth the necessary practices to make sure to capitalize on our strengths and our weaknesses. It also is to ensure that we make AYP.

*Participant 3*

We need to make sure that we test what we teach and achieve AYP.

*Participant 4*

Well, I feel the major goals of the district's assessment program are to identify the strengths and weaknesses not of just students but also the instructors. We can utilize professional development to strengthen those weak areas of the instructors that we have in our district, but also to identify and attack those weak areas of our students' abilities to make sure that they are able to perform on the global market.

*Participant 5*

The major goals of the district assessment program are internal scanning, external scanning, identification of strength and weaknesses, and the threats. In looking over the plan and being involved in the plan, it showed me that we looked on the inside and the outside and identified the strengths within the school system and within the community, and parents were involved to let us know what the strengths of the school system were and the teachers were also involved. The strengths and weaknesses and the instruments used were a very vital part of the strategic plan. This provided the feedback on each individual involved.

*Participant 6*

The goal would be to achieve AYP.

*Participant 7*

In reference to testing our goal is to get all students on grade level in order to meet the testing guidelines set forth by the State Department. We need to identify their weaknesses early and focus on them. Our main objective is to make sure they pass the Alabama High School Graduation Examination. To find out where students are weak and make sure they exit high school. It also ensures that the students are proficient.

*Participant 8*

Testing! And I look at where children can benchmark in our school, where children have to make benchmark, and the process of what it takes in order for the kids to achieve benchmark. I look at benchmarks, and use whatever it takes for students to benchmark.

*Participant 9*

The major goals, I think, inspired students to improve themselves. I don't know whether we always followed that because we have a lot of guidelines placed on us by the state and a lot of them by the federal *No Child Left Behind* laws. Sometimes we are not able to meet the requirements we would like to meet. Also, we need to look at the assessment area, too.

*Participant 10*

Well, I know we have certain verbiage, we use, but I think we certainly have to look at what we're doing in terms of measuring student achievement when it comes to conscious standards and the curriculum. We need to look at ways to improve instruction and ways to improve on professional development for all teachers. We have adequate resources to meet the needs of our students and to give the teachers and the administration the resources they need to implement the program. The assessment piece is critical in terms of measuring what and how well we are doing the things we say we are going to do to improve the overall achievement of our students and the overall performance of our stakeholders.

Findings Related to the Strengths of the Strategic Planning Process

There were numerous strengths identified in the strategic planning process that were used, and the participants stated their opinions about the process and the plan. Each participant stated that good consultants were hired to help facilitate the process and they thought this was a positive move. Most of the participants stated that stakeholders were included and that was a positive. The interviews also revealed that the strategic plan was designed to focus on long-range goals and to identify the benchmarks. The following statements were made regarding the strengths of the strategic planning process.

*Participant 1*

Now, this may be redundant. I like the evaluation part where we were able to put the information in and then we were able to use the scale to calculate this and it calculated at the end. I like that. I really like that part. Good consultants. Everybody was included. The process was well-organized.

*Participant 2*

One of our strengths of the process was that we did not just rely totally on the knowledge base of Selma City Schools. We went outside the system, and got experts in the field of planning or who had the expertise of planning strategic plans to come in, sit down, and help us devise a plan that would be most suitable for the populace here in Selma, Alabama. We just didn't depend upon our expertise, but we went outside the system and brought in consultants to help us devise this plan.

*Participant 3*

Community input. The community means students, faculty, parents, educational leaders, community leaders, and dialogue stakeholders. We also hired someone to help with the process. Information was used as a foundation.

*Participant 4*

The consultant we brought in was very strong in the process. We had someone that was an expert in the area that knew the process from step one to the end, and we had a guide to help us from being lost in the wilderness. This person had no problem in being thorough in the explanation of the overall strategic planning process.

*Participant 5*

I feel that it wasn't randomly done. Parents were involved, and I think that is a great strength for the school system.

*Participant 6*

One of the strengths is we have an idea of where we want to go to have baseline information available. We have something to look forward to, look up to, and try to make ourselves a better school system. That was the goal.

*Participant 7*

We got support from outside help. They support the things that the people are set forth.

*Participant 8*

Good benchmark settings. Long range plans.

*Participant 9*

One of the strengths that we had was an idea of where we want to go in the area of academics. We have something to look forward to, look up to, and to try to make ourselves a better school system. That was the goal. The people we hired helped get us to the next level. Parents, teachers, and staff worked on the plan.

*Participant 10*

Again, getting input from all the stakeholders. I also think the consultants were helpful. It had an excellent evaluation piece because it has baseline data.

Findings Related to the Weaknesses of the Strategic Planning Process

Each participant discussed the weaknesses of the Strategic Planning Process. The emphasis was on lack of knowledge of the process because it was new to everyone in the system. The participants stated that it was too comprehensive. The interview also revealed that strategic plan was on a tight timeline. The following statements were made regarding the weaknesses of the Strategic Planning Process.

*Participant 1*

I wouldn't say that the plan itself was that weak because I liked the process. I was in a meeting, and I thought that there were some people who really graded themselves higher than the facilities. I'm not just saying this here. I was just really surprised that some people graded themselves as high as they did on the physical. So really I think that it's not really that the plan has flaws. It is sometimes the way we feel about the plan. I know you say every plan has some weaknesses and every plan has some strength, but overall the plan is a good plan. It's just the way sometimes we fill in the information. Maybe I would say some of us were a little bit too subjective. We were on a tight timeline.

*Participant 2*

One of the weaknesses of the strategic planning process was not enough parental involvement. We can never get too much parental involvement. We had some, but not enough. So I would say that one of the weaknesses of the plan would be not enough parental involvement, or it could be a lack communication with the parent.

*Participant 3*

The time line! It was a very tight time line. But yet I don't think that the time line really hindered the process. More could have been discovered if the time line had been longer. But I do think that the time line was the only negative factor that I can recall now.

*Participant 4*

There were some data that we had trouble trying to obtain. For instance, we had to find the square footage of each plant. There was no one we could go to get that information readily; but some of us were able to get it, but I don't think all schools got data like that square footage. Instructional square footage was a part of the process and acreage of each physical plant. There was other information that dealt strictly with just the physical plant itself—where certain main controls were located for security purposes. I think communication was limited.

*Participant 5*

Well, what I see is that it wasn't at the end. The results were not really publicized as well as it should have been publicized. There are community leaders and others who were not aware of the strategic plan.

*Participant 6*

I don't think we focused enough on capital improvement.

*Participant 7*

I am not aware of anything at the present time.

*Participant 8*

A lot of information! The evaluations that took place may have been flawed. I don't know as a parent if I understood all the things. I did not understand the information about the assessment program.

*Participant 9*

I don't think we had enough input from the community and from the parents. We had good bit from the teachers and the people who work in our system. We have to make sure that we rely on parents and the community, community resources and that kind of thing. And I think that was probably one of our shortcomings.

*Participant 10*

I think with the facilitators that we had working with us and with the experiences they brought to the table, I think if you look at a weakness, it would be—do people actually understand what a strategic plan is. I don't think we could have asked for a better facilitator than the one that we had.

Findings Related to the Strengths of the Assessment Program

Each participant stated that accountability is the main strength of the assessment program. Student achievement in the form of monitoring was another strong focus of the assessment program. The participants also stated that the district's help is appreciated as part of the assessment program. The following statements were made regarding the strengths of the assessment program.

*Participant 1*

One thing about our assessment program, we along the way—let's just say periodically throughout the year—we just don't wait until the end and take SAT 10 and see what our children have done. We gave the ThinkLink as a checkpoint for accountability. This is a good one. The teachers bought into that. Matter of fact, we mentioned that yesterday. Language people were doing that. Reading, language, and math will do it next week. Our people are anxious to get the results. We use accelerated reader. It tells us some things about the child's weakness in reading. We used accelerated reading with the reading bonuses to encourage or motivate students to do well. District was supportive overall. The mechanism that we have now that will periodically assess students is in line with the district. The district supports all of these materials.

*Participant 2*

The strength of our assessment process is the knowledge base of our testing coordinator. She is doing a fine job. The testing coordinator is well prepared in delivering information to principals and teachers. So I would say that the knowledge base of our coordinator over assessment is a positive.

*Participant 3*

I think that the assessment process keeps us focused on what we are truly all about, and to make sure that we are indeed teaching and learning what we say we're teaching and learning.

*Participant 4*

It allows us to realize our strengths and weaknesses. It also gives us an opportunity to plan to strengthen our weaknesses.

*Participant 5*

One of the strengths of the assessment for the Selma City School System is that we do it in a timely manner. We get the results into the State Department, and they are sent back in a timely manner. Now, we can get those results and plan. Teachers can plan their educational lesson plans with that information. They know how to assess—I mean how to teach their children when they receive the results from the tests.

*Participant 6*

I think it is very effective. As we speak now, I think we know—we have a pretty good handle on where we want our students to be—two years from now, three years from now, five years from now. I feel since we have made that assessment now, we can kind of focus on what we need to do from a teaching point of view. I don't think we focused enough on capital improvement.

*Participant 7*

Getting the community involved. Reaching out, pulling in the different resources in order to build to put the students on the level that they need to be. Help from the central office.

*Participant 8*

It goes together because of the fact if you don't have the material for an assessment you cannot assess kids. You're not making available the tools that are



needed to be able to be assessed. It would have tools and quality teachers and proper staff people. All of this goes hand in hand in the assessment program in order to meet your objective. I see that as a strength of the assessment process. It measures. It gives the student a chance to measure their ability to perform. It gives the schools and school system an opportunity to measure our progress that has been made. It's really a report card.

*Participant 9*

I think the strength of it is we do have assessments for all kinds of things and all kinds of learning styles for children who have all types of abilities and everything. I think we're strong on that. And I think we do try to push that forward in our testing.

*Participant 10*

Again, let me reiterate. When one looks at assessment, we are indeed looking at student achievement. When I read through the strategic plan, it gave us a real good overview of whether or not our facilitative structure was satisfactory or not. It told us whether we had an environment conducive to learning or not.

### Findings Related to the Weaknesses of the Assessment Program

Each participant discussed the weaknesses of the assessment program that are not consistent. Each participant had a different perception on the weakness of the assessment process. The major focus was on personnel to ensure that students had good instruction to be successful. The following statements were made regarding the weaknesses of the assessment process.

*Participant 1*

One concern that our teachers have is the use of ThinkLink. It mixes reading and language together. Our teachers would like to have them separated. I think a major weakness is those parents don't really understand. The assessment data provided in the strategic plan were comprehensive. Parents had input, but I still think they lack the knowledge to get the whole picture. I think our teachers are really just catching the knowledge.

*Participant 2*

The weakness of the assessment process is that we have not done enough to educate our parents to understand what we are trying to do as far as understanding. We have done some but it's not enough. The parents don't fully understand when we tell them that the child is taking an SAT 10 test or why the child is taking the test. In other words, they are not educated enough. They need to be educated more on the importance of the test. Non-educators influence our system.

*Participant 3*

Right now the weakness is that educators do not drive it, but it is driven by legislatures in the community. And many times they are not sure of what they want. So educators have to work at their whim.

*Participant 4*

I think it is over emphasized. I think it takes up too much time really. I think we prepare our students to take a test and when they get in the real world—the real world will not give them a test—they will have to LIVE in the real world. We need to teach them how to survive rather than to take a standardized test and make a certain score so that our school and district will look well.

*Participant 5*

Too many tests!

*Participant 6*

Well, maybe we need more counseling.

*Participant 7*

Probably, there is too much for our teachers, with so many tests. We are not waiting to see what works. For example, if they implement Reading Program A then the following year they would implement Reading Program B. We didn't see whether or not Reading Program A had any results or did it actually meet the needs of any of our students. We're too quick to bring in other things instead of giving it a period of time for something to work.

*Participant 8*

The best person does not do the evaluation of the program. I also think from what I hear from the students and parents, there are too many tests. You might not have adequate teachers that are not giving the kids what they need. Kids might

not be evaluated on the level they need to be evaluated. And there are times when some kids are being left behind because of the fact or just some other technicality. Parents should have more input.

*Participant 9*

Parents are not helping their children the way they should. We are measured by what testing does when the scores come out. And I think the community and the parents could do a little better. I think that's a weakness.

*Participant 10*

I wouldn't necessarily say there's a weakness. I think it depends on the personnel if you're doing assessments. I think it also depends on how the strategic plan was seen by all of the stakeholders. Especially people who want to do the analysis of the plan and make sure that it is doing the things that we're hoping it would do when the plan was implemented and was developed.

Findings Related to the Interpretation of the Strategic Plan and Assessment Program

Several participants explained the interpretation of the integration of the strategic plan and the assessment program as a focus on the district's SWOTs. Integration found those areas that need improving. The participants kept the focus on the end process of student achievement. Each participant gave his/her interpretation of the integration of the strategic plan and the assessment program; the participants provided the following responses.

*Participant 1*

If you put strategic plan in a nutshell, you are saying what you plan to do over a period of time. We are weak in language, reading, especially reading vocabulary and reading comprehension, and social science. We don't do well in geography, which is a part of social science. When you look at your assessment, that's when we try to zero in on it. You expose kids to more material that is related to the weakness. Our professional development is linked to students' needs. We look at our students' assessment. We get someone from the Regional In-service Center. They do our teachers' workshops and vocabulary building right across the curriculum. We feel that if they expose the teachers to it, then they can carry it

back to the classroom. Hopefully, our students will do better, but professional development is a link. I will just use that as an example.

*Participant 2*

There is a linkage because our strategic plan is our vision. Our vision is linked into our academic process because we have to do whatever it takes. We follow our vision through our delivery system in the classroom. Yes, there is a linkage because in our vision for our strategic plan we take that same vision and bring it over into the classroom to get our kids to the point where we want them to be. There is a linkage there because we have tried it. Both of them have to go hand-in-hand because it's both of them for the benefit of the child or for our students. Our vision is for the benefit, of our students as well as our assessment program. They have to be hand-in-hand because as I said earlier, it's your vision and so your vision has to be carried out. We have to implement our vision through the classroom. That's the linkage because we have to do it, and that's the way it's implemented through the classroom.

*Participant 3*

Educators and teachers understand the linkage, but parents and community leaders don't. They see everything in isolation. For educators, strategic planning and assessment all work together because we understand what the mission is and what the goals of the school district are, but our community doesn't truly understand everything that we do. It gave us a chance to get together. We have a reference document. This gives us a chance to see the before, during, and the after.

*Participant 4*

My understanding or interpretation of this question would be that, within the strategic planning process, assessment is an area of major concern. I feel the two are linked because the strategic plan was put into place to improve the system as a whole. Assessment is one area that the business community uses not for us but against us, this is my opinion, to measure us to see if we are accountable for what they say we should be accountable for. But we don't turn around and make the business community accountable for what they do in society. They have unfair business practices such as inflated gas prices. We don't have a way of making them accountable and then measure up and punish them for not measuring up. Assessment is a way that we are able to measure ourselves. We used standardized tests and teacher-made tests to see the job that we are doing daily which is to instruct students if we are actually doing a good job or not. Within the strategic plan, we plan to instruct our students to the best of our ability. We plan to go out and get professional development to improve our skills. We are using the latest research-based strategies to make sure that we are addressing current needs,

because students are learning differently now and we have to come up with different ways of instruction. Students are more computer oriented and have more computerized type brains. We have to teach them on that plan. I think the two are linked in that we are planning to make sure we are utilizing assessment to improve instruction and also to be able to utilize strategies of today to reach the students of today.

*Participant 5*

The assessment and the plan work together hand-in-hand where you can look back and refer to any school in the system and see where the building stands, the acreage, the finances, and the budgeting. It is like a resource for each school, and the planning—having it there in the plan would allow the strategic plan—where you can plan for something and refer back to the actual school where something is actually happening in that school.

*Participant 6*

I think you can't have one without the other one. The assessment and the strategic plan, you must make. You must plan. In other words, before you could build on anything, you must make an assessment on what you have and your needs. Then, you know where you are going. You know. You say, well, I want to do this; but if you don't know your needs, then, you know, you don't have anything. But if you know what you need, then you can go ahead and build on what you have.

*Participant 7*

It's linked together by taking the results of the assessments and pulling out the strengths or the weaknesses where you fell short or where you were strong. That's how you do your planning. You look at your assessments to see what you need to focus more on and pull in different resources to help build an area up. I feel the advantage of it is like I said earlier, it's seeing what areas you fall short on that you can plan more activities with or plan to bring in more resources on instead of just saying well, we need A, B, and C and really you probably need less of B than you would need of C. If you take time to plan, look at your assessments and plan, then you can reach the level that you would need to be on.

*Participant 8*

The advantage I can see when you enlist teachers to plan an assessment together, it gives you a measuring tool. When you reach your main objective, you go back and look from one to five years and see where our strong points, where our weak points are, where we need improvement and where we lack improvement.

*Participant 9*

I think that they are linked, but I think the linkage may be weak in a certain way. I don't think that we are strong enough in our linkage between the two and that we could do a little better on some of that. One of the things is information. We don't give enough information in our community and our parents don't seem to want to receive enough from us. Because we are judged by assessment data, our scores and how well we plan are linked together.

*Participant 10*

Well, you know, any time you're going to do planning, you have to have a process. The process itself will lend support to developing a category of people. And, again, I may overuse the word *stakeholders* to give input whether the teachers or principals or parents or central office staff to give input on what are some of the things that they see within the district or within their school building, or within their school community. The overall picture tells us how well things are being done to improve education in the Selma City School System. Again, if you have only a mention of the goals or objectives of a plan, then actually you don't have a plan. You've got to be able to have major objectives to make sure that within a certain time frame that you have met a certain percentage of the goals and objectives you set in the implementation of your plan. I think we have a way of assessing these goals and objectives as we move through the process. It already had been put in place for us.

Findings Related to the Perception of the Effectiveness of Mechanisms to Integrate the Process

The perception of the effectiveness of mechanisms to integrate the process was basically described in three ways: (1) good communication, (2) funding, and (3) good professional development. The statements from each participant are provided in the following responses:

*Participant 1*

Do you see the actual integration of what we do in assessment and the actual process that we did with strategic planning? Do you actually see the integration of it? You learn something through the process you use. Let me tell you why later on. It's just like you revisit the plan. It's just like that, for instance, the code of conduct. I read the code of conduct book when it comes out. I had the code of conduct book. That book is not far from me in this office because what I have to do is I have to go back and revisit that code of conduct book periodically to make

sure that I'm trying to follow the system what has been adopted by the board of education. Now, I say that to say sometimes we have to go back. We go back and I revisit the school wide plan—I mean the strategic plan. And really I think the school-wide plan draws from the strategic plan because the strategic plan goes more in depth to me. And another thing the strategic plan covers a period of time. School-wide plan is basically a year. Your strategic plan covers several years. And even with that now, again, subjectivity comes in because of what you do. If you're doing a strategic plan, you're projecting some things down the road, too. You know even with that, sometimes it costs! We do know that like everything else you project a cost and you probably say about ten percent or five percent. Something may go up on the average of two to five percent per year. But then you come back and you may go up higher than that. I keep saying. But we have to go back periodically and revisit the plan. Now, it's like you say we got survey instruments. Even if you're giving some surveys out there, sometimes you go back to this plan or a good plan of asking parents about the environment and stuff. Where you have questions they agree. I strongly disagree. I agree. We get a different group of students every year. We need to administer this plan every year—I mean the survey because if the children are not here, parents move onto another school.

#### *Participant 2*

I think our integration of that is working fabulously, because teachers are receiving the necessary professional development. Teachers are receiving the professional development to implement our strategic plan to ensure that student achievement is taking place. The professional development is researched based. So I would say that they are receiving the best that we can possibly give them at this particular time. Is there room for improvement? Yes, there's always room for improvement, but I think we're doing a fairly good job with what we have to work with right now.

#### *Participant 3*

The number one mechanism is communication. It is reflected in the document that better communication would definitely be the way to improve the integration. The number two mechanism is professional development for both teachers and parents. They need to understand the documents before they can integrate. Integration of assessment and strategic plan is easy, if the professional development is available.

#### *Participant 4*

The overall effective mechanism to integrate the assessment process and the strategic plan has been the professional development that teachers have received. Teachers are the driving force of education. These instructors have to be well versed in the curriculum and knowledgeable about the information. So, I would

have to say that good professional development is the key. The plan we put in place in 2004 is helping to improve instruction. I know that in many cases those binders might be on the shelf, but what was put in those binders was already in the minds and thoughts of those persons that put those binders on the shelf. They were putting in writing what they were already using. And of course, we have had some changes, but that is why we meet every month. We have these Thinktank Sessions and brainstorming. Our leader is a teacher. A lot of people don't understand what Doc is doing every month, but he is teaching us. If you don't catch it the first time then you will catch it the fifteenth time. You won't be able to say you didn't hear it.

*Participant 5*

They can integrate them by having more copies available for people in the community, and the community leaders sharing this information for growth.

*Participant 6*

I don't think the implementation of the plan has not been as effective as it should have been. I don't think we have been consistent like we have been. We have two in one. How effective are the mechanisms in integrating this process? How effective is it to actually take the plan and see that people are actually using the plan to assess the students? Do you think the people are actually going back and looking at what they said in 2004 versus what they are doing in 2007? I don't think the implementation of the plan has not been as effective as it should have been. I don't think we have been consistent like we have been.

*Participant 7*

After the State Department sends us our results, we sit down as a group and we go over our strengths and our weaknesses. On a system level, maybe we can bring in more input from just not one school, but bring in one representative from each school in order to be more effective. To improve probably we should bring in more people from other areas to work towards a common goal.

*Participant 8*

Our strategic plan is basically a long-term plan. I look at it about five years. What you do and what I was saying is that in order to really reach your objective in your assessment, there has to be an adequate amount of funds. The program has to be well funded. There has to be revenue in place in order to reach your objective. You would make plans from one to five years. Each year you're going to continue to make your goals and try to reach your goals. Your milestone would be the fifth year.



*Participant 9*

I really can't say how effective they are. I really can't. I'm not as knowledgeable on the plan in that area as I thought I would be.

*Participant 10*

Well, I think based on what we have in our strategic plan and based on the knowledge that many of the stakeholders have in terms of their role in the plan, I think the integration of the assessment and the plan could not be done any better than what we're doing right now. I think that's the reason because we had a lot of follow up. When we actually use the data that we have to formulate other plans, we would be geared toward certain problems and certain areas of the school district. I think when you take from the plan and look at it and then assess certain schools in the district, you can pretty much find out whether or not we are reaching the goals and objectives that we set. All of them must be ready to go.

Findings Related to the Most Relevant Assessment Data

The perception of the most relevant assessment data was very concise and unanimous; each participant agreed that the Stanford 10 (SAT10), Alabama High School Graduation Exit Exam (AHSGE), and Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) were the most relevant assessment data. The participants also discussed the Course of Study and content standards as being relevant assessment data. The statements from each participant provided the following responses:

*Participant 1*

Stanford 10

*Participant 2*

The most relevant in my opinion is criterion-referenced data. That's because it's based upon what the child actually knows. According to the Course of Study, we have to go by standardized data from SAT 10 for accountability purposes. The most effective way to judge by is criterion referenced because that's what the Course of Study is saying that they must know. We lean more towards criterion-

referenced data as opposed to standardized data. The standardized data determines whether we're an effective school or not.

*Participant 3*

I think, first of all, the instruction is definitely most relevant. Of course, you have to look at your human resources. You look at your budgeting. But overall, the number one concern is going to be how students were doing in the elementary grade. What kind of progression is there from the elementary grades to the middle grades and high school? Yes, we use all of the test data. We use the scores. We use SAT10, ACT, AHSGE, AP, and SAT scores. We have data also for our special needs students as well.

*Participant 4*

Test data, I would say depend on the grade level, but the AHSGE is the most relevant type. With a foundation from the elementary school level, the high school polishes them off for the real world. High school is the final product. That data would help us plan from the top down I know that you are supposed to plan from the bottom up. Foundation first and then you bring up the rest. But in that sense we can reverse the plan by seeing how well our final product is performing in the real world. We have some data from other schools like UAB and Samford. To let us know how, they are performing so we can improve our final product to enhance the weak areas in the middle and elementary schools. If you are devising a strategic plan, you are not just putting it on paper; you are trying to make improvements.

*Participant 5*

I think the Alabama High School Graduation Exam is good, but the Alabama Reading and Math is very good too. Well, all of them are good assessment strategies. I'm not a person that really believes in tests, but the system says this is required for them to go out in the world. This is what they need, but I'm not a person that really believes in tests. Because I don't believe a test can really say what a person can do or cannot do. Okay. They tell where a person fits on the Bell curve, and it should tell if they fall below the 50 percentile or above the 50 percentile. Society is based on testing materials. I would like to see society move away from that. That is just my own personal opinion, but that is what it is based on. In order for people to go out in the world today, they must be test oriented, but I think a standardized test is necessary, even though I don't agree with it.

*Participant 6*

The ultimate goal is to graduate from high school; therefore, the AHSGE is the most important.

*Participant 7*

On testing, in order to plan for a new year, we need to see the results of what was done in the past year in order to plan to see what is needed to do for the new school year.

*Participant 8*

SAT10

*Participant 9*

SAT10

*Participant 10*

When you look at assessment data from the ARMT, SAT 10, and AHSGE, those types of assessments give you the truth of how students are performing based on the content standards for the state of Alabama.

Findings Related to Missing Assessment Data

The perception of the missing assessment data was varied. Most participants thought the assessment data were complete and nothing should be added. Those participants that thought something needed to be added varied with responses such as the emotional needs of the students and teacher absenteeism. The statements from each participant are provided in the following responses:

*Participant 1*

We talked about the SAT10. It is in the strategic plan. I see that teacher absenteeism is not addressed. Students are addressed, I think. I know we have emergencies that we can't avoid. Each day a teacher is out, that's six hours of instruction. If I'm out that is six hours of instruction. If I'm out five days that's five days of instruction that child has lost. For the last several years, I noticed percentage wise that some teachers brought your rate down. Any school personnel who have perfect attendance for the academic year will receive a \$300 gift certificate. One person did receive it last year. He had perfect attendance.

We are doing this to motivate teachers. We feel that the more they are in the classroom that our students would be exposed to more teaching.

*Participant 2*

Criterion referenced testing is missing. Not enough emphasis is placed upon criterion referenced. It should be number one, but it isn't.

*Participant 3*

I didn't really find any type of data that I thought was not bad. Every attempt was made to make sure that all aspects of the total school community were included. The emotional needs of the students are missing in this process.

*Participant 4*

Nothing is omitted.

*Participant 5*

I think there is enough. I think we over test our children, but I think this would be enough. You only need a basis to find out where the children are in the level of proficiency. The SAT10 is enough. I don't think we need both the ARMT and the SAT10. They are basically the same test.

*Participant 6*

I think we have done enough testing. I think what we need right now is an implementation follow-up. I don't think we need more testing. I think we need to follow up and see how effective we have been.

*Participant 7*

I don't think anything is missing.

*Participant 8*

I don't think anything is missing.

*Participant 9*

I will say mathematics and science. We need more. We should put more emphasis on math and science because they are technical. We also need to include technology.

*Participant 10*

If I had to look at data that I felt was necessary it would be in the area of evaluation of personnel. Are the classroom teachers, support staff, and principals receiving the help that they need in order to be more effective? We need to pay to this area.

Findings Related to the Communication of Assessment Data

The perception of the communication of assessment data was parallel. Each participant said that communication was done through report cards, media, and teacher-made assessment sheets. The statements from each participant are provided the following responses:

*Participant 1*

On our first report cards, we send our assessment data home to our parents from the previous year. We get the information because it comes back in August to the Central Office. The central office sends the report card to us. There is a student report sheet that is sent home to the parents with the student's report card at the end of the first grading period. Teacher attendance is crucial.

*Participant 2*

I look at the data and I communicate it to the teachers. The teachers and I interpret the data. We look at our strengths and our weaknesses. The teachers are able to look at it and do an assessment of them to see if they were effective. It goes from the teachers to the parents. The teachers explain the data to the parents. It goes from the school to the superintendent, then from the superintendent to the school board, and then from the school board to the public.

*Participant 3*

Well, we, of course, distributed copies of report cards to all of the schools and each school was asked to make sure that they made all of their teachers and PTO members, et cetera aware of it. And then, of course, through our public relations person we always reference something in the newspapers, et cetera. It may not necessarily be outlined as a strategic plan, but we know in the district level, it is because we're looking at a strategic plan that we can focus in on particular areas.

*Participant 4*

Parents receive report cards. We have the test scores and information about making AYP in the newspaper. The information is on the radio. The State put the information on the Internet.

*Participant 5*

As a parent, I do receive progress reports. The progress report comes mid term. If you are on the six weeks grading period, you may get a progress report in three weeks, but if your child is having difficulties, you may request a progress report everyday, every week, or any time you request it. Teachers will do a progress report for you when you request it as a parent. Assessment data are communicated throughout counselors who provide them to the schools and the principals, and they provide them to the teachers who provide them to the parents.

*Participant 6*

I think a report card goes out to the parent and community. You get it through report cards, and you get it through other means. We have public forums, oral communications, and written communications. I think we have done a pretty good job down here.

*Participant 7*

The results of the assessment data are communicated through each school is report card. The State Department calls it a report card. The report card is released to the community. Each student is given a copy of it to send home so the parents will be aware of it. It's also placed in the newspapers, and each member of AEA also gets a copy of it.

*Participant 8*

I know it is in the newspaper and we get report cards.

*Participant 9*

We do a good job communicating the information to parents. Students receive information from the schools on every test taken in a timely manner. The information is sent in an easy format to understand. The information is sent home through individual report cards, school report cards, and individual student profile sheets. The information is displayed in the newspaper twice a year.

*Participant 10*

Well, through meetings with the teachers, parents, and students. Certainly we have student profile sheets to disseminate. We have the report cards that we send out to parents, teachers, and the media. We're able to get the data out to the public.

Findings Related to the Overall Perception of the Strategic Plan and Making AYP

The participants expressed many different ideas and thoughts about the overall perception regarding the strategic plan and assessment data as far as making AYP. The major consensus was to improve teaching and learning for students in the Selma City School System. The participants also saw the plan as a reference point or benchmark for achieving AYP, to ensure that *No Child Is Left Behind*. One area that had a negative light was in educating the stakeholders about the information that was provided. The statements from each participant are provided in the following responses.

*Participant 1*

Student achievement goes right back to our assessment and using the strategic plan and student improvement plan will ensure the district AYP. Hopefully, all of that combined will allow us to make AYP. Human resources, financial resources providing supporting materials, and everything that we've tried to do here is centered on student achievement. Human and financial resources provide the major support for making AYP. Student achievement goes right back to our assessment and using the strategic plan and student improvement plan.

*Participant 2*

Now, the parents' perception—the majority of the parents' perception of AYP—they don't have a clue because the parents are not aware of this educational jargon although they are getting there. Principals and teachers take AYP status seriously, because they know the mark that is placed on the school. Everyday we're embarking upon the teachers to make certain strides in order to improve our chances or our marks in making AYP. We're very cautious of our attendance. We're very cautious of our free and reduced lunch status. We're conscious of the number of students that need to pass the SAT10 and the ARMT in order for it to clear our statuses in reading and math. Yes, we have bought into the practice.

Now, do we strongly believe all of that should be done? No. But we have to do what we have to do in order to survive. But we have bought into it. And, yes, we need those things to make our school come out.

*Participant 3*

I think that they do coincide. I would have to say that it relates to AYP. We educators understand the process. I don't think our parents and our community leaders really understand. In many instances, I'm finding out that some of our teachers do not understand the information. It seems as if the elementary and the middle school teachers are more aware of AYP than the high school. So, I think that as a part of strategic planning process, we are now emphasizing the high school. I think it definitely leads to making AYP because, again, it gives you a focus as a point of reference. It's a baseline and because we know that whatever is taught must be tested and all of this is a part of the strategic planning process. That's what we have determined to find out exactly how everybody in the community feels about strategic planning, how they feel about teaching and how they feel about learning.

*Participant 4*

I think AYP and student achievement are the same term in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. I feel that the district has put the document and information in the right places for us to achieve AYP.

*Participant 5*

To me, this is something they are doing right now to satisfy maybe a few people. Maybe in a few years from now they will have something else, but right now everybody is trying to make AYP even though they haven't worked out all the kinks in it yet. It is still a requirement, and everyone is running around trying to make AYP. I am a person from the old school, educating people the old way. We didn't have AYP and stuff and children still achieved. This is another way of asking people for something just to add on more to what you are doing, but I think this is needed to fulfill the *No Child Left Behind* mandates. You may need AYP to fill in the guidelines in the Federal Government, but I don't think AYP means that much to me as far as being the old educational way. If we get back to basics, then children can learn. I see no problems with that. When a school system does not make AYP, they have either—it could be in the lunch report form or it could be in the test scores. It could be a lot of things. How would the lunch form have something to do with academics? If they are tying all that in together, this really could cause problems. If they would separate everything and if they are going to require schools to make AYP, they need to change the guidelines a little bit.



*Participant 6*

It tells you where your students are. In other words, it gives you a thorough diagnosis. You will know what the students should do in order to make AYP. Well, it helps when you know where your students are. You need a thorough diagnosis, and then you will know what the student needs to meet AYP.

*Participant 7*

I have nothing to add.

*Participant 8*

Well, I see that we are getting a passing grade. You might be satisfied. You cannot start being satisfied. There has got to be other improvements. There are other levels and other steps that need to be taken. Funding is a very important part of being able to develop your strategic plan.

*Participant 9*

I think it plays a great role. If we have a good strategic plan, I think the results would flow over to what we're doing in our schools so far as assessments are concerned if you have a good plan. If our plan is weak, then AYP and other things are going to be weak as well. I think it does lead. It does lead to making AYP. We have to be very careful and make sure that we do take care of all the facets that would help us make AYP.

*Participant 10*

I think I alluded to this earlier. I think we met all of the goals that we set out to meet. I think the plan enhances the overall performance of our students in the classroom of K through 12. Again, you know if you're not going to assess the plan that you have in place, you really have no way of knowing what impact the plan would have on students meeting any of the objectives that we set for them academically. AYP is only one area that we have to look at because of the *No Child Left Behind* mandates. The strategic plan would lend itself to a broader area of concern with student achievement that looks at the total student in terms of what he/she does in the classroom as well as what he/she does outside the classroom.

### Data Analysis and Identified Themes

Selma City Schools' stakeholders were interviewed because they held valuable rich information about the strategic plan as related to the assessment data. These

interviews provided the necessary data to complete a qualitative data research, which allowed for a detailed and in-depth study of the heart of the participants' thoughts and perceptions on strategic planning and assessment data. A large amount of data was collected through the interview process and coded to form categories. A large amount of time went into coding these raw data and transforming them into useful information. A substantial amount of time was spent transcribing and reading and re-reading the interviews to make sure it was useful in the research. After careful consideration was given to coding and combining categories, the researcher heard some of the same points made over and over again to form the eight major themes for this research study. The identified themes were (1) a comprehensive good plan, (2) effective consultants, (3) include input from stakeholders, (4) stakeholders lack an understanding of the plan, (5) effective professional development, (6) effective communication, (7) identified the SWOTs, and (8) achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Each major theme that emerged from the participants' interviews was in respect to the Selma City School's stakeholders' perception of the strategic plan as related to the use of the assessment data.

#### *Theme 1: Comprehensive Good Plan*

Ten of ten participants found the strategic plan to be comprehensive in all areas. The idea of a good and comprehensive plan was stressed throughout the interview process. The majority of the participants explained that the plan encompassed the community, assessments data, mission, goals, and facility.

Participant 1 shared the following comment:

I think overall that it's a good plan and it's one that's needed, and I think that the results of it would show that it is what the community wants also. We had good facilitators.

Participant 3 echoed the sentiments regarding the comprehensive good plan.

My perception of the strategic planning process was that it was an excellent process. It was well organized, and it was also very comprehensive because it included all stakeholders. Every mechanism was used to be able to include everybody; therefore, I thought it was an excellent process. This is a long-range plan.

Participant 6 stated that the plan was focused on long-range goals and its set of benchmarks. He also stressed that the ultimate goal was to graduate students:

I think it is a very good plan. I think it focuses on some of the long-range goals that we have had for some time, particularly student achievement and student goals. I felt that it reflected the exit exam.

Participant 9 stated her feelings about the lack of knowledge some stakeholders had, but she still felt it was a good comprehensive plan.

I think the plan was pretty good. I felt like the members of the group were not knowledgeable enough about the procedures and their roles they had to play in it. These were some of the shortcomings of the plan. Yes, the plan was comprehensive.

### *Theme 2: Effective Consultants*

Eight of ten participants stated that the Selma City School System hired good, effective consultants to facilitate the process. Each participant felt that the effective consultants were positive in providing leadership with a process to produce a good effective plan that is comprehensive. The researcher selected a few passages that expressed the same thoughts.

Participant 4 stated his overall perception of the strategic plan was that the consultants made the difference in the picture.

The Strategic Planning Process was a well thought out plan and a very good design process. The system brought in a consultant; he was very thorough in helping guide us through this strategic planning process.

Participant 4 also restated that the consultants were a plus when asked to elaborate on the strengths of the process. He stated:

The consultant we brought in was very strong in the process. We had someone that was an expert in the area that knew the process from step one to the end, and we had a guide to help us from being lost in the wilderness. This person had no problem in being thorough in the explanation of the overall strategic planning process.

Participant 10 stated that the plan was basically a benchmark, and the consultants were the key component of a good plan.

We have something to look forward to, look up to, and to make ourselves a better school system. That was the goal. The people we hired to work helped us get to the next level.

Participant 2 echoed the same thoughts about the effectiveness of the consultants with these statements.

We went outside the system, and we got experts in the field of planning or who had the expertise of planning strategic plans to come in, sit down, and to help us devise a plan that would be most suitable for the populace here in Selma, Alabama. We just didn't depend upon our expertise, but we went outside the system and brought in consultants to help us devise this plan.

### *Theme 3: Included Input from Stakeholders*

As the researcher listened to the information, the main point stressed was concerning the stakeholders' input in the plan. Each participant stated that input from stakeholders was important, and it helped the integration process of assessment data and the strategic plan. All ten participants, in some other form, stated that the stakeholders

had input in the development of the plan. The researcher will share some comments made by the participants.

Participant 10 felt the stakeholder was a plus.

I think it certainly gave the stakeholders an opportunity for input on what the future of the Selma City School System should become. Anytime you have an opportunity for the stakeholders to have input that certainly gives them a sense of ownership. I think the process actually gave many of our stakeholders, not all of them, an opportunity to participate in and learn more about the education process.

Participant 2 thought the inclusion of stakeholders would give them a sense of ownership; therefore, in most of his statements he discussed inclusion of stakeholders.

We wanted to make sure that our parents are involved in the total development of our children. We wanted to make sure that our teachers are involved and that they are highly qualified and have the necessary skills in order to teach our children and carry them to the next level.

#### *Theme 4: Stakeholders' Lack of an Understanding of the Plan*

The researcher was astonished at the information provided. Ten of ten participants stated the stakeholders lacked an understanding of the plan. The researcher observed that nine of ten participants expressed that the stakeholders had input into the plan, but the majority of the stakeholders actually understood the plan as it related to assessment data. Participant 8, a stakeholder, made the following statement:

A lot of information! The evaluations that took place may have flaws. I don't know, as a parent, if I understood all the things. I did not understand the information about the assessment program.

Participant 10 made a simple but very informative statement about the lack of understanding.

I think with the facilitators that we had working with us and with the experiences they brought to the table, if you look at a weakness, it would be—do people actually understand a strategic plan?

Statements from Participant 2 are as follows:

We have not done enough to educate our parents to understand what we are trying to do as far as understanding the importance of the test. We have done some, but it's not enough. The parents don't fully understand when we tell them that the child is taking an SAT 10 test or why the child is taking the test. In other words, they are not educated enough. They need to be educated more on the importance of the test. Non-educators influence our system.

Participant 3 made the following statements:

Educators understand the process. I don't think our parents and our community leaders really understand. In many instances, I'm finding out that some of our teachers do not understand the information.

#### *Theme 5: Effective Professional Development*

A topic that surfaced during six of the interviews was effective professional development. The participants repeatedly affirmed the need for good, effective professional development. This is the key to an effective assessment program.

Participant 9 made the following statements:

I think our integration of that is working fabulously because teachers are receiving the necessary professional development. Teachers are receiving professional development in order to implement our strategic plan to ensure that student achievement is taking place. The professional development is research based. I would say that they are receiving the best that we can possibly give them at this particular time. Is there room for improvement? Yes, there's always room for improvement, but I think we're doing a fairly good job with what we have to work with right now.

Participant 2 mentioned the overall effective mechanism to integrate the process of professional development:

The overall effective mechanism to integrate the assessment process and the strategic plan has been the professional development that teachers have received. Teachers are the driving force of education. These instructors have to be well versed in the curriculum and knowledgeable about the information and vehicles available.

Participant 3 made the following affirmations:

The number two mechanism is professional development for both teachers and parents. They need to understand the documents before they can integrate. Integration of assessment and the strategic plan is easy if professional development is available.

#### *Theme 6: Effective Communication*

Another apparent theme during ten of ten interviews was communication.

Participants felt that communication was the key to an effective assessment program and a meaningful strategic plan. Participants also discussed how the information about both are communicated throughout the district. All stakeholders felt that the information was distributed effectively.

Participant 3 vehemently stated the following:

The number one mechanism is communication. It is reflected in the document that better communication would definitely be the way to improve integration.

Participant 9 admitted that information is communicated to the stakeholders in a timely and effective manner.

We do a good job communicating information to parents. Students receive information from the schools on every test taken in a timely manner. The information is sent in an easy format to understand. The information is sent home through individual report cards, the school's report card, and the individual student profile sheets. The information is displayed in the newspaper twice a year.

### *Theme 7: Identified the SWOTs*

When the reader hears the word *strategic plan*, the first thought that comes to mind is the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOTs). While interviewing the participants, this theme was repeated over and over again. The participants may not have used the term, but the concept was communicated over and over again. Ten of ten identified with the theme. Several participants had this to say about SWOTs.

Participant 1 stated the following:

When we talk about assessment, you are saying what you plan to do over a period of time. The strategic plan will identify the strengths and weaknesses of your assessment program. The strategic plan looks at your assessment data and helps you find your strengths, weaknesses, and threats.

Participant 8 is a stakeholder who puts it in simple language.

The advantage I can see when you enlist a teacher to plan an assessment—it gives you a measuring tool. When you reach your main objective, you go back and look from one to five years and see where our strong points, where our weak points are, and where we need to improve and where we lack improvement.

### *Theme 8: Achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*

With the new *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, achieving AYP is the mega term. Everybody is familiar with the term. Ten of ten participants saw this as a very important theme. Each time one of the participants expressed a concern or thought, AYP had to do with student achievement. AYP and student achievement are synonymous with each other.

Participant 9 had this statement about achieving AYP.

I think it plays a great role. If we have a good strategic plan, I think the results would flow over to what we're doing in our schools so far as assessments are concerned. If my plan is weak, then AYP and other things are going to be weak



as well. It does lead to making AYP. We have to be very careful of making sure that we do take care of all the facets that would help us make AYP.

The data analysis yielded useful insight relative to the strategic plan and assessment data. Logical themes emerged from the data as participants shared their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The themes provide a context for understanding the participants' perceptions of stakeholders regarding the strategic plan as it relates to the use of assessment data. A summation of these themes and the participants' emphasis on each is found in Table 3.

Table 3

*Themes by Participants*

Theme (category)	Participant Emphasis										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Good Comprehensive Plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Effective Consultants	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	8
Input from Stakeholders	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Lack an Understanding of Plan	X	X				X		X			4
Effective Professional Development		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			7
Effective Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Identified the SWOTs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Achieving Adequate Yearly Progress	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	9

A review of the table showed that all participants thought this was a comprehensive plan and all stakeholders were included. Eight participants viewed the consultants as effective in making sure assessment was a benchmark for assessment. All participants felt that the plan identified the SWOTs for the system in relation to

assessment. Each participant thought that achieving Annual Yearly Progress was important and the way to achieve AYP is with a strong assessment program with a strategic plan in place to use as a guide. Seven participants focused on the importance of a strong effective professional development program, while only four participants felt that there was an overall lack for understanding the plan.

## CHAPTER 5

### STUDY SUMMARY, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

#### Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if school personnel and community stakeholders were using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. Although research has been done in the area of strategic planning, there was a lack of research in the area of the usefulness of a strategic plan when analyzing assessment data. The study also sought the qualitative responses of ten stakeholders within the Selma City School District. The data revealed that these stakeholders offered considerable insight as to the perceptions of the strategic plan as related to assessment data.

The study included five chapters. Chapter One provided the introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose, the definitions of terms, and limitations for the study. In Chapter Two, a comprehensive review of the literature related to the study was provided. Chapter Three presented the methodology of the study and the design. This study used qualitative research for collection, analysis, and interpretation. The fourth chapter presented the data analysis and the narrative results related to the analysis. The last chapter, Chapter Five, provides the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study. The remaining sections of this chapter focus on a

presentation of findings related to each research question, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future study.

### Review of Findings

Qualitative researchers do not expect other researchers to replicate their findings in the sense of independently coming up with a precisely similar conceptualization (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). Therefore, the conclusions that are presented in this study have limited generalizability. The categories were used to develop the conclusions.

Conclusions are presented following the restatement of each research questions. Following the question is a discussion of the conclusions that were drawn from the study.

#### *Research Question 1*

What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of the strategic plans and assessment programs?

These stakeholders felt that the major goal of the strategic plan and the assessment program was to ensure that students received a good education in a safe and secure environment. The majority of the participants felt that the strategic plan and the assessment program were a good plan and a good program. Ten of ten participants felt that both addressed the needs of the district. The strategic plan and the assessment program were comprehensive by their designs meaning that it is long range and inclusive with respect to stakeholders. The main focus of the strategic plan and assessment were student achievement. The educational administrative leadership required to successfully implement a long-term strategic planning program must be strong, consistent, and

committed to the process. The leaders needed to be adaptable to changing conditions to maintain progress toward the end goal in spite of obstacles.

### *Research Question 2*

What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment?

The strategic plan and assessment program was an analysis of SWOTs. The linkage was discussed in the form of its effectiveness. Communication was an important component for effective linkage. The stakeholders felt that the linkage could be better if there was a clear understanding of the plans. Although student achievement was the driving force for the linkage, the participants expressed concern about the vision of the plan and program. Studies indicated that the intermediate and long-range planning had not reached a formalized level in most districts and that there was a lack of understanding among educators regarding the scope and complexity of intermediate and long-range planning (Bozeman & Schmelzer, 1984). The participants in this study echoed those sentiments. Four of ten felt that there was a lack of understanding in what was available and how and what could be integrated.

### *Research Question 3*

What were the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting (AYP) Adequate Yearly Progress?

The perception of the Strategic Planning Process and AYP can be defined as stated by the ten participants as (1) helps improve student achievement, (2) a place to revisit information, (3) benchmarks, and (4) lack of knowledge and understanding. All

participants expressed a concern that the strategic plan and the annual updates were just avenues that ensured that student achievement was linked to AYP. Ten of ten participants articulated that the plan was a good comprehensive document that was not used everyday, but as a document to visit and revisit during the academic year for a guide of progression and to remind stakeholders about what is being measured. The plan was used to reference baseline data to ensure that the district exceeds the benchmarks. The only negative comment made was there might have been a lack of knowledge and understanding when it comes to stakeholders in the community. The parents and community leaders expressed concern about not being as knowledgeable as they thought they should be.

### Conclusions

Qualitative research methods were used for this study; therefore, the researcher sought to “limit all conclusions to those situations, time periods, persons, contexts, and purposes for which the information collected is applicable” (Patton, 1987, p. 162). Cronbach (1982) argued that “extrapolations” from experimental designs (qualitative methods) can be extremely useful when based on information rich samples. As Patton (1990) stated, “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increased understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability” (p. 14). Readers may draw conclusions or see areas of transferability from this study. Readers may also draw conclusions from this study; however, they are cautioned to remember that the generalizations of these conclusions are limited in scope to the ten participants interviewed and should not be

generalized. All conclusions correspond with the list of implications and recommendations.

1. The data collected and analyzed during this study suggest that the stakeholders of the Selma City School District think that the strategic plan and the assessment program are good and comprehensive. The strategic plan is a set of long-range goals that work toward achieving AYP. From the data collected, eight themes emerged as follows: a good comprehensive plan, effective consultants, input from stakeholders, lack of understanding of the plan, effective professional development, effective communication, identified the SWOTS, and achieving AYP.
2. According to Espy (1992) successful strategic planning does not filter down from bureaucratic ivory towers. It is a reality-based activity carried out by and in consultation with those who are responsible for the organization's daily operations. Strategic planning has the greatest chance of successful development and implementation when it actively involves the staff that will be impacted by the plan. The participants in this study acknowledged that they were very active in the development of the strategic plan and the assessment program lends itself to little input because it is driven by outside people. All participants felt that input gave them ownership to the documents. Conley (1992) made the point that strategic planning techniques in education sought to place goal setting in a broader context so that stakeholders inside and outside of the organization were involved in the goal setting process.

3. A comprehensive plan is needed to set benchmarks and examine the systems assessment program according to Conley (1992). The participants thought the plan was comprehensive. The majority of the participants stated that the plan was to review baseline data to ensure that the benchmarks were being reached. It was used as a point of reference, and all participants found it to be useful and not something used everyday but as a guide to student achievement. It also contained the goals, vision, and mission for the district. The assessment program information was contained within the plan. In the review of literature, the researcher has a section devoted to strategic planning as a reform instrument in education. Strategic management and planning provided superintendents and school boards the opportunity to lead sustainable change within the school system (Conley, 1992).
4. Professional development in the area of strategic planning is something each participant stated as an area of concern. Professional development is an element that became important when the stakeholders reviewed the plan. All participants felt that the plan helped develop a professional development plan because it identified the SWOTs for the district. The Herman model of strategic planning has identified several key components in the strategic plan. The components include steps consisting of (1) developing a planning structure with the applicable agency, (2) internal scanning, (3) external scanning, (4) identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTS), (5) and identifying strategic planning areas. Once the SWOTs have been identified, it is easy to implement effective professional development.



5. Bryson (1995) emphasized the value of strategic planning in public and nonprofit businesses. He said, “It can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonably analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation” (p. 45).

Communication was the key to using the strategic plan and the assessment.

Another apparent theme during ten of the ten interviews was communication.

Participants felt that communication was the key to an effective assessment program and a meaningful strategic plan.

### Implications for Practice

The following implications are based on research findings, conclusions, reviews of related literature, and practical experiences of the researcher. This study revealed that a good strategic plan should be comprehensive in nature, have effective consultants, include input from stakeholders, have on-going professional development, provide for effective communication, identify the SWOTs, and focus on achieving AYP.

Results indicated that stakeholders must be involved in the initiation, the development, and the implementation of the plan. According to the participants, this will ensure effective linkage between all components of the plan and individual programs. Epsy (1991) stated that successful strategic planning does not filter down from bureaucratic ivory towers.

The strategic plan and the assessment programs are points of reference for the district leaders and the stakeholders. They should use these documents and refer to them

when data or information is needed. No longer can stakeholders use their own intuition about a particular situation, but they must rely on data.

Professional development in the area of strategic planning was found to be an area of concern, which indicates that professional development should be provided for new teachers, veteran teachers, parents, and stakeholders to ensure that everyone understands the plan. Professional development should be on-going and research-based because most teachers and administrators are not up-to-date on the new trends and the language used in the *No Child Left Behind* mandates.

Communication was indicated as an essential ingredient in strategic planning. Individuals involved need to make sure that they are on the same page and speak the same language. Everyone should have input.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

The findings of this study, as well as conclusions drawn, suggest some topics for further research. The following are possible areas for study:

1. Because strategic planning is mandated by the Alabama State Department of Education, more time is being spent in carrying out the process. A possible topic of research would be to find out whether this increase in emphasis has opened a new genuine interest on the strategic planning process or whether strategic planning has simply become one more unfunded mandate on the school's districts.
2. A study that shares a variety of approaches to strategic planning that could be adapted to align the district's vision and mission would be beneficial.

3. Examining models of integration of planning and assessment responsibilities into existing structures would be helpful to districts attempting to develop these processes under budget constraints.
4. Additional detailed research into specific areas of both academic strategic planning and assessment in school districts could be helpful in integrating these processes. School districts are increasingly recognizing the need to plan and assess, but may not have determined the best manner in which to implement either or both in their school district.
5. An additional study would be to examine the progression and/or regression of schools district from the onset of the strategic plan.

Finally, research should be conducted in an ongoing manner to see if the school districts are providing on-going professional development for strategic planning as personnel changes in efforts to make sound, instructional decisions that result in achieving AYP.

## REFERENCES

- Ansoff, H. I. (1976). The state of practice in planning Systems. *Sloan Management Review*, 18(2), 1-24.
- Anthony, W. P. (1985). Effective strategic planning in nonprofit organizations. *The Nonprofit World Report*. 2(4), 12-16.
- Baldwin, G. H. (1993). *School site management and school restructuring* (Monography Series No. 47). National Organization on Legal Problems of Education.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Bikien, S. K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bozeman, W., & Schemelzer, S. (1984). Strategic planning: Applications in business and education. *Planning and Change*, 15, 35-49.
- Bryson, J., Freeman, R. E., & Roering, W. (1985). *Strategic planning in the public sector: Approaches and future directions*. Discussion Paper #37, Strategic Management Research Center, University of Minnesota.
- Bryson, J. M. (1995). *Strategic planning for nonprofit organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Burkhart, P. J., & Reuss, S. (1993). *Successful a guide for strategic nonprofit agencies planning and organizations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Byrne, J. A. (1996). Strategic planning: After a decade of gritty downsizing, big thinkers are back in corporate vogue. *Business Week*, 15, 42-45.
- Carlos, L., & Amsier, M. (1993). *Site-based management: An experiment in governance* (Policy Briefs No. 20 ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 356522).
- Chaffee, E. E. (1985). Three models of strategy. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 89-98.
- Chandler, D. (1962). *The campaigns of napoleon*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

- Chin, R., & Benne, K. (1969). *The planning of change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Chubb, J. E., & Moe, T. M. (1990). *Politics, markets, and America's schools*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution
- Clark, J., and Krone, C. (1972). Toward an overall view of organizational development in the early seventies. *The Management of Change and Conflict*. Published manuscript. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Clausewitz, C. V. (1976). *On War*. Princeton, NJ.
- Conley, D. T. (1992). *Strategic planning in America's schools: An exploratory study*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco: United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Published manuscript.
- Cook, W. J. (1988). *Bill Cook's strategic planning for American schools*. Arlington, VA: Cambridge Management Group, Inc.
- Cook, W. J. (1990). *Strategic planning training manual*. Arlington, VA: Cambridge Management Group, Inc.
- Cook, W. J. (1999). *Facilitators guide for strategic planning*. Arlington, VA: Cambridge Management Group, Inc.
- Cook, W. J. (2000). *Strategic: The art and science of holistic strategy*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Cope, R. (1978). *Strategic policy planning: A guide for college and university administrators*. Littleton, CO: Ireland Educational Corporation.
- Cope, R. (1981). *Towards a natural system theory of organizational effectiveness: Integrating geopolitical, darwinistic, and strategic planning perspectives*. Washington, DC. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 203803).
- Cox, G. P. (1994). *The halt in the mud: French strategic planning from Waterloo to Sedan*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication.

- Cronbach, L. J. (1982). *Toward reform of program evaluation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Digman, L. (1986). *Strategic management: concepts, decisions, cases*. Plano, TX: Business Publications.
- Dolence, M. G., Rowley, D. J., & Lujan, H.D. (1997). *Working toward strategic change: A step-by-step guide to the planning process*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Drucker, P. (1954). *The Practice of management*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Dumaine, B. (1995). Distilled Wisdom: Buddy, Can You Paradigm? *Fortune* 9(14), 205-206.
- Ensign, M., & Alder, L. (1985). *Strategic planning: Contemporary viewpoints*. Santa Barbara, CA: AB-Clio Information Services.
- Epsy, S. (1991). *Handbook of strategic planning for nonprofit organizations*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Epsy, S. (1992). *Strategic planning: Guidelines for success*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Garner, H. G. (1995). *Teamwork models and experience in education*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Goodstein, L. D., Nolan, T. M., & Pfeiffer, J. M. (1993). *Applied strategic planning: A comprehensive guide*. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer and Company.
- Hamel, G. (1996). Competing for the future. *Harvard Business Review*. 72(4): 135-144.
- Harrison, F. (1986). *Policy, strategy, and managerial action*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Heany, D. F. (1985). *Strategic planning: Contemporary viewpoints* (ix-xv). Santa Barbara, CA: AB-Clio Information Services.
- Herman, J. L. (1991). *Education quality management*. Lancaster, PA: Tenchomic Publishing.
- Howard, M. (1975). *The Franco-Prussian war*. London: Rupert Hart-Davies.

- Howell, E. (2000). Strategic planning for a new century: Process over product. *ERIC Digest*, August 2000, Article ED 447 842. Retrieved July 12, 2001.
- Jemison, D. (1978). The contributions of administrative behavior to strategic management. *Academy of Management Review* (6).
- Johnson, L., & LaMontagne, M. (1993). Research methods: Using content analysis to examine the verbal or written communication of stakeholders within early intervention. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 17, 73-79.
- Kaufman, R., & Herman, J. (1991). *Strategic planning in education: Rethinking, restructuring, revitalizing*. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publication.
- Keller, G. (1983). *Academic strategy*. The John Hopkins University Press .
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.
- Mahan, A. (1890). *The influence of sea power on history. 1660-1783*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company.
- Matloff, M., & Snell, E. (1953). *Strategic planning for coalition warfare: 1941-1942*. Washington, DC: The War Department.
- McCune, S. D. (1986). Guide to strategic planning for educators. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*. Alexandria, VA.
- McGrath, M. D. (1998). *The Massachusetts education reform principal*. New York, NY: Quorum Books.
- Menarchik, D. (1993). *Powerlift—Getting to desert storm: Strategic transportation and strategy in the world order*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher.
- Mercer, J. L. (1991). *Strategic planning for public managers*. New York, NY: Quorum Books.
- Merriam, S. B., (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

- Mintzberg, H. (1994). *The rise and fall of strategic planning*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, United Department of Education.
- National Research Council. (2001). *Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment*. Committee on the Foundations of Assessment, J. W. Pellegrino, N. Chudowsky, & R. Glaser (Eds.). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Neufville, J. (1986). *Usable planning theory: An agenda for research and education*. In *Strategic Perspectives on Planning Practice*. Lexington, MA. D.C. Health.
- No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. No. 1007-110 (2001).
- Odden, A. R. (1991). *Education policy implementation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Palomba, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Beverly, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. Newbury, CA: SAGE
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousands Oak, CA: Sage
- Poole, M. L. (1991, April). Environmental scanning is vital to strategic planning. *Educational Leadership*, 48, 40-42.
- Rhodes, F., (2001). *The creation of the future: The role of the American university*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Roney, C. W. (2004). *Strategic management methodology: Generally accepted principles for practitioners*. Westport, CT: Praeger.



- Rowley, J.D., Lujan, H. D., & Dolence, M. G. (1998). *Strategic choices for the academy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Roueche, J. E., Johnson, L. F., & Roueche, S.D. (1997). *Embracing the tiger*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Sashkin, M., & Ergermeier, J. (1993). *School change models and processes*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Schlechty, P. C. (1990). *Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Leadership imperative for educational reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Seidman, I.E. (1991). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sevier, R. A. (2000). *Strategic planning in higher education: Theory and practice*. Washington, DC: CASE Books.
- Stake, R. E. (1979). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7, 5-8.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Steiner, G. A. (1979). *Strategic planning: What every manager must know*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Synder, J. (1999). *The ideology of the offense: Military decision making and the disaster of 1914*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sybouts, W. (1992). *Consultation services used in schools*. University of Nebraska. Lincoln, NB.
- Tyack, D. (1993). School governance in the United States: Historical puzzles and anomalies. In J. H. M. C. (Ed.), *Decentralization and school improvement* (31-43). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Valentine, E. P. (1991). *Strategic management in education: A focus on strategic planning*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Van Dyke, C. (1990). *Russian imperial military doctrine and education, 1832-1914*. New, York, NY: Greenwood Press.

- Wiersma, W. (1995). *Research methods in education: An introduction (6<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Needham Heights, NJ: Allyn and Bacon.
- Yin, R. K. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Yin R. (2003). *Application of case study research: Applied social research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form  
Identification and Certification of Research  
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and expires on February 14, 2009. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: SIMMONS, ZANETTA A.

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X060829006**

Protocol Title: *A Perception of Parents, Teachers, and Community Leaders Regarding A School District's Strategic Plan as Related to The Use of Assessment Data*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 09/26/06. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 9-26-06

Date IRB Approval Issued: 09/27/06

HIPAA Waiver Approved?: No

Marilyn Doss, M.A.  
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review  
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

470 Administration Building  
701 20th Street South  
205.934.3789  
Fax 205.934.1301  
irb@uab.edu

The University of  
Alabama at Birmingham  
Mailing Address:  
AB 470  
1530 3RD AVE S  
BIRMINGHAM AL 35294-0104

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** *A PERCEPTION OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS REGARDING A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN AS RELATED TO USE OF ASSESSMENT DATA*

**INVESTIGATOR:** Zanetta Andrea Simmons

**SPONSOR:** N/A

### Explanation of Procedures

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to find out if school personnel and community stakeholders are using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the **No Child Left Behind** mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. This study will examine the viewpoints of nine public school members living within the Selma City School District. The subjects of the study will be the stakeholders of Selma City Schools such as parents, teachers, administrators, and community members.

If you decide to participate, you will be assured that the results of this study will be used specifically for dissertation proposes only, and the confidentiality of data will be maintained. Your anonymity will be preserved at all times. Your participation is entirely voluntary. During the interview, a tape recorder will be used to ensure the accuracy of your statements. The tapes will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

Purposeful sampling will be used to identify the participants that are used for this study. Purposeful sampling means that you were selected to participate because you met certain criteria. Your work on the strategic plan and involvement in the assessment process makes you valuable in this study.

Each participant will be interviewed in mutually convenient, comfortable setting. Each person will be audio-taped and transcriptions will be detailed and summarized. Each interview will last approximately one hour in length.

UAB – IRB

Page 1 of 3  
(09/19/06)

Consent Form Approval 09/20/06  
Expiration Date 09/20/07

Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

### **Risks and Discomforts**

The risks and discomforts from participating in this research are no greater than the risks and discomforts from day-to-day living.

### **Benefits**

You may not personally benefit from your participation in this research; however, your participation may provide valuable information to your school district.

### **Alternatives**

The alternative is to choose to not participate in this research project.

### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will be kept confidential to the extent of the law and your anonymity will be preserved at all times. The UAB Institutional Review Board may review the research records for auditing purposes.

### **Withdrawal Without Prejudice**

You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice.

### **Cost of Participation**

There will be no cost to you from participation in the research.

### **Payment for Participation in Research**

There is no compensation for participation in this research project.

### Questions

If there are questions concerning this research, please feel free to contact Zanetta Simmons-Ervin at (334) 874-1605 (work) between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, (334) 877-0529 (home) after 6:00 p.m. or (251) 404-4515 (cellular) at any time. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call Ms. Sheila Moore, Director of the Office of the UAB Institutional Review Board for Human Use. You may call Ms. Moore at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816, press the option for the operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., CT.

### Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

### Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent.

---

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



## Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Zanetta Simmons-Ervin. I am a doctoral student at University of Alabama at Birmingham. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. Interviewing individuals, such as yourself, who participate in your district's assessment and/or strategic planning processes will help me investigate how these processes are linked and how they benefit the Selma City Schools.

The information gathered in my research will be used in my doctoral dissertation. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you do not have to respond to every question. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential throughout the whole process. Do I have your permission to tape record this interview and take notes to ensure the accuracy of your responses?

Location of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Date and Time \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in this position \_\_\_\_\_

Educational background \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of the strategic plans and assessment programs?

1. Tell me your perception of the strategic planning process that took place in 2004.
2. What were the major goals of the strategic planning process?
3. What is your interpretation of the mission of your district?
4. In what ways are the district's mission and goals supported by the district's strategic planning process?
5. What are the major goals of the district's assessment program?
6. In what ways are the district's mission and objectives supported by the district's assessment process?
7. What do you perceive as the strengths of the strategic planning process?
8. What do you perceive as the weaknesses of the strategic planning process?
9. What do you perceive as the strengths of the assessment process?
10. What do you perceive as the weaknesses of the assessment process?

What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders about the linkage of strategic planning and assessment?

11. How are the processes for strategic planning and assessment integrated or linked together?
12. What do you see as the advantages of linking the assessment process with strategic planning at the district level?
13. How effective are the mechanisms to integrate these processes? How would you improve the integration?
14. To what extent are assessment data utilized in the following strategic decision areas?

- A. Budgeting
  - B. Human resource planning
  - C. Facility planning
  - D. Student life programming
  - E. Academic programs
15. What types of assessment data do you believe are most relevant to Strategic Planning?
16. What types of assessment data do you believe are missing in the strategic planning process?
17. How are the results of assessment data communicated throughout the district?

What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting (AYP) Adequate Yearly Progress?

18. What is your perception of the strategic planning process and achieving AYP?
19. How does the assessment process lead or not lead to making AYP?

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

1455 K. P. Thomas Road  
Pine Hill, AL 36769  
September 8, 2006

Dr. James H. Carter  
Superintendent  
Selma City Schools  
2194 Broad Street  
Selma, AL 36701

Dear Dr Carter:

Thank you for allowing me to use your school district as part of my dissertation study concerning your strategic plan and assessment data analysis. This letter will outline the purpose and the steps necessary to obtain written approval to conduct this research project in your system.

I am requesting your permission to interview ten stakeholders in this district who were involved with the development of the strategic plan and assessment data analysis. I will also analyze relevant planning documents and test data.

The purpose of this study is to find out if school personnel and community stakeholders are using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress.

As part of the IRB approval, I am required to submit a letter from you granting permission for me to conduct research in this school district. I have drafted a sample letter that you may alter, if necessary. Please sign and forward it to me by September 14, 2006, so that I may proceed with my study. Once I receive this letter of consent from you, I will forward it to the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

I want to assure you that the results of this study will be used specifically for my dissertation, and I will maintain confidentiality of data and preserve the anonymity of the interviewees at all times. It will also be made clear to all participants in the district that their involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. The results of this study could provide valuable information to the district's effectiveness; therefore, I will gladly share an executive summary with you or any of the participants upon request.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please call me at (334) 385-2741. Your usual cooperation is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Zanetta Simmons-Ervin

APPENDIX E

LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT



OFFICE OF THE  
SUPERINTENDENT

## SELMA CITY SCHOOLS

300 WASHINGTON ST.  
P. O. BOX F  
SELMA, AL 36702-0318  
(334) 874-1600

September 8, 2006

Mrs. Zanetta Simmons-Ervin  
1455 K. P. Thomas Road  
Pine Hill, AL 36769

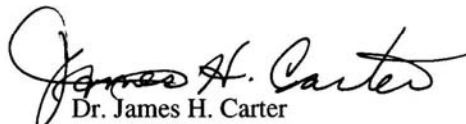
Dear Mrs. Ervin:

I am writing to convey my support for your doctoral dissertation research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I understand that you will need to interview various members of our faculty and staff to discuss the relationship of assessment data and the strategic plan in our district. I also understand that you will review various documents related to those areas.

I also understand that you will schedule individual appointments of 45 to 60 minutes each, in advance, with faculty, staff, and community stakeholders during the month of September 2006. You have agreed to emphasize to these individuals that their participation is entirely voluntary. I further understand that you will protect the confidentiality of these discussions.

Thanks for soliciting my input and approval for this research project. I wish you much success in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

  
Dr. James H. Carter  
Superintendent



APPENDIX F

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

1455 K. P. Thomas Road  
Pine Hill, Alabama 36769  
September 8, 2006

Dear Potential Participant:

I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am in the process of conducting research for my dissertation—*A Perception Of Parents, Teachers, and Community Leaders Regarding A School District's Strategic Plan As Related To Use Of Assessment Data*. Your role and involvement with both assessment and the strategic plan for the Selma City School System make you vital to my research topic.

The purpose of my research study is to find out if stakeholders are using assessment data from the strategic plan to help meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates. The analysis of data from this study may be information that could be used by other school districts across the state.

You have been identified as an individual who could provide valuable information for this research project. I would like to schedule a time to interview you that will last from 45 to 60 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential, and I will preserve your anonymity at all times. I also want to emphasize that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you may withdraw your consent at any time. Because the results of this study may contain information that could improve your district's effectiveness, I will gladly share an executive summary of the study with you upon your request. I will also share a copy of the recorded interview before I compile the data.

My interview sessions will begin during the month of September and end at the latter part of October. If this schedule is not convenient for you, please advise. Attached is a copy of the questions you will be asked.

Please read and sign the attached consent form if you agree to be a part of this study. You may contact me at (251) 404-4515 or email me at [zanetta@excite.com](mailto:zanetta@excite.com) if there are questions. I look forward to interviewing you.

Sincerely,

Zanetta Simmons-Ervin

Attachments

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION (SAMPLE)

11/15/2006  
Interview with James  
James' Office

Zanetta:

Good morning James, I have three major questions that I would like to ask you and then each question is broken down into parts. So the first major question would be:  
What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders in the Selma City School District as related to the major goals of the strategic plans and assessment programs?  
Tell me your perception of the strategic planning process that took place in 2004.

James:

I think it certainly gave the stakeholders an opportunity for input on what the future of the Selma City School System should become. Anytime you have an opportunity for the stakeholders to have input that certainly gives them a sense of ownership. I think the process actually gave many of our stakeholders, not all of them, an opportunity to participate in and learn more about the education process, more about what we offer in the school district in the city school system of Selma.

Zanetta:

What were the major goals of the strategic planning process?

James:

Well, one of them, I guess, I would certainly look at the overall assessment of what the future plans, some of the strengths and weaknesses in the district. And then also what we wanted the strategic plan to do to give us a road map on how we could further enhance student achievement, further improve facilities, further enhance what we do in the budgeting process and also give us a snapshot of all of the resources that we have in the school district.

Zanetta:

What is your interpretation of the mission of your district?

James:

Well, you know, people have big -- a lot of people have misnomers, I guess, about a mission. I have always looked at a mission. We have certain verbiage that we use, but I certainly look at a mission or school district as making sure that you have safety and

discipline, curriculum, quality teaching and that students are actually learning and the environment is conducive for learning. So, you know, we can come up with a statement of mission but actually when you look at our mission I think I would sum it up in those areas that I just mentioned and certainly be good stewards of the taxpayer dollars.

Zanetta:

In what ways are the district's mission and goals supported by the district's strategic planning process?

James:

Well, it certainly is like a good architect. Certainly, you have to plan quite well in terms of what areas we need to enhance and will give us a real good -- I'd say somebody from the outside looking inside of what we are doing I think extremely well. And on the other hand, it would give us some things that we aren't do as well as we could do. So I think if you look at a strategic plan, it's like giving us strategies to enhance what we should be doing to improve the overall performance of all of the stakeholders we have in the school district.

Zanetta:

What are the major goals of the district's assessment program?

James:

Well, it's I know we have certain verbiage, again, we use but I think you certainly have to look at what we're doing in terms of measuring student achievement when it comes conscious standards and the curriculum. When we look at professional development whether or not we're improving instruction, when we look at the resources we have. We have adequate resources to meet the needs of our students to give the teachers and the administration the resource they need to implement the program. So the assessment piece is critical in terms of act of measuring what and how well we're doing the things we say we're going to do to improve the overall achievement of our students and the overall performance of our stakeholders.

Zanetta:

In what ways are the district's mission and objectives supported by the district's assessment process.

James:

Well, they kind of, you know, it's you can't have one without having the other. You can have a plan, but you have to have a way to assess the plan. In this thing I think if you look at it, the strategic plan wouldn't be as significant as it is if we didn't have a way to

assess how well we implemented the plan. I think the assessment of the plan go hand in hand. Once you develop a plan you have to have a way to assess it.

Zanetta:

What do you perceive as the strengths of the strategic planning process? Again getting input from all the stakeholders. What do you perceive as the weaknesses of strategic planning process?

James:

I think what the facilitators that we had working with us and with the experiences they brought to the table, I think if you look at a weakness it's people actually understand what a strategic plan is. I think those would be weaknesses. But the process itself I think you couldn't ask for a better facilitator than one that we have.

Zanetta:

What do you perceive as the strengths of the assessment process?

James:

Again, let me kind of reiterate. When you look at assessment, I think based on what we're doing as a central office staff, what we're doing as a local administrator would say that we are indeed looking at student achievement reassessing that we are and will continue to assess facilities. So I think with strategic plan give us -- I know when I read through that it gave us a real good overview of whether or not our facilitative structure was satisfactory or not satisfactory whether it had good environment for students to learn in and some of the things we needed to correct. So I think when you look at the overall picture it's the assessment piece has to be people who understand what we actually mean by assessment and be able to utilize the process to make sure that the plan has been implemented.

Zanetta:

What do you perceive as the weaknesses of the assessment process?

James:

I wouldn't necessarily say there's a weakness. I think it depends on the personnel if you're doing assessments. I think it also depends on how the strategic plan that was seen by all of the stakeholders. Especially people who want to do the analysis of the plan and make sure that it is doing the things that we're hoping would do when the plan was implemented and was developed.

Zanetta:

The first part just kind of gives a general concept of the planning process. The second part is dealing more with the linkage.

James:

Well, you know, any time you're going to do planning, you have to have a process. And the process itself will lend support to developing a category of people. And, again, I may overuse the word stakeholders to give input whether the teachers or principals or parents of central office staff to give input on what are some of the things that they see within the district or within their school building, within their school community. The overall picture of how well things are being done to improve education in the Selma City School System.

Zanetta:

What do you see as the advantages of linking the assessment process with strategic planning at the district level?

James:

Again, if you have only a mention of the goals or objectives of a plan, then actually you don't have a plan. You've got to have to be able to have major objectives to make sure that within a certain time frame that you have met a certain percentage of the goals and objectives you set in the implementation of your plan. I think we have a way of assessing these goals and objectives as we move through the process. It already had been put in place for us.

Zanetta:

How effective are the mechanisms to integrate these processes? How would you improve the integration?

James:

Well, I think based on what we have in our strategic plan and based on the knowledge that many of the stakeholders have in terms of their role or their plan I think that the integration of the assessment and the plan is I couldn't ask for it to be done any better than what we're doing right now. And I think that's the reason why because we had a lot of follow up. And when we actually use the data that we have to formulate other plans that would be geared toward certain problems and certain areas of the school district. I think when you take from the plan and look at it and then assess certain schools in the district, you can pretty much find out whether or not we are reaching the goals and objectives that we set. But all of them must be ready to go.

Zanetta:

To what extent are assessment data utilized in the following strategic decision areas?

a. Budgeting

James:

Anytime you utilize a strategic plan and assessment of that plan and terms of the budgeting process, the budget should be tied. I think if you look at what we're doing the entire budget that we have I seem sure that almost a hundred percent of what we have in place in terms of programs are tied to student achievement.

Zanetta:

b. Human resource planning

James:

Again, I think you look at the professional development part of it. The money that we spend for that is certainly tied to improving teacher strategies. Improving the support people or jobs of the scripts for what they have to do in supporting the teachers in certain instances. And certainly with the other classified employees. I think everybody has to have a certain amount of professional development. I think when we look at how we utilizing that again, all is tied to improving student achievement or closing the achievement gap.

Zanetta:

c. Facility planning

James:

Very critical based on what I have seen again in the strategic plan. When I first read it, it gave me a better view of how well our facilities are being maintained and what areas they weren't being maintained as well as others. We had some work excellent. We had some rank unsatisfactory. But the good thing about it, we didn't have any that were unsatisfactory. What I like about it, it had a point system. I think I recall there were 200 points that was given to each facilities and I'm sure with the surveys that were done with our stakeholders they were able to rank the facilities in the different categories. And I don't think any of them are considered satisfactory.

Zanetta:

d. Student life programming



James:

I don't think you can ask a school district in terms of what we have here. In terms of whether or not we have the knowledge to meet the plan. I think we have excellent plans including students who are disabled. I think that's a tremendous push for us over the last years to make everything we do for our student all-inclusive. I think the treatment plan pointed out.

Zanetta:

e. Academic programs

James:

Cutting edge. Again, we have a very rigorous challenging curriculum and K through 12. And I don't think—we are offering the students challenging courses in all grade levels.

Zanetta:

What types of assessment data do you believe are most relevant to strategic planning?

James:

I think when you look at assessment data when you look at student criteria reference tests, the Alabama reading and math or when you look at the Alabama high school graduation exam. I think that type of assessments give you the truth of how their students are performing based on the content standards for the state of Alabama.

Zanetta:

What types of assessment data do you believe are missing in the strategic planning process?

James

If I had to look at data that I felt was necessary sometimes in terms of how I know some of them in there but how well are we actually evaluated in our personnel and are we really giving them the help that they need to become more effective at doing their job. I think we can certainly look at that as being something that we need to pay more attention to.

Zanetta:

How are the results of assessment data communicated throughout the district?

James:

Well, through meeting with the teachers, parents and students. Certainly we have student profile sheets to disseminate. We have the report cards that we send out to parents and to teachers and to media. So through the media, through parents and through all of our stakeholder. We're able to get the data out to the public.

Zanetta:

What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and community leaders regarding the factors in the Annual Review and Update Phase of strategic planning for meeting (AYP) Adequate Yearly Progress?

What is your perception of the strategic planning process and achieving AYP?

James:

Well, I think with the strategic planning that we have we follow that plan. And I think I alluded to this earlier. I think we meet all of these goals that we set for students regardless of whether they are AYP or students doing better on ACT. I think the plan itself to enhance again the overall performance of our students in the classroom of K through 12.

Zanetta:

How does the assessment process lead or not lead to making AYP?

James:

Again, you know if you're not going to assess the plan that you have in place you really have no one knowing what impact the plan would have on student meetings any of the objectives that we set for them academically. AYP is only one area that we have to look at because of No Child Left Behind. But actually the strategic plan itself would lend itself to a broader area of concern with student achievement that looks at the total students in terms of what they do in the classroom as well as what they do outside the classroom.

Zanetta:

And what about the annual review of the strategic plan?

James:

I think that's something that certainly should be ongoing and things that we have done well. We should make note of that and then we look at some things that we need to

improve as the year's go by, I think we ought to review those things and add to or take out some things that we don't need. But things that we haven't done well, work harder on those things but add to those things as we see the needs arising. That we know will become a part of the educational process and community. We see those needs out there we should add those needs as part of our objective to our procedure plan.