Academic Intervention Services-How Can We Make It Work?

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Abstract
Academic Intervention Services (AJS) are in response to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The state of New York has legislated that schools are required to offer students who fail to meet the standards on state tests services to close the gap. This research will look at the history behind why the federal government has stepped in and required states to do something about low achievement scores. The review also looks at the different practices by other states to meet NCLB. AIS is a complicated program and this paper looks at what it entails, how it is determined what students are serviced and, why and how the students are serviced. AIS can be useful in meeting the needs of those students who might not be able to meet state requirements and help them to be successful in their educational process. This research uncovers the best practices for assisting students through AIS.

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Academic Intervention Services

How Can We Make It Work?

Academic Intervention Services (AIS) are in response to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The state of New York has legislated that schools are required to offer, to students who fail to meet the standards on state tests, services to close the gap. The state of New York's intention, when it created AIS, was to help close the gap between those students who were meeting the state requirements and those students who were falling short. The uncertainty behind AIS is that the methods used to accomplish the goals set by the state and the NCLB Act, that of closing the gap, are left to the individual schools discretion as to how best accomplish this feat. With this lack of regulation, the schools are free to provide AIS services in any manner they wish. The question is which method of providing services is the most effective? This paper looks at the Academic Intervention Services that are being provided by different schools throughout Monroe County. The AIS providers were asked a series of questions to determine their practices and whether they thought the services provided in their schools were effective.

The topic of AIS interested me because of the position of Math Lab teacher that I held during the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year. AIS was something that I was not familiar with and I felt that, if I was going to be involved in providing these services, it would be helpful to find out what types of services were available and being offered in different schools in the area. The process of researching these programs revealed that there were a variety of ways for providing the required services. Being aware of these differences would help me to better understand my purpose in the classroom. It would also allow me to
take pieces of each program that worked the best for students and create a better and more effective AIS program.

In order to determine the types of services that were being offered in the area a survey was used. The surveys provide an overview of the types of services that were being used and provided feedback as to their perceived effectiveness. The hope was that there would be some common practices among the schools with regard to successful ways to provide the services required by the state through the NCLB. The information that was collected would also serve to educate me as to what is available and how these different methods were being used. From this information I could draw conclusions as to what the most successful practices were in providing AIS so I could be more effective in my own career.

This paper will highlight and compare what services are being offered in the Monroe County area. Determinations will be made regarding which services seem to be more successful based on the observations of the providers and their responses. Conclusions will be added to this information in effort to make a determination of what services might be the best to use in the school systems.


**Literature Review**

Academic Intervention Services (AIS) have been offered in schools throughout the state of New York. These services were required by the federal government in response to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In order to understand why the federal government was enforcing NCLB it was important to look at the history of American education and how it has progressed to its current state, which will be the first section of the literature review.

The NCLB required that states address the education of their low achieving students and look for ways to make improvements, helping to close the gap for those students who might be struggling in the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. The state of New York has addressed this requirement through the implementation of AIS. The literature review looks at what AIS involved, and how other states have addressed these NCLB requirements.

The literature review also shows why the services provided by programs such as AIS, might be needed, and what the requirements are that determine which students should receive such services. When these students are identified, it is necessary to identify what types of programs might be used to help meet their needs.

The conclusion tells that through services such as AIS, this nation will be able to help close the gap for those students who struggle to meet the standards that are written by the State Boards of Education. The national government wishes to instill a confidence in the educational system by closing this gap and raising the standards of our educational system so that the United States can keep pace with the rest of the world.
History leading up to NCLB

In the early 20th century, the United States was considered to be the leader of the world with regard to the quality of education it offered to its people. Gerald Gutek (2000) showed this opinion was something the American people and government were proud of. The educational system was run by the individual states. Gutek (2000) stated that since the mid-nineteenth century, when public schools started in New England, the local governments established and financed their own educational systems. The federal government did not have any part in the organization and financing of the educational system. Gutek (2000) reported that there were differences in the quality of the education from state to state due to the financial status of the states. There were even differences in the quality of education between rural and urban settings. There were plenty of times when the federal government was tempted to get involved in education, but it was always considered the kiss of death for a president to consider getting involved in funding and running the states education.

This all changed, however, in the late 1950's. According to Gutek (2000) the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1957 marked the first involvement in the education of the American public by the federal government. Until this time the federal government had little involvement in the educational system. It was the responsibility of the states to monitor and finance the education for their residents. Most federal officials did not want to get involved because the people liked the way things were handled by the states, for the most part. Gutek (2000) stated that the American public and the federal government were concerned that America might lose their status as the leader in quality of education because the Russians were getting the upper hand in the space race due to their concentration in math and science.
President Eisenhower, with the aid of Sputnik, determined that all of the debates over the previous decade regarding federal involvement in education had to be acted upon. Gutek (2000) explained that the intense rivalry between the United States and the USSR caused an apprehension about the quality of education in the US and led to a fear for national security. The competition in space between the US and the USSR led people to believe that the US education system was declining. The government felt that they needed to step in and offer aid and guidance to restore their world class status. The educational system had fallen behind in science, math and technology. The curriculum was criticized for not being superior to that of the USSR. The US also feared that, with the Cold War, falling behind the USSR in educational standards would then mean falling behind the USSR in the arms race and that would mean a threat to national security.

The NDEA opened the doors for the federal governments' involvement in education. In the early 1980's Gutek (2000) pointed out that the federal government put forth the charge that American schools were not providing what the students needed. Student’s scores on standardized tests were on the decline. The government attributed these declines to incompetent teachers and a watered down curriculum. According to Brian Bottage (1993), President Reagan used the term *A Nation at Risk* to describe this problem. Bottage (1993) stated that Terrel Bell, who was the U.S. Secretary of Education in 1983, was the guiding force behind the *Nation at Risk* movement. He headed the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) that reported the status of American education. Math and English were the two main areas of concern. The NCEE wanted states to raise their standards in order to keep pace with the rest of the world. The United States was continuing
to fall behind other countries and the federal government felt it was because of the insufficient curriculum.

In the late 1990's the decline of education continued. John Gehring (2001) stated that states such as Massachusetts continued to pump money into programs to improve education. Gehring (2001) told how the State Education Department provided eighty million dollars to schools for programs and tutoring that helped students who were in danger of failing state tests. The areas that were of most concern, according to Brian Bottage (1999), were English and math. In 1989, President Bush also stressed education reform in the areas of math and English.

As of July 1, 2000 each school district in the state of New York, according to the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) website (2005), was required to have a written plan for Academic Intervention Services (AIS) for grades K through 12. Pat George (2004) told how the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) marked the beginning of the No Child Left Behind era. In 2001, Congress reauthorized the ESEA to reinforce elementary and secondary education in the United States. George (2004) enumerated that the ESEA required accountability for results, proven practices based on research, increased parental involvement, increased flexibility, and high qualified teachers as the road to improving the state of education. Craig Jerald (2002) stated that, "NCLB might appear to be just another blip on the screen, but the law redefines what it takes to be a successful school system" (p.16). The No Child Left Behind legislation, according to George (2004), understood "that schools would follow the proven practices requirement and focus on student achievement" (p.13). He further stated that these proven practices were tutoring, second periods of instruction, summer school, extended school days, and pullout services. Jerald (2002)
reported that the NCLB Act required states to separately report school and district level test scores for different groups of students. These reports kept states from hiding students who were not meeting the standards and held the districts accountable for closing the gap. According to Jerald (2002) "the state of education in the United States was deteriorating and President George W. Bush felt that measures needed to be put in place to reverse this trend of falling farther behind" (p.16). The NCLB also charged the individual states and school districts with being accountable for closing the gap for those students who were not meeting the standards. George (2004) believed that using resources available to the schools, such as proven practices based on research, high quality teachers, and parental involvement, student achievement would improve and the standards and the level of education would also improve.

What is AIS and why is it needed?

Many states responded to this legislation with legislation of their own. The state of New York responded to the NCLB by looking at ways that might help close this gap for the students who were falling behind. The response to NCLB was something called Academic Intervention Services (AIS). According to New York State Education Department (NYSED) (2005), there were several reasons that students received AIS. The program was designed to supply students with extra instruction in those subjects where they were not meeting the standards. It was also designed to help build and strengthen student skills. Students also learned how to become more organized by learning organizational skills and problem solving strategies. The student's critical thinking skills were increased through work in the program.
Finally, AIS could help reach students by looking at their learning strengths and learning styles and teach to their strengths. AIS is defined, according to the NYSED (2005) web site, as follows, “additional instruction which supplements the regular instruction in order to assist students in meeting the state learning standards” (sec. 100.1). NYSUT (2005) and Lynn Olson (2000) agreed that AIS was implemented to help students who were struggling to meet state standards in math and English for grades K through 12, and for social studies and science for grades 4 through 12. These students received additional instruction time to help them achieve the state learning standards. The method that districts in the state used would be left up to the individual districts.

Some considered AIS as being a reactive strategy. However, according to NYSUT (2005), when AIS was used correctly, it worked well as a proactive tool. When a teacher believed that a student had fallen behind, AIS could be used as a tool to help the student stay on track. Diane Bryant (2005) believed that “it is advantageous to identify those students who are at risk and to provide them with the needed instruction in order to boost the core curriculum” (p 340). The level of services varied based on what the needs of the student were. More intensive instruction was given to those students who did not respond to core instruction. Those students who scored a one, out of four, on the state tests needed more help and programming than those who may have received a passing grade but may benefit from additional help that was given by the program.

There were many reasons why a student may be in need of AIS services. Bottage (1993) pointed out those students who experienced academic or behavioral problems were students who were at risk. Bryant (2005), stated “without early identification and intervention, many students with math difficulties (MD) may not develop a level of mathematics proficiency that
would be sufficient for success on high-stakes assessment administered in the early grades” (p. 340). Those students who had MD may also have difficulties with comprehension of mathematics vocabulary according to Bryant (2005). When they did not understand the vocabulary, it made it hard for them to succeed in that core content area. Bryant (2005) also believed that some students had a cognitive deficit which caused them to need additional services such as AIS.

AIS was not meant to replace special education services. It has not been classified as a special education service, according to the NYSUT (2005) site. These services were meant to supplement the services provided by special education; in fact many students who received AIS were not coded students. NYSUT (2005) gave several criteria for those students who were eligible to receive AIS services in the state of New York. The first criterion was that the service helped students get additional help in their weakest subjects. Next, the regular education teacher and the AIS teacher must collaborate and communicate on the students’ weaknesses and use this information to help the student meet state standards. Students were evaluated on a regular basis and the instruction was adjusted to help the students improve. Many learning skills were used to strengthen the students’ skills including teaching organizational skills and problem solving strategies.

The AIS teacher was also required to teach the student how to respond to questions that require critical thinking skills. Bottage (1999) stated, in remedial classes, it was important to teach the students how to use different strategies, strengthen computation, increase functional math skills and skill acquisition by creating problems that reflect real life situations. The instruction in the regular class did not change, but in the remedial class, accommodations included review and recovering of concepts that were taught in the regular classroom.
Remedial classes that were a part of the New York educational system today were similar to AIS classes in this aspect. AIS provided different materials and resources to meet the different learning styles of the students. Finally, the AIS program involved the parents or guardians by helping them to learn how to support their child’s needs.

The AIS program was designed to help students in other areas. The guidance and counseling services of the school district were used to help students deal with other barriers such as attendance problems and family issues. This was important because these aspects of the student’s life often contribute to their ability to meet the state standards. When students had issues outside the academic setting, they were not often able to concentrate on the content and missed out on instruction due to absences or other factors.

Although all states were required to offer some form of remediation, the name given to each program varied from state to state. New York was the only state that used the term AIS. The Florida Department of Education (2005) used the term Supplemental Academic Instruction to describe their program. They also had a program for their public middle schools called Middle Grades Reform Act (MGRA). Both of these programs were in response to NCLB. The MGRA required that schools implement reading and math programs by October 1, 2004. These programs were very similar to the AIS program found in New York. They both provided remedial and supplemental services for those students who failed to meet standards on state testing. They also used modified curriculum, tutoring, mentoring, class size reduction and an extended school year to meet the requirements put forth by the state of Florida.

Michigan was another of the many states that, in the past, had programs that were similar to AIS. According to Ann Kuperberg (1993), Michigan created Chapter I which was in
response to students not meeting standards. The state used remediation and intervention programs to increase reading scores. They used pull out programs in order to provide these services. Pullout programs were rarely used in the New York AIS system, because students who were pulled out of their regular classes were more likely to fall behind in those subjects at the expense of receiving the services. This was the main reason why more programs used the extended day or a second period to provide services.

**How are services determined?**

One of the major determinates for whether a student received services is how that student performed on state tests. These tests were generally taken by students during fourth and eighth grades and then, again, during high school. Although these were the required benchmarks the Department of Education (2005) stated that services could begin anywhere from kindergarten through 12th grade. If school districts feel that a student was not meeting the state standards, then the schools had the right and the obligation to provide services to the student. According to Jerald (2002), because of NCLB, district leaders were aggressively using test scores and teacher evaluation to identify low achieving students. Once these students were identified, they are provided with the extra help and time to help get them back on track. In New York, NYSED (2005) stated that AIS was intended to assist those students who were at risk of not achieving the state standards or pass the state required exams.

The tests that were used for determining if a student needed additional help were taken at different times during a students' schooling. NYSUT (2005) showed that in fourth grade students are measured in math and English. If the student did not achieve a one or a two on these benchmark tests then AIS services were provided. Also, in fourth grade, students took
the science exam and needed to score higher than 30 on the objective section. In fifth grade the students took a social studies test. In the eighth grade students took math and ELA exams, both required a score higher than a two. They also were required to take another science and social studies test. Finally, in high school New York students were required to take Regents exams. Passing these regents tests was required in order to receive a diploma at the conclusion of high school in New York.

The Department of Education (2005) and NYSUT (2005) agreed that proper protocol needed to be followed when a student was placed in a program for additional help. This began with the notification of parents or legal guardians. This notification told the parents why the student was being referred for these services, and what the specific area of need was. This notification was done by the administration, usually the principal or the school counselor. In this notification the parents were also informed about the consequences for not achieving the expected performance levels. NYSUT (2005) mentioned that not all students received the same level of services; the level of service would differ based on the students’ needs, which included tests scores and other information about the student. Those students who showed a greater need may receive more intensive services than other students. NYSED (2005) also stated that disabled students were entitled to AIS as long as these services were not covered under their IEP.

Parents were continually involved in the AIS process. NYSUT (2005) stated that every semester the student received the services there needed to be communication between the school and the parents. The parents had the right to a consultation and must have received quarterly reports on the progress being made by their child.
remedial programs, the student might identify with a subject that they might be stronger in. Using this knowledge and interest helped the student in the weaker subject.

In most AIS settings the class size was small. Bryant (2005) said that this enabled the teacher to differentiate the instruction much more easily, in order to meet the individual student’s needs. Anthony Grieco (2003) recommended the use of technology in AIS settings. Using technology was a good tool in developing the students’ interest and making the learning experience more enjoyable for the student. Finally, one other strategy that Council (1992) recommended to use in the remedial setting was graphic organizers. Using graphic organizers helped the student to look at the content in a different mode that may help lead to success.

In the state of New York, James Kadamus (2000) believed that BOCES could be active partners with districts in helping to set up AIS programs. He warned, though, that it was the districts’ responsibility to design the program. However, they could ask BOCES for help and ideas, but the district needed to be the leader in making the changes to their instructional program. BOCES has helped districts by providing professional development regarding programs and strategies, by operating summer school programs.

Other states that have complied with the NCBL used some of the same strategies that New York used in their AIS programs. Linda Jacobsen (2001) revealed that the state of Georgia used reduced class size and extra time for instruction to service those students who were not meeting standards. Jerald (2002) said “that some states, such as Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, had programs that provided schools in high poverty areas with extra funds each year to extend instruction” (p. 21). This was one way that they met the needs of those students who were covered under the NCLB. Jerald (2002) also showed that
“Tennessee paid bonuses to effective teachers who volunteered in the neediest city schools to offer services to students who struggle” (p. 21). Grieco (2003) reported that the state of Pennsylvania serviced high need students through tutoring, mentoring, small group settings and summer remediation.

Conclusion

When a program such as AIS was being offered to students, it was designed to help bring the student back in line with the standards. Council (1992) suggested that school districts needed to realize that remedial services were not just the responsibility of the teacher that supplied the service, but that all members of the staff were responsible for the success of the program. When everyone was working together, this only helped all of those involved. The students gained from this experience because more teachers become involved in their education. The staff benefited because they worked collaboratively and become familiar with different ways to reach students of all levels. Administration also benefited because they, too, became involved with the students and that enriched the lives of all involved. Council (1992) also suggested that, “with the smaller class sizes; the teacher was able to develop a closer relationship with the student, which in turn, showed the student that they matter to someone” (p. 110).

The NCLB Act was designed to close the gap in education for students in the United States. The government feared that our nation was falling behind the rest of the world with regard to the quality of our education. Jerald (2002) concluded that in order to close the gap, our educational system needed to do four things. First, the system needed to use standards to reshape instruction. If the standards were consistent then the instruction would be consistent.
This consistency lead to the second point brought out by Jerald (2002); that clear and public standards could supply a benchmark for what students should know at different grade levels. This benchmark made it clear for the educational system to recognize which students were not meeting the standards and enabled the system to help those students to close the gap and become successful. Third, the standards needed to be tied to a rigorous curriculum. If the curriculum and standards were not challenging, the students would not be able to meet the benchmarks that would bring the level of education up to the rest of the world. The final way to close the gap, according to Jerald (2002), was to find ways to provide the students who needed it, with extra instruction so that they could become successful and reach the high standards placed before them.

AIS programs in New York were being designed and improved upon over the last few years. With the cooperation of teachers, staff, administration and parents, there will continue to be improvements to the program so that the gap is closed and all students can achieve the benchmark standards that have been set before them. When this occurs the NCLB will have been a successful venture by the federal government. The ultimate goal was to improve the level of education in America so that our nation would continue to be one of the leaders in the world. If our level of education continued to decline, as perceived in the eyes of our government and our population, we would not be able to compete with other countries in the world of the future.
Methodology:

I surveyed teachers and administrators who were involved with the AIS program in the school in which they teach. Thirteen different schools in the Monroe county area were surveyed. When substitute teaching at different schools in the area I met with these teachers and interviewed them during my free time. When I signed in for the substitute assignment, I asked the office to identify the people involved with school’s AIS program. In some instances I surveyed schools in which I did not substitute teach. These schools were chosen because of contacts with AIS providers in the building. The interviews were either done over the phone or in person.

Once I found out who the teacher was, I located this person and introduced myself. I explained to the teacher that I was doing a survey for my thesis regarding the AIS services that were being provided in local schools. I gave this person a letter of introduction (Appendix A), a list of survey questions which I created (Appendix B), and a consent form (Appendix C). I then determined when it would be convenient for them to meet with me later in the day to discuss the survey questions and make arrangements to discuss their answers. During the discussion, I asked them to expand on their thoughts and took notes on the discussion.

After the interview was completed, the information was analyzed and organized for later tabulation for the result section of this paper. When all of the interviews were concluded, the responses were compared and reported within the result section by question from the interview questions.
Results:

The survey was broken down into twelve main questions. What follows are the findings of those twelve questions as a result of the interviews.

What format was being used to provide services?

This question was one of the first questions asked in the survey. There are several ways that Academic Intervention Services can be offered to students who are in need of help. The methods included a math lab setting, push-in or pull-out services, before or after school help, a second period with a group of students who work at a slower pace, or a study hall or other academic period designed for additional help. The schools that were surveyed, in most cases, did not use just one way to service their students, but used a combination of methods to meet their student’s needs. Using different types of services made it easier to meet the needs of the varied student population. Scheduling was also a reason for using varied methods of service.

The math lab setting was a method that nine of the thirteen schools used. The labs were usually taught by a teacher who was certified in the area of math and whose sole role was that of AIS provider. Except for the Math lab, this teacher had no other contact throughout the day with these students. The lab time was an actual class period in the students’ schedule that took the place of a study hall or an elective class. In the lab setting the students received additional help from the provider on the subject of math.

The push-in or pull-out method was used by five different schools. This method was modeled closely after traditional special education services. The AIS provider went into the regular math class along with the regular math teacher. The AIS provider circulated around
the classroom, reinforcing content or trying to give students another way to look at the materials given. In some cases the AIS provider pulled a group of students out of the classroom to reinforce or cover topics that the students did not understand.

The third method, used by seven of the schools, was before or after school help. This method was more of a one-to-one type of service and was used for those students who needed extended individual time to grasp a concept that was not understood in the regular class setting. This also included a tutoring setting for the students.

Three schools found that services were needed by a large number of students. To best service these students, the schools scheduled these students to two class periods of math per day. The provider was a math teacher who took extended time to teach the same content that was otherwise covered in one period a day to those students who did not need AIS services. The pace of this class was slower and the content was taught in the first session with the class and then, in the second session, the students explored and practiced, under the provider’s supervision, to reemphasize the content.

The last method, that four schools used to service the students, was to use study hall time or some other academic support time to provide services. The students were allowed to go and see either their regular math teacher or an AIS provider during this time period for additional help. This method did not allow for a regularly scheduled help session, but still afforded the student to get additional help.

What pedagogical methods were used?

Most of the AIS providers and teachers that were interviewed agreed that students learn in a variety of ways. Therefore it was necessary to offer different pedagogical methods in
order to reach the students. It was agreed by all, that students have different learning styles and that varied approaches needed to be used to help the students to close the gap in meeting the state requirements.

Several of the schools felt that having one-to-one instruction or smaller student to teacher ratios was an effective way to meet the student’s needs. Having more of a one-to-one interaction allowed the students to open up and ask questions they may not have asked in a regular, larger, classroom setting.

Another way to help the students was to pre-teach the topics to the students in a lab setting or a pull-out setting. The pre-teaching of the content helped to familiarize the students with what was going on in the regular classroom and enabled the students to be aware of the concept before going into the regular classroom setting. This helped to boost the student’s confidence and enabled them to have a better understanding of the topic from the beginning.

Some of the AIS providers also used re-teaching as a strategy to reinforce what students heard in the classroom. When the provider re-taught, they used different strategies to teach the concept. For example, if the regular class used worksheets to reinforce a concept, the provider might use some type of manipulative to give the student a hands-on learning experience to get the concept across to the student in a different way, teaching to the student’s varied learning styles.

In addition to teaching or re-teaching concepts, several of the schools allowed the students to work on homework during lab or study hall times. This allowed the students to have additional help when they worked on the assignment.
In several of the high school settings AIS services were used to help students who were in danger of not passing the Math A state exam. There were several ways providers worked with students in this situation. Small study groups were used to review prior tests and to discuss and work on test taking strategies. The results from these practice tests were used to identify areas that needed additional re-teaching. Individual instruction was also used to cover topics when students needed additional background or help in order to understand the concept.

Those schools who used the second period, which reached a large number of students in one setting, took the curriculum at a slower pace in order to be sure the students comprehended the concepts. They used the first period of instruction to introduce the topic and the second period to practice and expand on the concept. The schools that used this method felt it enabled them to reach a larger number of students in one setting.

In the middle school setting, two schools used a program entitled Enrichment. The Enrichment program was designed to help students become stronger with concepts that typically were found on the eighth grade assessment. The designated students were involved in the Enrichment class for an eight week period and reviewed the major concepts that often proved most troublesome.

What size were the AIS settings?

The size of the classes in the programs varied based on the type of program that was being provided. For those schools who provided services through a lab setting, the average class size was between two to six students per teacher. In the pull-out or push-in setting, the class sizes ranged from two to fifteen students, depending on how many students in the class
needed the services. When services were provided in an after school or before school setting, the number of students tended to be a smaller. These services were generally more of a one-to-one setting. The schools that used the method of a second class at a slower pace, where the whole class received the services, often had between twenty to thirty students. This size depended on the number of students that needed to receive the AIS services. This method was typically used when there were a large number of students who were in need of AIS services and the budget did not allow for the smaller settings to service them. The final method of services, those provided in a study hall setting, had varied enrollment depending on the topic and the need of the students.

**What grade and subjects were covered by AIS?**

Most of the schools that were interviewed said that the AIS services were offered prior to Middle School. In general, AIS services began for English and Language Arts in the primary grades. Second grade was the norm in schools that responded. Math AIS began in the third grades. The degree of services in these two areas varied based on the recommendation of the teachers in the primary ages. The other areas that were covered by the schools in the interview were science and social studies. The services in these two areas were generally started later in the students’ schooling. The fourth or fifth grade would be a typical starting time for services to be provided to students with the emphasis still being on ELA and Math.

**What determines when AIS services begin?**

The middle schools were mostly in agreement that the state testing done in fourth grade was one of the biggest factors in determining if students were at risk. In the area of math,
which is the area of concern in the interviews, if a student received a score of one or two on
the New York State Math Assessment they were recommended for services in that subject in
sixth grade. Because New York will soon begin testing at more grade levels, this may soon
change. Most of the providers said that they were unclear as to how these additional tests
would affect their AIS programs.

In the high schools that were interviewed, the New York State Eighth Grade Math
Assessment was one of the determining factors for students receiving services. Like the
New York State Fourth Grade Math Assessment, if a student received a score of one or two
on this test they were recommended for services.

Scores alone were not the only factor that determined if students were entered into the
AIS program. If teachers felt that students would benefit from the services, a student could
be recommended to receive the services. Also, if a student failed the Math A exam in high
school they received services.

What determines when AIS services end?

Determining when students no longer needed the AIS services was similar to determining
when they needed the services. For most of the schools, successful completion of a state
exam could lead to termination of services for a student. However, some schools also
required a teacher’s recommendation in addition to successful test scores in order to release
the student from services. This was found at both the middle school and high school levels. If
students continued to show improvement in their class work and grades, teachers could
recommend that students stop receiving services. Resources and money were also
deciding factors in the length of time a student received services. If the school had the
resources the student was more likely to stay in the program until the student had mastered all the skills. When resources were lacking the schools were more likely to cycle students through the program, and not use mastery as a benchmark to release the student from the program.

How extensive were the services offered?

The amount of service that a student received was based on a number of factors. Some students only needed a minimal of service based on his or her skill level. These students were been recommended for help by their teachers even though they scored well enough on the state exams. Other students needed extensive help in order to close the gap. The level was determined by their scores in the different areas of the state test and through teacher recommendations. The lab, study hall and after school settings had the greatest amount of flexibility and allowed for the students to only come once every four days or more, depending on the student needs. All services were designed on a student by student basis.

To what degree were the parents involved?

The level of parental involvement and notification varied from school to school. When it was determined that student needed services, some of the schools notified the parents, letting them know that their child would be receiving the additional help through AIS services, others did not.

There were different degrees of parental involvement. Some schools sent letters home; some invited the parents in for conferences to discuss the programs while others notified the parents by phone. The resources that the school was willing and able to appropriate to the
Discussion

AIS was the result of The No Child Left Behind Act. Although AIS was New York's way of helping students to perform better in their struggling subjects, when New York required that schools provide AIS, they were not very specific in how the services were to be provided. This fact gave schools the flexibility and responsibility to do what they saw was best for their students. Schools used this freedom to provide services for their students in a variety of ways. On the surface, schools may have appreciated this freedom; however, these required services came without the funds to support them. The state expected the schools to be held accountable without the necessary financial support.

In the process of interviewing the schools, it was evident that there was a need for AIS services as reflected by NYSED (2005). There were many students in these schools that were benefiting from receiving the services that were offered by the schools. Extra instruction was offered through various methods to allow students to meet state standards. The schools that were interviewed all agreed that AIS could be used as a proactive tool which aligned with NYSUT (2005).

The schools that were interviewed proved that the settings of providing the services were many and they all had their usefulness, depending on the needs of the students receiving the services. Schools also revealed that it was necessary to use more than one setting to meet the varied needs of the students. Each setting had its own usefulness in meeting the needs of all students, and they had both pros and cons.

The many strategies that were being used in these AIS settings were mentioned by Bottage (1999), including hands on activities, real life applications of problems,
organizational skills, and problem solving strategies. Bottage (1999) believed that different strategies were important to a successful program.

The Lab setting seemed to work well in the middle school setting where class periods tended to be less than one hour. In this setting the students usually had the lab every other day and received services from a lab teacher whose job was specifically to provide services. The strength of this setting was that the students were exposed to various teaching styles and that there were two different teachers helping and watching the student to make sure they were grasping the content. The key to this setting’s success was that there was constant and detailed communication between the regular class teacher and the lab teacher. The two were able to work together to maximize the time that they spent with the students. This method would also work in the high school setting too, however many of the schools that were interviewed had block scheduling and they had difficulties with scheduling lab time in the student’s schedule. Communication was a key to the success of lab settings. In situations where teachers were not in contact with each other about the progress of the student the service was less effective.

There were a few negatives to the lab setting. Students were typically required to give up elective time in order to fit the lab into their schedule. This often meant that the student would not be able to take a preferred class.

Offering a second period of class time with the same teacher, but at a slower pace, seemed to work for the schools who were offering it. The biggest reason that schools chose to use this method was that it enabled them to serve a large number of students. The students were with the same teacher throughout both periods so there was no need for communication
to coordinate services. The slower pace allowed for the students to go at a rate that allowed them to ask questions and not feel rushed to cover the content.

This setting does not lead to individualized instruction for the students. The fact that there were larger class sizes prevented the teacher from having the option to meet with students individually and thus get the one-to-one attention. It also meant that teachers who taught these classes tended to work with the lower achievers. The classes, as a whole, tended to have more discipline issues and less motivated students.

The push in and pullout setting was beneficial for the students because in this setting they often had two teachers who worked with them. The need for extra communication between teachers was not an issue because the opportunity was built into the setting since they worked together with the students in this setting. This method also had some flexibility in that the teacher could either keep the students in the room with the rest of the class or pull them out when they felt that it would be beneficial to the student. With this setting the student did not have to give up the electives or special class and could take the courses that they might have missed under the other two methods previously discussed.

There were two disadvantages to this setting of delivery. First, the number of students that could be serviced by this method was less, thus if the school had a large number of students that needed the services, it was hard to schedule them. Likewise, scheduling of staff for this was more costly due to the fact that two teachers were needed to serve a smaller number of students.

The method of providing services before or after school was one that allowed for one-to-one instruction for the students. The regular teacher provided the services. Students flourished in this setting because of the individual attention that they received.
The services provided in this manner were also more costly, and the numbers of students that could be reached using this method were fewer. Very few schools in the survey used this method solely to provide services. It required a commitment from both the student and the provider since the services were offered after the school day.

Using study halls or other advisement sessions to offer the services lead to a smaller teacher to student ratio. This allowed more one-to-one time for the student. It seemed to work best for those students who only needed help on specific topics and did not need as much help as some of those who were weak in many areas.

Like the after school method, this method was limited as to the number of students who would take advantage of the services. It also made the students responsible for making sure that they asked for the help when they needed it instead of the teacher making that determination. A student’s skill level impacted this method of service. Scheduling was an issue if the student’s and the teacher’s schedule were not able to coordinate to allow the student to receive the extra help.

Services were started early in the student’s education as required by the Department of Education (2005) sometimes as early as first grade, based on the students’ performance as compared to the standards set forth by the state. The AIS programs then were designed to assist those under achieving students as mentioned by NYSED (2005). The benchmark grades used by NYSED (2005) were the fourth and eight grade state tests which were used extensively by the schools to determine if students required services. The level of services also varied based on the students needs and level of performance on these tests. NYSUT (2005) was in agreement to what was found in the interview process.
Parental involvement was something that varied from school to school. This variance was due to resources and time that was available to the staff. NYSUT (2005) suggested that parents needed to be involved in the process. Parental involvement was a part of all of the programs, but the amount of involvement varied.
Conclusion:

The literature review revealed Jacobsen (2001), Jerald (2002), and Grieco (2003) that there were a variety of methods used by all fifty states to provide students who needed extra help with the support needed to close the gap addressed by the NCLB Act. The state of New York, by using AIS to address this problem, was able to service the needs of these students. Other states had various names for their programs geared to help students meet the standards, but it appeared that students were receiving the help that they needed. There were many problems still with the programs, such as lack of funding and lack of structure by the state, but the schools seemed to be putting forth an effort to do the best with the resources and the funding that their own districts could supply.

As was the case with most of the schools interviewed and the states that were covered in the literature review NYSED (2005) it appeared that schools were stepping up to the plate and using methods that were deemed acceptable to service the needs of their low achieving students to help to close the gap addressed in the NCLB Act. The goal was that the gap would be narrowed and that we, as a nation, would feel more at ease with the state of our US education system. The need to help progress our nation’s technological advancements is still lurking in the back of the minds of our nation, but the longer these services are offered, and the services are refined to meet the students needs, the better chance we as educators have to close the gap.

It is important to note that we as educators must realize that it is not a one method is best for all situation. The paper shows that the method or methods that are being used are on a school by school basis and, that even within the schools; there are different methods that help meet these needs. We need to be aware of these changing circumstances and be willing to
change with the needs of the population that we are working with. We also have to be willing to work with the resources that we are given and do the best that we can, keeping the students’ best interest in mind.

Future areas of interest might be to look into ways to better service the needs of the students. Looking into ways to improve the communication between the provider of services and the regular classroom teacher may prove beneficial. This might be done by looking into what content the students might need more help with and different ways to teach the content so that varying student learning styles may be reached allowing the students to close the gap. The main idea being that we need to be open to change and willing to go with what the students need.
References:


Appendix A: Letter of introduction:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for taking the time to work with me on this survey. I am currently working on finishing my masters program at St. John Fisher College. As a part of my masters, I am required to do a research based thesis. This is the final requirement for my program. In our research we are required to do an action research project and I have chosen to look at what Academic Intervention Services (AIS) entails. My goal in this project is to determine what might be the best way to service students through AIS and what schools in the area are currently doing. Your answers will be treated with complete anonymity.

My findings will be reported in a way so as to not identify any of the schools in which I perform the interviews. The plan is to use the information that I gather in order to make some inferences about different programs and determine which ideas might best exemplify the goals of the state and the federal government in the No Child Left Behind Act.

Again I thank you for your time and cooperation in being involved with this study. I look forward to working with you and learning more about your ideas on AIS.

Sincerely

Michael Launhardt
Appendix B: Interview questions

1. What format does your school use for AIS? Explain.
2. What subjects are covered by your school with AIS?
3. What is the determining factor in deciding which students receive services?
4. How long can students receive AIS? Or do they all get the same amount?
5. What is the determining factor in deciding when students no longer need the services? What is the procedure?
6. What type of instruction is offered in the AIS setting?
7. What kind of parental involvement occurs?
8. Describe, if any, what communication occurs between the AIS teacher and the regular teacher?
9. At what grade does your district start AIS services?
10. What do you see as successful or failing AIS practices in your program?
11. What kind of successes and failures can you share from your program?
12. What programs do you feel are not as successful?
13. What size are the AIS classes?
14. How effective do you feel the services are?
15. What ways would you change what you are doing to help the students more?
Appendix C: Consent Form

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Academic Intervention Services: How can we make it work?

Name of researcher: Michael Launhardt

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Diane Barrett Phone for further information: 585-385-8366

Purpose of study:
This study is being performed in order to complete my masters program. The study is going to be used to complete the research for the thesis portion of the masters degree. The goal of the research is to determine if AIS programs are successful, and what can be done to better service students to help them be successful on standardized tests and successful in their regular classes.

Any information gathered from this interview will be held in strictest confidence and names of interviewees and schools involved in the interview process will not be expounded in the research.

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: Local participating schools
Length of participation: one hour

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:
By participating in this interview, the interviewee will not have their name or school name reflected in any of the research.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:
Interviewees and schools will be identified only by numbers and there will be no list correlating them. No names will be shared in the research both in reference to the school and the interviewee. Schools and participants will be held in complete confidentiality.
Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

(Participant) _________ Signature ________ Date __________
Print name

Michael Launhardt (Investigator) Signature ________ Date __________

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.