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The purpose of this study was to determine what a successful Title I school is doing to ensure all students' educational needs are being met, according to the goals of *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015), which holds schools accountable for ensuring all students show progress. The study investigated the school's role in meeting the challenges associated with educating students from high-poverty environments. Specifically, the study focused on what administrators did to ensure teachers were successful in their roles, what teachers did instructionally, how teachers motivated and provided high expectations for all students, how teachers collaborated and the impact it had on student achievement, and what instructional programs were used and proven successful in enhancing teaching and learning.

A qualitative methodology was utilized in conducting the research. The school was selected based on its work as a consistently high-performing Title I school. A sampling of participants was used from various classifications/positions within the school: administrators, school leadership team, teachers, and PTA members. The perspectives of participants on how the school continues to be successful in meeting the educational needs of all students were paramount to understanding and identifying specific practices, policies, and programs that contribute to the school's continued success. The results of the study may assist other Title I schools that struggle to meet the challenges of high-poverty students.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS IN A HIGH PERFORMING TITLE I SCHOOL THAT IMPROVES STUDENT PERFORMANCE

by

Gail Brady

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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Doctor of Education

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Approved by

Carl Lashley
Committee Chair

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To all the children who think they can't because others have spoken that over your lives, let me be the first to say, "You can because I did"! To all the teachers who are dream makers, who work tirelessly each day to make school count for all children. Your lives matter! To Ruby Burkeen, my seventh-grade teacher, who taught me the meaning of "potential," I am today because you were yesterday.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Gail Brady, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

> We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Edmonds, 1979, p. 20)

In the late 1960s, the Effective Schools movement started in response to the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS; Coleman, 1966), which assessed the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different race, color, religion, and national origin. The EEOS, also known as the Coleman report, asserted that family background, not the school, was the major determinant of student achievement. This finding was crucial to the education of students experiencing poverty. With a significant number of U.S. citizens emerging from schools without basic skills, the Effective Schools movement responded to the premise that all students are expected by society to be taught the basic skills (Gautheir, 1986, as cited in Mace-Matluck, 1987, p. 4). It examined school-based factors that influenced educational outcomes. This movement became critical to schools facing the challenge of meeting the needs of students experiencing poverty. The educational researchers who conducted the studies on effective schools developed a body of research that supported the premise that schools control the factors necessary for all children to be able to master core curriculum

(Lezotte, 2001). As a result, the research showed many schools did in fact overcome the challenges and were successful in ensuring all students' academic needs were met.

Fast forward to the 21st Century, with the correlates of effective schools and other proven research on what makes for effective schools, it is yet difficult, with the challenges of accountability, high stakes testing, and the required mandate of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) to meet the goal of ensuring all students experience academic progress. The challenges continue to be more pronounced in schools with high rates of poverty. The question remains, "With all the research about what makes schools effective, why are schools still not meeting the needs of students experiencing poverty?"

The correlates of Effective Schools (ES) research continue to be a primary focus of educational reformists, as the need yet exists for schools to meet the needs of all students, especially marginalized groups. Even as recent as the rewrite of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) to the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), and now the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), at the heart of all the reauthorizations is the matter of equality in education for all children, the critical issue for education reform.

The onset of ES research began in the 1960s through the 1980s with a focus on five correlates, which were school-based practices found in higher performing schools serving disadvantaged children. As research continued, the focus remained on the relationship between classroom and school practices and the impact on student achievement. According to Waters and Marzano (2006), "A body of research-based knowledge emerged, along with increasingly robust sets of data for secondary analysis.

This body of knowledge and these data evolved into the second generation of ES research" (p. 5).

With the second wave or generation of ES research, researchers not only reviewed practices but were able to richly describe the relationships between specific practices and achievement. The most current research translates effective classroom, school, and leadership practices into actions and behaviors that are definitive of such practices (Marzano & Waters, 2006). The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), a nonprofit education and research organization, contributed to this research. According to Waters and Marzano (2006),

> McRel's contributions to this third generation of effective schools research has been published as a series of "what works" books, including *Classroom Instruction that Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2003), *Classroom Management that Works* (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003), and *School Leadership that Works* (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). (p. 5).

The Research Problem

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965, 2002, 2015) was passed to ensure all children have a "fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" [No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002).]

Schools that receive funding under Title I consist of high percentages of students from low-income households. Federal funds are allocated to these schools to help students meet academic challenges. Despite all the research on effective schools and the funding, purpose, and goal of ESEA, many Title I schools continue to fail in meeting the academic needs of their students, as the 2014 NCLB goal of 100% of students being proficient in reading and math has come and gone (Crawford, 2011). According to Kirk and Jones (2004), a body of research was developed that proved schools can make a difference despite students who come from families of disadvantaged backgrounds. Research by Lezotte and Snyder (2011) “supported the premise that all children can learn and that the school controls the factors necessary to ensure student mastery of the core curriculum” (p. 1). Also, it has been found that “when school improvement processes based upon the effective schools research are implemented, the proportions of students that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least, remains the same” (Association for Effective Schools, 1996, para. 1).

With the link between the aforementioned factors and academics, some educators continue to think the chances of reaching students experiencing poverty are dismal. There are many myths associated with poverty that are used as excuses as to why educators are not successful in ensuring students are achieving. This research discusses practices being implemented in today’s high accountability environment to improve the educational performance of students from families in a marginalized and impoverished socioeconomic status.

Purpose of the Study

Research and the literature tell us a great deal about why schools filled with poor students do not do well (Bergeson, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). There are many challenges and issues families and their children face as a result of poverty. Opportunities are not as prevalent for those in poverty, and children often begin school at a deficit. However, schools can be an equalizer and help all students experience success. This study reveals how administrators and teachers address challenges and issues and develop approaches to teaching that lifts students from poverty into school success.

Research Questions

With all the research about effective schools and what we already know about poverty and achievement, why are schools still not meeting the needs of students experiencing poverty? The overarching question that guided this research is:

> What educational factors, such as programs, practices, and expectations, do principals and teachers in a high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school use to improve their performance in the school?

To investigate and determine answers to this question, the researcher used the following guiding research questions:

- What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high poverty, high achieving school?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies and structures contribute to high achievement at high performing, high poverty elementary school?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?

- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to their school’s success?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to their school’s success?

My Background as Researcher

My personal connection and interest in this study began as far back as I can recall. I lived in poverty throughout my entire time in school. Poverty seemed normal to me because everyone around me was poor. We lived in a public housing neighborhood, and as a child, I knew my destiny rested in my parents’ hands. As hard as they tried to provide for our family, they seemed to never have enough. Elementary school was my least favorite time in school because I always seemed to be in trouble for not paying attention. I daydreamed a lot, which kept me in the corner or the principal’s office. My mind was always on the challenges at home. It was not that I did not like school. I loved school because it was an escape for me, and I loved getting a hot breakfast and lunch every day. I remember my principal once asked, “What do you think about while the teacher is teaching?” I could never answer, but I do know it had nothing to do with math or reading. I was smart and could run circles around my classmates, but I was not motivated to excel. I could not see the relevance or importance of school compared to what my family was experiencing.

As I progressed in junior high school, I was fortunate to work in a program the school partnered with for disadvantaged youth. I was 13 years old, and although I did not make a lot of money, what I did make helped our family. In addition to having a part-time job, I had a teacher who took me under her wings and showed me another way of living life according to the middle class. She showed me a world where all my needs were met. She would take me home for the weekend and buy me clothes, shoes, and made sure I had school supplies. It was then I knew there was more to life than poverty. She closed the opportunity gap for me by providing me with the resources I lacked and showing me that with the same level of resources and working to my potential, I was just as smart as anyone else. My confidence level increased, and I came alive in school. I became president of the student government association and began participating in the extracurricular activities I formerly shied away from for fear of embarrassment.

When I reached high school, not only did I have the same teacher mentor from junior high, but I was fortunate to have a job at the same factory in which my mother worked. The pay was good, but I knew there was more to life. For the first time, I had thoughts of college. After being involved in academic organizations such as the forensics team, Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), the literary club, yearbook club, and several others, I knew I wanted something more in life. I saw how my classmates who didn’t live on my side of town lived, and I wanted what they had.

After a visit from the college recruiter, I felt a shift in my life. I was determined I was going to college. I paid for my application fee and wrote an essay to help secure scholarships to get me through my first year. With small scholarships and financial aid, I was a college freshman, learning and connecting to the real world. I saw life in a different light, and I knew my destiny was tied to hard work and determination. I wanted more, and I knew it was out there. After not being challenged with high expectations by the college in which I was enrolled, I applied for and received a full scholarship to transfer to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. From day one, the emphasis was on student learning and impacting the world through life's work. Every moment of teaching and learning was through lenses of equity, fairness, and social justice. I knew my life was meant to change the world for students who looked like me, and although I didn't have the level of resources as most of my White, more privileged classmates, it didn't matter because my professors never let me see the difference.

Creswell (2013) discusses the research process as beginning with researchers considering what they bring to the inquiry, such as personal history, views of themselves and others, and ethical and political issues. This reflexivity and my history directly shaped the interpretation of this research of closing the achievement gap, as my entire educational journey (from Head Start to 12th Grade) was highly impacted by poverty. As asserted by Creswell (2013), researchers make their values known in a qualitative study by admitting the value-laden nature of the study and actively reporting their values and biases as well as the nature of the information gathered from the field. This occurs when researchers "position themselves" in a study (p. 20). As the researcher, I became situated within the school setting fulltime over a period of two weeks to document the nature of what occurs in a consistently high-performing Title I elementary school.

I am in my 24th year as an educator and my tenth year as an administrator. From the first day of my career, I knew I was called to serve, and because I believe in providence, it was no coincidence or by chance that I was placed in schools that served high populations of high-poverty students. I grew up in poverty with all its challenges, and as an educator, I used to think there was something I needed to impart to students experiencing poverty that would make their lives richer, fuller, and more meaningful. As the years progressed, my thinking has been transformed to the realization that students make educators' lives more meaningful as we serve their needs. As educators, in order to be purposeful in our stewardship of children and their education, we must work to transform schools, not students, especially our populations of marginalized students. For these students, the lack of resources and opportunities heavily impact their learning. However, schools have the awesome task of bridging the gap between poverty and achievement.

During my eight years as a teacher, I poured my soul into my students' lives. However, I felt somewhat limited and helpless with the remaining students who were not under my supervision. To impact more students, I embarked upon graduate studies to assume a role as an administrator. I believed it would afford me the opportunity to make a greater impact on the adults serving students, thus yielding a greater return on our students' lives, especially as it related to achievement.

The journey into obtaining my Master's degree was very eventful because I was fortunate to have professors and mentors who embraced the very beliefs I adopted for my style of leadership. It was the first I had ever heard of transformational leadership. I didn't have a formal knowledge of what it was, but I knew it was something I wanted to pursue. I knew if the students and teachers I served had any chance of change, it would begin with me and my leadership style. While I believed teachers are the single most important factor in the classroom, the administrator is the single most important factor in the school. I knew I had work to do, and I was willing, able, and ready to effect change for the populations served.

As an administrator, working to reform the practices, policies, beliefs, and mindsets of teachers in schools serving poor students afforded me opportunities to address the most pressing issue—beliefs about students, teaching and learning, and expectations of students. In order to effectively change the climate, culture, expectations, rigor, fidelity of teaching and learning, and academic outcomes, there had to be an inward transformation of myself as the leader. This would ultimately transform how teachers and staff served students. From the onset until the present, it has been and remains hard but meaningful work, which ultimately benefits all stakeholders, especially students as their achievement increases.

Affecting change in high-poverty schools is challenging and rewarding; however, there is a downside. The constant moving of administrators from one high-poverty school to the next, just as transformation begins to take place, impacts a school's success. With every move, the work must begin again and is time-consuming and laborious. Minimally, it includes redirecting or dismissing ineffective staff; building leadership capacity; engaging in need-specific professional development that improves teaching and learning; focusing on curriculum driven by ongoing data; purposeful, frequent assessments of learning; student achievement; and more.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The Impact of Poverty on Schooling

Poverty is a daily struggle for many families who juggle limited resources just to make ends meet. Having to make decisions or choices about paying the rent, the electric bill, or buying food for their families is a daily stressor. Poverty brings the constant worry about things most people take for granted, such as having enough gas in the car to get to work, being able to leave work if a child gets sick at school, buying school clothes for a child, and many other needs. Choices are limited for those who live in poverty, and more often than not, it comes down to being a choice between a need and a want. Poverty robs people of a true sense of security and impacts their hope for the future (Jones, 2013).

With the prevalence of poverty in society, schools continue to deal with the impact of poverty on their students. There is a consistent failure of schools to overcome these challenges and meet the needs of students in poverty. The solution for beating these challenges lies within the walls of schools. Research has proven that effective schooling works, as evidenced by the examples of effective schools found during the Effective Schools movement. Schools were successful regardless of socioeconomic background (Lezotte, 2001).

As the Effective Schools research has shown, the correlates of effective schools do work when those who serve children directly in the schools focus on teaching and learning rather than what students lack at home. It is true that students experiencing poverty can come with many challenges; however, their socioeconomic status should not dictate the level of education they receive or the expectations educators have of them.

The myths listed in Table 1 are a result of people believing there is a certain culture of poverty shared among its victims. The truth is there is no culture of poverty. Differences in values and behaviors among poor people are just as great as those between poor and wealthy people. In actuality, the culture of poverty concept is constructed from a collection of smaller stereotypes that, however false, seem to have crept into mainstream thinking as unquestioned fact (Gorski, 2008). Educators must discredit these myths so students can receive a fair chance at a quality education without prejudice and biases.

Table 1

Myths of Poverty

Myth	**Reality**
Poor people are unmotivated and have a weak work ethic.	Poor people do not have a weaker work ethic or lower levels of motivation than wealthier people (Iversen & Farber, 1996; Wilson, 1997). Although poor people are often stereotyped as lazy, 83% of children from low-income families have at least one employed parent; close to 60% have at least one parent who works full-time and year-round (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2004). The severe shortage of living-wage jobs means that many poor adults must work two, three, or four jobs. According to the Economic Policy Institute (2002), poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier counterparts.

Table 1

(Cont.)

Myth	Reality
Poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education.	Low-income parents hold the same attitudes about education that wealthy parents do (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978). Low-income parents are less likely to attend school functions or volunteer in their children's classrooms (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005)—not because they care less about education, but because they have less *access* to school involvement than their wealthier peers. They are more likely to work multiple jobs, to work evenings, to have jobs without paid leave, and to be unable to afford child care and public transportation. It might be said more accurately that schools that fail to take these considerations into account do not value the involvement of poor families as much as they value the involvement of other families.
Poor people are linguistically deficient.	All people, regardless of the languages and language varieties they speak, use a full continuum of language registers (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). What's more, linguists have known for decades that all language varieties are highly structured with complex grammatical rules (Gee, 2004; Hess, 1974; Miller, Cho, & Bracey, 2005). What often are assumed to be *deficient* varieties of English- Appalachian varieties, perhaps, or what some refer to as Black English Vernacular, are no less sophisticated than so-called "standard English."
Poverty has little lasting impact on children.	Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being. Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor physical and mental health, and poor self-esteem. Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young and/or experience deep and persistent poverty.
Poverty is a minority issue.	Poverty is not solely a minority issue. Poverty affects people of all races. Of the Americans living in poverty today, 42% are White, 29% are Hispanic or Latino, 25% are Black or African American, and 4% are Asian. However, poverty has a disparate impact on people of color.

Source: Gorski, 2008, p. 32.

Poverty and the Achievement Gap

The annual report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; NAEP, 2013) shows the disparity of academic progress of elementary and secondary students in the United States for reading and math. The report is part of *The Nation's Report Card* and is based on nationally representative samples of fourth and eighth graders. The goal of the NAEP has been to provide information to the public about what students in United States schools know and can do in various subject areas. Data in Table 2 show the disparity of scale scores among ethnicities tested in 2013. Participants in the sampling included 7,930 schools and 186,500 students for fourth-grade math and 7,920 schools and 190,400 students for fourth-grade reading. For eighth-grade math, participants included 6,520 schools and 170,100 students and for eighth-grade reading, 6,510 schools and 171,800 students. Table 2 shows math and reading scores (respectively) of fourth- and eighth-grade students by ethnicity, therefore showing the achievement gap among the groups.

The data show that White fourth-grade students scored significantly higher in reading and math than Black and Hispanic students, with differences between 26 points in reading and 19–26 points in math. Asian/Island Pacific students scored three points higher in reading and eight points higher in math compared to White students. American Indian students scored 27 points lower in reading and 23 points lower in math compared to White students. Students who claimed two or more races scored only five points lower in reading and math compared to White Students. The reading and math scores are similar in comparison with eighth-grade students. A review of the data reported by

NAEP throughout the years reveals a significant achievement gap between students as it relates to poverty and ethnicity.

Table 2

National Assessment of Educational Progress 2013 Math and Reading Scores of Fourth- and Eighth-Grade Students by Ethnicity

Fourth-Grade Math Scores and Reading Scores	Eighth-Grade Math Scores and Reading Scores
White *250* and *232*	*294* and *276*
Black *224* and *206*	*263* and *250*
Hispanic *231* and *207*	*272* and *256*
Asian/Island Pacific *258* and *235*	*306* and *280*
American Indian/Alaska Native *227* and *205*	*269* and *251*
Two or More Races *245* and *227*	*288* and *271*

Deficit Thinking and Achievement

The Deficit Thinking Model is the belief that "people of color carry inadequacies that are often associated with poverty or insufficient socialization from home" (Valencia, 2010, as cited in Burciaga, 2015, p. 4). A lack of motivation or drive to excel is often believed to be characteristic of people of color. In the educational setting, it is the belief that children of color are not motivated to do well in school. According to Burciaga (2015), deficit thinking is a cycle and educational leaders must acknowledge that how they think either perpetuates or prevents this model. Burciaga's discourse addresses the fact that educational systems are focused on outcomes as if schools are just fine; however, students are blamed and viewed as the ones having a deficit. Lopez and

Burciaga (2014) address sociohistorical schooling conditions prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1964) that have contributed to inequality in schooling and whether or not progress has truly been made (Burciaga, 2015).

According to Burciaga (2015), deficit thinking “blames the students who are not graduating, being mainstreamed, or achieving at the same rate as their White peers” (p. 5). She believes the achievement gap is “not about White students, but Black and Latino students who are keeping up” (p. 5). The perspectives of deficit thinking do not focus on systemic inequities but rather blames students and their familial, cultural, and communal practices (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solorzano, 2010, as cited in Burciaga, 2015). Although educators realize the importance of equity and social justice in schooling, there continues to be a focus on what students do not come to school with as a result of their family, community, or socioeconomic status. According to Burciaga (2015), deficit thinking operates with educators’ assumptions that their students are products of their environment and rarely rise any higher than their surroundings. Burciaga (2015) declares that “it is not only students of color that are implicated as incompetent” (p. 5). She believes deficit thinking is so ingrained in the U.S. that many teachers and administrators of color suffer the same experiences associated with deficit thinking (p. 5). Despite this, Burciaga (2015) states, “Despite experiencing and challenging racism in schools as students and professionals, many critical educators of color assert their commitment to serving students who often remind them of their younger selves” (p. 5).

Interconnectedness of Race, Poverty, and Achievement

With the connectedness of race and poverty, the racial differences in achievement are indicative of the economic conditions students and their families face versus genetic makeup. Understanding poverty and its impact on students, their experiences with school, and their learning and achievement will help educators be more responsive and intentional in their work with schools. The opportunity gap that is caused by poverty must be understood and filled in order to meet the needs of students who are educationally deprived. Educators of all levels must be willing and brave enough to broach the subject and fight unfair policies and practices that hinder the work that must be done.

Milner (2013) framed his research on three spheres of study to explain why some students living in poverty are not as successful in schools as those not living in poverty:

> - Research focused on out-of-school factors such as unemployment, family income, parental styles, parental educational level, geography, and resources in the home such as the number of books available to children
> - Research focused on in-school factors such as instructional practices, resources and the lack thereof in school, administrative practices, school culture, and the nature of relationships between teachers and students as well as between teachers and parents/family members
> - Research focused on the effects of out-of-school factors on outcomes and experiences in school. (p. 5)

Educators often use outside-of-school factors as reasons why they cannot meet the inside-of-school needs of students in poverty; however, Milner points out that the role of schools, in particular administrators, counselors, and teachers, must be responsive to the outside realities that influence students of poverty. The opportunity gap must be responded to in order for students to be successful. Evidence has revealed that teachers and teaching can be the most powerful *inside-of-school* predictors of success for students (Barton, 2003; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In the current study, research focused on the roles of administrators and teachers and the practices they used to ensure students consistently experienced success.

Although many researchers often avoid connecting race to poverty when it comes to educational outcomes, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained,

> Although both class and gender can and do intersect race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between Whites and students of color. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that even when we hold constant for class, middle-class African-American students do not achieve at the same level as their White counterparts. (p. 51).

Of the teachers studied by Milner in his research, he states, “Teachers I have studied who teach students of color and students living in poverty tended to feel much more comfortable talking about or thinking about poverty or social class than race, and many seemed to struggle to see the relationship between the two” (Milner, 2013, p. 11). Race is a conversation many educators tend to shy away from, especially those who benefit from it. Race and its issues will always be important in society and consequently education.

Significance of the Study

The Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty were the catalysts for bringing national attention to the inequities in education (Crawford, 2011; Mace-Matluck, 1987). Through passage of the ESEA (1965), the primary goal was and continues to be to help schools better serve the "special educational need of educationally deprived children" (Crawford, 2011, p. 1). With re-authorization of ESEA as NCLB, the focus has grown to include many other objectives, such as setting "challenging" standards, mandating assessments "aligned" with the standards, "holding schools accountable" for student progress in core subjects, eliminating "achievement gaps" between various groups of students, encouraging the use of "research-based" programs, and ensuring that educators are "highly qualified" (Crawford, 2011, p. 1). The problem with focusing so much on standardized testing as a measurement for all students is that it demonstrates the danger of using white, middle-class students as the gauge for judging other students' abilities. Bowman (1994) asserts that "in school, behaviors characteristic of middle-class white children have been seen as the only valid representation of competence—the standard by which all children are judged" (p. 1).

According to Entwisle and Alexander (1989), when practitioners determine there is a "mainstream behavior" that should be used as the only measure for students' healthy development, they (students) are often misdiagnosed and not treated in an appropriate manner; their learning potential is often miscalculated because they have not learned according to the standards school value as measurable. "Misunderstanding cultural differences leads schools inappropriately to place minority students, who are developmentally normal, into special education and low-ability groups, and lead teachers to expect less from them than from other students" (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989, as cited in Bowman, 1994, p. 5). This misunderstanding often leads to teachers perceiving poor black students as immature and holding them to a lower expectation level than their more affluent counterparts.

This study helps educators realize that despite the challenges of poverty, achievement *is* possible. With the achievement gap widening, it is not evident educators understand the urgency of serving the needs of educationally deprived students. Perhaps the assumption is that these students are deprived because they do not measure up to the middle-class standard by which White students are judged. When schools represent this viewpoint as the standard for all students, racism and classism contribute to conflicts between schools and poor and minority students and their families, which ultimately fail in educating all students. This study contributes to negating the deficit model of education because it sheds light on a continuing problem that exists in education.

With all that is known about poverty and its effect on achievement, there are schools that continue to overcome the challenges and close the achievement gap. Schools are proving that success is attainable despite poverty (Barth et al., 1999; Izumi, 2002; Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002). Students are being challenged and held to high expectations and standards. Best practices and effective instructional methods are being used to improve teaching and maximize student learning. Research-based programs are being utilized to enhance instruction (Barth et al., 1999; Izumi, 2002; Ragland et al., 2002). The correlates of effective schools are operative in these schools, and as a result, they are being successful in achievement for all students.

To improve the achievement of students from low socioeconomic classes and students of color, educators must stop thinking in terms of a deficit model to explain the widespread underachievement of these students. Administrators, teachers, and other school leaders often believe the problem lies within the students, their families, and communities. This deficit thinking attributes students' lack of educational success to circumstances more than likely rooted in their cultures and communities (Bowman, 1989). This only blames the victims of institutional poverty for their own oppression by referring to negative stereotypes and assumptions regarding certain groups or communities. Collins (1988) speaks of deficit theory as the most destructive tool of the culture of classism, defining students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Deficit theory suggests poor people are as such because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies.

When educators think of students' deficits, the responsibility of serving the needs of students is taken off their shoulders and placed on students and their families. When students from low socioeconomic status and those of color come to school unprepared, educators often make the assumption that cognitive strategies are not in place (Bowman, 1989). As a result, they incessantly test students, eventually placing them in special education programs. When educators confuse development with cultural accomplishments, there is a misunderstanding of students' abilities. When teachers equate a student's developmental competence with a particular form of behavior, they misread the meaning of the behavior and are led toward practices that compromise the potential for learning (Bowman, 1989).

Bowman (1989) believes teachers are held hostage to their own past experiences and pass these experiences on to the students they serve. Teachers, like all of us, make generalizations about other people, ideas, and events on the basis of their personal interpretations of reality. When confronted with discrepancies teachers cling to their own theories, forcing contrary evidence to fit their old beliefs. When adults and children do not share common experiences or hold common beliefs about the meaning of experience, they are apt to misunderstand culturally-coded interchanges (Bowman, 1989). As a result, teachers fail to value real similarities and differences between their understanding of the world and that of students and families who come from different backgrounds.

Contributions of the Study

With the continuing work on effective schools, what we already know about students of poverty and achievement and the continuing failure of Title I schools to meet the academic needs of its students, this study specifically researched the practices of principals and classroom teachers in a successful high-performing Title I school. The research highlights the practices used to improve the academic success of students by focusing on instructional practices, teacher collaboration, and how it impacts teaching and learning, student motivation, and instructional programs used. The study contributes in assisting similar schools in school improvement measures. It provides proven practices and programs that work in one consistently high-performing, high-poverty school. It validates similar practices already in use by similar schools serving high percentages of poor students but are struggling to meet the mark.

The significance of this current study is paramount to the success of struggling Title I schools that find it difficult to consistently meet the academic needs of its students. Taking a closer look at poverty, the achievement gap, deficit thinking, and the interconnectedness of race, poverty, and achievement will shed light on how poverty and academic achievement are interconnected. Without the connections, the study would lack a holistic approach to the problem.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following key terms are used:

Academic Achievement—student makes at least proficient on statewide assessments, at level specified by annual measurable objectives (AMO), formerly AYP.

Accountability—

> measurable proof, usually in the form of student results on various tests, that teachers, schools, divisions and states are teaching students efficiently and well, usually in the form of student success rates on various tests; Virginia's accountability programs is known as the Standards of Learning which includes curriculum standards approved by the Board of Education and required state tests based on the standards. (Virginia Department of Education, n.d., p. 1)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—a measurement indicating whether a school, division, or the state met federally approved academic goals required by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA/NCLB).

Applied research—"research . . . used to answer a specific question that has direct applications to the world" (Kowalczyk, n.d., "Different Kinds of Research," para. 2).

At-risk students—students who have a higher than average probability of dropping out or failing school.

Deficit thinking—blaming students and perceived deficiencies such as poverty, race, and family background for students' academic failure or lack of learning.

Effective schools—Ron Edmonds, the leading researcher in school reform in the 1970s, created what is now known as the Effective Schools model characterized by strong administrative leadership, a focus on basic skills, high expectations for student success, frequent monitoring of student performance, and safe and orderly schools.

Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the primary federal law affecting K-12 education; the most recent reauthorization of the law is also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

High-poverty, high-performing—

> Definitions and standards for high-performing schools varied across and within these studies. Nonetheless, each of the schools examined showed positive growth and progress. All of the studies used standardized test results, primarily in mathematics and reading, to identify high-performing schools. (Center for Public Education, 2005, para. 4)

Performance—refers to how students achieve on statewide assessments.

Standards of Learning (SOLs)—the minimum grade level and subject matter educational objectives, described as the knowledge and skills "necessary for success in school and for preparation for life," that students are expected to meet in Virginia public schools and specified by the Standards of Quality (SOQ).

Student success—academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

Title I School—a school with a high rate of disadvantaged students making it eligible for participation in federal Title I programs (Virginia Department of Education, 2015).

Summary

The background of the research problem includes the work of the Effective Schools movement and the correlates that were the results of that research. The correlates were found in higher-performing schools that served students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and found that schools were a determining factor of students being successful. Poverty creates an opportunity gap for children, and due to many external challenges, learning is impacted. In addition to these challenges, teachers and educators, who blame marginalized, disadvantaged students for their lack of academic attainment and achievement can be a barrier from schools being distinguished by the correlates. Gorski (2012), expressed a very similar concern:

> When stereotypes creep into educational practice, policy, and programs, educators and policymakers risk justifying injustice, explaining away failure (including our failure to insist upon equitable educational access), and adopting misguided reform efforts, such as those aimed at redressing inequalities by "fixing" poor people rather than the conditions that disenfranchise them. (p. 314)

The challenge of high-poverty schools is to dispel the myths associated with students experiencing poverty and move them towards achievement. It can be done, and the school studied in this research has consistently maintained the success of their students. The school has all the correlates in place and continues to be effective.

In Chapter II, the review of literature focuses on the Effective Schools movement from the beginning to the present. Various research findings on what makes schools effective and how the findings compare are shared in the chapter. A look into the evolving characteristics of Effective Schools sheds light on how researchers have resolved what is effective as educational trends and needs shift from decade to decade. Educating all students is still the primary focus of all the research findings on effective schools. For the purpose of the research setting in a Title I school, four areas are discussed in detail. These areas encompass factors that influence the effectiveness of schools for all students, but most importantly, marginalized groups such as socio-economically disadvantaged and children of color. Instructional practices, collaborative approaches that impact teaching and learning, teacher motivation of students, and instructional programs that enhance teaching and learning are factors that heavily impact the success of Title I schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction: The Effective Schools Movement and Beyond

Over 48 years ago the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned a study to assess the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different races, color, religions, and national origins. The results of the study came by way of a report by sociologist James Coleman called “Equality of Educational Opportunity,” better known as the Coleman report. In the findings, the predominant thought was that “schools didn’t make a difference” (Mace-Matluck, 1987, p. 4) in producing student achievement. This outraged many who thought of school as the great equalizer. According to the report, what mattered more in determining children’s academic success was a child’s family background.

Birthed out of this outrage, other researchers, led by Ronald Edmonds, the author and educator who introduced the concept of Effective Schools, set out to identify schools that in fact did make a difference in measured achievement for all children, regardless of socioeconomic status and family background.

Correlates of Effective Schools

Edmonds, in his summarizations (1979a, 1979b, 1981), maintained that there were five correlates to effective schools and that they were all related to one another and present in effective schools:

- Strong administrative leadership
- Focus on basic skills
- High expectations for student success
- Frequent monitoring of student performance
- Safe and orderly schools (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 1)

Effective Schools researchers stood firm in their conviction that the primary mission of public schools should be "learning for all." This stance was based on three beliefs:

- All students can learn,
- The individual school controls many of the critical variables to assure such learning, and
- Schools should be accountable to ensure learning for all students.

Beyond Initial Research on Effective Schools

As schools, students, and teaching practices and methods changed and grew, so did the research. In their work *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness*, Scheerens and Bosker (1997) conducted research on a wide variety of school reform initiatives and came up with eight essential characteristics of successful schools:

- Monitoring of student progress
- Focus on achievement
- Parental involvement
- Creating a safe and orderly climate
- Focused curriculum
- Strong leadership
- Cooperative working environment
- Time on task (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 2)

In 1999, the United States Department of Education sponsored a report "Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings," compiled by a team of researchers who studied the 300 most comprehensive school reform research studies done in the previous five years. The common characteristics they identified were as follows:

- Commitment to high academic expectations
- Small learning environments
- Structure learning around career/student interest
- Professional development focused on instruction
- Tie out-of-school learning to classroom learning
- Career and higher education counseling
- Flexible, relevant segments of instruction
- Assess on what students can do
- Partnerships with higher education
- Support alliances with parents and community (Visher, Emanuel, & Teitelbaum, 1999, as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 2)

Robert J. Marzano (2003), in his book *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Actions*, reviewed research on school reform and identified five characteristics for highly successful schools:

- Guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Challenging goals and effective feedback
- Parent and community involvement
- Safe and orderly environment
- Collegiality and professionalism (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 2)

In their work, *High Poverty – High Success: Schools That Defy the Odds*, Drs. Doris Quick and Custer Quick (2000), senior consultants at the International Center for Leadership in Education, conducted an analysis of five models of high achieving schools.

> They studied the 90-90-90 Schools (schools with 90% free or reduced lunch, 90% minority, and 90% academic proficiency), the No Excuses Schools, Benchmark School study, the Hope for Urban Education study, and the Beating the Odds study. They reviewed the characteristics that each of these major initiatives had found to be central to student success and established the following five overriding characteristics:
> - A commitment to a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students
> - Implementation of a testing program that evaluated both students' conceptual knowledge and their ability to apply knowledge
> - A focused and sustained staff development program
> - Commitment to addressing the issue of student behavior
> - Willingness to make organizational changes for the benefit of students (Quick & Quick, 2000, as cited in Daggett, 2005, pp. 2–3)

In 2002, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

> has made a major commitment to school reform at the secondary school level, following an extensive review of the research on the components of successful schools. The characteristics they identified as most important were:
> - Common focus on a few research-based goals
> - High expectations
> - Small, personalized learning environment
> - Respect and responsibility for all
> - Parent/community partnership
> - Focus on performance
> - Effective use of technology tools (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 3)

Larry Lezotte, a fellow Effective Schools researcher, was notable for his expertise on creating effective K-12 schools. In his recent book, *What Effective Schools Do: Re-Envisioning the Correlates* (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011),

> Lezotte noted the following as the most important characteristics of effective schools:
> - Creating the school culture
> - The correlates of effective schools
> - Site-based management
> - Data collection, disaggregation and analysis
> - School improvement plans process

- Organizing schools for students
- Building community support
- Evaluation of student progress (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 3)

Most Current Research on Effective Schools

In more recent research from the National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU), eight components were identified which resulted in success for large urban high schools that serve marginalized students—low socioeconomic status, minority, and English language learners. The center focuses on programs, practices, processes, and policies that make high schools effective. The identified components have a strong connection to the earlier research of Effective Schools research conducted by Lezotte in 2002 and 2004.

In previous research, Lezotte and others believed leadership played a key role in assuring schools were effective. The management of schools was the primary role of the leader, and in more recent research, leaders have shifted from having primary responsibility for schools to sharing leadership with school leadership teams. Leaders have focused more on teaching and learning as opposed to managing the day-to-day operations of schools. This has caused a shift in leaders moving from managers to shared decision makers who build leadership capacities within their schools. Leaders who are centered on learning hold both staff and students to high expectations of teaching and learning. See Table 3.

Table 3

Effective Schools Evolving Characteristics

Lezotte, Skaifer, and Holstead (2002)	**Effective Schools Correlates (Lezotte, 2001)**	**Characteristics of Effective High Schools (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, & Obsborne-Lampkin, 2012)**
Site-based management	Strong administrative leadership	Learning-centered leadership
Organizing schools for students	High expectations for student success	Organization of the learning environment
Data collection, disaggregation and analysis	Frequent monitoring of student performance	Systemic performance accountability; Systemic use of data; Evaluation of student progress
Creating the school culture	Safe and orderly schools	Culture of learning and professional behavior; Personalized learning connections
Building community support		Connections to external communities
	Focus on basic skills	Quality instruction; Rigorous and aligned curriculum
		Variability in schooling experiences

When the Effective Schools movement began, researchers focused on safety and orderliness of schools and the impact on learning. As time progressed, and programs such as *Responsible Discipline* and *Positive Behavior and Interventions Support* were implemented in schools, student behaviors were addressed, with the strongest support in place for extreme behaviors needing intense support. The learning environment has progressed from solely focusing on safety to focusing on being student-centered and having student achievement as its primary focus. Hand-in-hand with the learning environment being focused on student achievement, the overall culture is centered on learning and high expectations for both staff and students. What matters to a school's culture is often evident in both behaviors and what is displayed in the physical setting.

Instruction has changed from just the basics of reading, writing, and math, to a more challenging and rigorous curriculum. In the school I researched, this was evident by the written, taught, and tested curriculums being aligned, higher-order questioning of students' knowledge, and high yield teaching and learning strategies. Teaching and learning has progressed from teachers trying to get something *to* students to teachers facilitating learning and allowing students to bring their experiences, voices, and cultures into the classroom, making learning more relevant. There is no longer a focus on the basics, as once suggested by Lezotte (2001), but more quality instruction as suggested by Rutledge et al. (2012). The quality instruction, according to Rutledge et al. (2012) has four components: clear curriculum standards; curriculum align with state, district, and school standards and assessments; curriculum with consistency and integrity to the standards; and a rigorous curriculum that includes ambitious content and high cognitive demand for all students.

Having an accountability system in place to determine the effectiveness of teaching yet remains a constant for moving schools forward. Schools that are effective frequently assess teaching and learning as a formative measurement tool that allows both teachers and students to have real time data that can be used to inform instruction. Students are now owners of their own data, so they can see areas for improvement. The data also allow teachers to determine next steps for instruction. In data-rich classrooms, DuFour’s (2004) guiding questions are the focus of effective planning and teaching:

1. What do we want students to know and learn?
2. How will we know if they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

This keeps the focus on teaching and learning and gives teachers a useful tool to gauge students’ performance and understanding, and does not rely solely on external summative testing. Frequent assessments and data analysis give formative data teachers can use to adjust instruction before, during, and after concepts are taught.

Developing meaningful and personal connections between students and adults is one area not mentioned in the earlier Effective Schools movement; however, it is a critical element for effective schools. The connections between teachers, administrators, and parents to students are necessary in building a learning community in which all stakeholders share responsibility for student success. In the school I researched, one of the top reasons quoted for school success was relationships between students and teachers. It accounted for the trust students placed in teachers to get them where they needed to be academically and teachers’ belief in students’ abilities. There was never a question if students could learn, but the expectation of when. According to Rutledge et al. (2012), “In effective schools, individuals, report strong connections between the students and the school, as well as widely distributed meaningful relationships among students and adults at the school” (p. 9). In these schools, according to Rutledge et al.

(2012), teachers are more engaging, meet the needs of their individual students, and practice authentic teaching that is practical to students' lives.

The only component not listed in previous research before Rutledge et al. (2012), but perhaps the most important, is the recognition in the variability in schooling experiences of students. According to Rutledge et al. (2012), effective schools recognize students' experiences vary and realize policies, practices, and programs (implemented at the school level) can help to foster and encourage positive learning experiences across subgroups of students. A breakdown of the relationships among the conceptual framework, research questions, and interview questions are located in the appendices.

Common Themes of Effective Schools Research

The research conducted on effective schooling shares the belief that learning should be for all students, which means learning should be successful for all students. Educators must put in the work of engaging in effective practices, research-based strategies, and other common elements of effective schooling. School can be an equalizer for all students, equipping them with a solid, successful education, which would not only close the achievement gap, but also open up opportunities such as after school tutorial and enrichment programs. The research presented shares the following attributes in common:

- strong leadership,
- focus on achievement with challenging goals,
- high expectations for students and staff,

- frequent monitoring of students’ performance and analyzing data to drive instructional decisions,
- focused professional development,
- safe and orderly schools,
- parental involvement and support, and
- a positive culture and climate

All of these commonalities can be attributed to the original effective school correlates identified by Ron Edmonds.

Focus Areas of Study

With the above-referenced research surrounding effective schools, there yet remains the problem of our nation’s poorest children not receiving a quality education, as evidenced by Title I standards, the No Child Left Behind definition of achievement, and the achievement gap. This study focused on four areas:

- instructional practices that improve student performance (curriculum)
- collaborative approaches used by teachers and how they impact teaching and learning (learning communities and professional development)
- how teachers motivate and provide high expectation of all students (high expectations)
- instructional programs utilized to enhance student achievement (programs, technology, other resources)

Justifications for the four areas of study are common threads that are backed by the above literature. Additional research on each area is included further in this chapter.

Instructional Practices

Children who live in poverty are often at significant risk for experiencing academic and social failure (Belfiore, Auld, & Lee, 2005). The reasons for this are varied. Research has shown that children at risk because of poverty are more likely to have teachers who use less effective instructional practices and to experience more negative interactions with their teachers (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003). Additionally, children who are from impoverished backgrounds are also at risk for having more challenging behaviors, which often means receiving more negative attention from their teachers. This results in frequent loss of instruction, especially if they are excluded from the classroom, whether from being suspended or spending time out of the classroom. Furthermore, children who live in impoverished environments often enter school behind their same-age peers in early reading skills (Espinosa, 2005). Regardless as to why they are at significant risk for failure, it is imperative all children receive the opportunity to experience high-quality instruction and positive interactions with teachers. What happens in the classroom, by way of teaching and learning, is paramount to student achievement.

Teacher Impact

The positive impact a classroom teacher can have on students is a given and not disputable. Administrators know this and try to recruit highly qualified teachers with reputable experience. Parents quickly learn who the great teachers are and submit requests for their children to be in their classrooms. Great teachers are effective because they possess intrinsic skills, are properly trained, and are supported by administration as they affect the lives of students on a daily basis (Rosenburg, 2012).

> The positive impact a classroom teacher can have upon any student is not even worth debating. Every parent knows it to be true, as does every principal at all levels of education. Great teachers have some innate skills, but also must be effectively trained and supported. (Rosenburg, 2012, p. 10)

Without these traits, teachers' skills are stifled and the chances of improving them are limited, which means their impact on student achievement is limited (Rosenburg, 2012). To improve teacher effectiveness in the classroom, administrators must provide them with necessary tools to do their jobs. A huge part of administrative support is professional development that is tailored to meet teachers' specific needs. The days of a one-size-fits-all are long gone, as teachers have varied needs. According to Smylie, Allensworth, Greenberg, Harris, and Luppescu (2001), there is a positive relationship between teacher professional community and the quality of professional development.

Administrative Impact

Administrators must utilize walkthroughs and observations to regularly assess what individual teachers need and then provide differentiated professional development to meet those needs. Another means of supporting teacher effectiveness is to provide time for collaboration. Teachers need time to gain knowledge and techniques from their colleagues. Where one teacher's outcomes in a math objective may be weak, another teacher's may be strong and administrators and teachers can match talents to needs. Bruner and Greenlee (2000) examined work culture in high- and low-performing schools and determined there was more collaboration among teachers in schools with higher student achievement. To support and encourage collaboration, the master schedule must be created to build in time for teachers to collaborate among their grade level colleagues and with other personnel who impact learning (Chenoweth, 2009).

In *Using Great Teaching to Overcome Poverty*, Rosenburg (2012) shares his aggressive approaches used as an elementary principal of one of the bottom 5% of low-performing schools in all of California to improve the school. Working alongside the leadership team, Rosenburg (2012) took time to strategically look at the school's data and build a plan on closing gaps. They looked at what students already knew and were able to do and what more was needed to improve student achievement. Two main actions dictated their plan: teacher collaboration and specific professional development. Rosenburg (2012) believed great teaching could overcome the debilitating impact of poverty on student achievement and focused his attention on the classroom and teaching. He believed in order to develop teachers' skills necessary to improve achievement, the focus had to be on high quality professional development. The targeted professional development provided used a simple approach: identify a few key instructional practices the leadership team believes will have a dramatic impact on student achievement, regularly assess teachers and their specific needs in an overtly non-evaluative manner, and provide specific professional development based on trends observed while assessing classroom practice (Rosenburg, 2012).

Best Practices

From the onset of *No Child Left Behind*, improving student achievement through best instructional practices has been at the forefront of educational research, especially in regard to children at risk because of poverty (McMaster, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2007; Simpson, 2005). Effective instructional practices include those that maximize instructional time, engagement of students, time for students to engage in meaningful talk about learning, and less time spent on negative behavior, time wasted during transitions, classroom interruptions, and time off task on topics not related to teaching and learning (National Research Council, 2001; Stichter et al., 2006, 2008). "Effective instruction has been linked to higher academic achievement, increased on-task behavior, and fewer problem behaviors (Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002; Gunter, Hummel, & Conroy, 1998)" (Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 1998, p. 172). Sanders and Horn (1998) indicate, "The single biggest factor affecting the academic growth of any population of youngsters is the effectiveness of the individual classroom" (p. 2).

Peabody (2011), an administrator with Florida's Orange County Public Schools, conducted a research study on the impact teacher beliefs and instructional practices had on students' performance on Florida Comprehensive Reading Assessment Test in 10th grade. Teachers at four schools with a majority of at-risk students were observed and interviewed. Findings showed that teachers at high performing schools emphasized learner-centered teaching and teachers at low-performing schools emphasized teacher-centered behaviors. In his study, Peabody noticed the following instructional practices that resulted in high achievement:

- Student-led activities
- Student choice in the curriculum
- Emphasis on reading-related activities and assignments

- Higher order thinking skills encouraged
- Student-directed learning
- Teacher rapport with students
- Use of technology
- Positive learning environment

For classrooms that emphasized student-centered behaviors, students had input into curriculum choice, were more apt to engage in productive student-talk, and took ownership of their learning. In classrooms where the teacher was the focus, there was a hidden agenda where teachers were trying to transmit knowledge and get something *to* students rather than students experiencing and discovering their own learning. In high-performing schools, administrators and leaders work to affect real change and transform school into centers of inquiry where students benefit from education.

Change that Lasts

According to Riddile (2010), Associate Director for High Schools Services at National Association of Secondary School Principals, real and responsible change takes at least three to five years of laser-like focus, deliberate practice, and much plain, old-fashioned hard work. He believes responsible change always leads directly to the classroom, because it is in the classroom where the business of school—teaching and learning takes place (Riddile, 2010). In order for schools to effect real change, they must set up schedules that define learning time. School leaders influence what subjects teachers teach and which students they teach, and the leaders make choices regarding the variations in the sizes of each course section. They plan professional development and give feedback to teachers to improve their teaching methods. The real work happens in the classroom, but leaders set the tone.

Riddile (2010) believes schools must have short and long-term goals. In the short-term, schools can impact learning by ensuring time for bell-to-bell instruction and adequate instructional delivery. Bell-to-bell teaching eliminates downtime and ensures no time is wasted. Every second of instructional time is used. In order to have a positive impact on learning, school leaders must have a clear vision of what effective teaching looks like. When it comes to success for hard-to-reach students, Riddile (2010) suggests consistency, not sameness. “The weaker the student, the more structure and consistency he or she will need” (p. 65).

Another effective instructional strategy is to get the most use out of homework by making it meaningful for students by checking for understanding. Homework should be the application of learned and mastered material, and high-performing schools ensure that before students practice independently, they have received guided practice in the classroom with the teacher (Riddile, 2010).

In the long term, school leaders must also improve the quality of instruction by building the capacity of teachers to meet individual students’ learning needs. Teachers must develop their mindset by putting forth work and effort, which produces their ability to meet the needs of their students. In turn, it will be the students’ work and effort that creates their ability. Teaching and learning must be deliberate to produce success. The mindset of teachers in high-performing schools is that the poorest and most disadvantaged students can outperform their advantaged counterparts if the entire school focuses on the right things and consistently uses the right strategies (Riddile, 2010).

Teachers are not given extra duties, but time to focus on teaching and learning. Teachers also focus on cooperative learning from their colleagues, and encourage the same with students, to learn from one another. Professional development is an essential, according to Riddile, because it allows teachers to have continual, ongoing professional standards and procedures to enhance and improve their skills (Riddile, 2010).

Effective instructional classrooms equate to having strong beginnings and focused closure in each class session, checking for understanding, and actively engaging students (Riddile, 2010). Schools must be determined to learn, develop, strengthen, and utilize best instructional practices, so teaching and learning is intentional for student success. Riddile (2010) summed it up when he said, “Schools are about so much more than the walls that define the building. They are about what goes on inside those walls” (p. 66).

Collaborative Approaches

Chris Dolejs, Research Associate with the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA), compiled a report offered by the National High School Center. Their job was to build the capacity of states across the nation to effectively implement the goals of *No Child Left Behind* relating to high schools. The report focused on successful high schools, highlighting the ways in which superintendents, principals, teachers, and students set and met high expectations for all students. As the NCEA took a look at the practices that distinguished higher performing schools from average performing schools, several themes emerged. The following basic characteristics of the higher-performing schools included:

> - They set explicit academic goals that are aligned with and often exceed state standards.
> - Their focused professional development activities support a culture of collaboration.
> - Educators embrace broader learning objectives than just their own subject matter and use differentiation strategies to reach students at all levels.
> - Teachers interpret student achievement data to make decisions about teaching.
> - Schools recognize student and teacher achievement within a context of support. (Dolejs, 2006, p. 1)

Teacher Collaboration

One of the recurring themes in high-performing schools is teacher collaboration. This is often problematic due to time constraints. Personal and institutional constraints often limit the degree to which professional development affects teaching practice (Coskie & Place, 2008). Darling-Hammond (as cited in Collier, 2011) suggested that one of those constraints is time in schools for collaborative planning. In order to move high-poverty schools to high-performing, teachers must have to time to build partnerships in planning by collaborating about the entire teaching and learning process. Administrators can assist by ensuring the master schedule supports and builds in time for collaboration on a daily basis. The days of teacher isolation are gone, as they benefit no one. Teachers must have open minds as well as open doors and be receptive to learning from their colleagues. In the long run, students benefit, and it becomes a win-win situation for everyone. When administrators foster a no-secrets work environment, teacher feel safe to collaborate, ask questions, seek help, share ideas, and learn from their colleagues.

Teachers who are willing to collaborate with colleagues are open to constructive critique and sharing their ideas and expertise with others. They are not afraid to ask questions or think outside the box. They try to understand their work better. They regularly come together to share experiences, stories, tools, and methods, and through these kinds of interactions, they learn how to do their work better, which results in students benefitting from their collaborative work.

Peer Coaching

In their study of adding collaborative peer coaching to teacher identities, Jewett and MacPhee (2012) discuss how valuable peer collaboration is to teachers and ultimately, students. As it relates to teachers creating reciprocal relationships, as teachers begin to learn about peer coaching and collaboration, they discover ways to interact with one another in ways that are collaborative, locally focused, and student-centered. As they reflect on the peer coaching experience, they begin to develop confidence in their collaborations. Along with this sense of confidence comes new understanding about coaching and professional development (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). When teachers feel a renewed sense of confidence, they also have the courage to open their classroom doors, ask for help, share ideas, and expect support from colleagues.

When teachers have opportunities to collaborate, they create opportunities for complementary teaching versus parallel learning. In parallel learning, teachers engage in independent activities that are similar but not necessarily influenced by or shared with others. They work together for the good of their students but do not always have opportunities to engage collaboratively in curricular conversations about their teaching concerns and practices.

Complementary teaching, on the other hand, affords teachers opportunities to engage in activities that can have an influence on each other's teaching. Darling Hammond (as cited in Collier, 2011) wrote that in complementary and collaborative settings, "You always have a way to have partners to help you solve your problem, to help you improve your practice" (p. 13).

Research and Peer Coaching

According to Jewett and MacPhee (2012), when collaborative partnerships occur with teachers, there is a complementary relationship that is created. They complete one another in the teaching and learning process, and students benefit from such partnerships as teachers begin to work together. Two-way learning opportunities are created for teachers and knowledge is constructed together, in which knowledge is co-constructed. Teachers tend to "engage in joint activities which are negotiated rather than imposed" (Wells, 1999, p. 227, as cited in Jewett & McPhee, 2012, p. 109).

Impact of Teacher Collaboration

Research conducted by Clubine, Knight, Schneider, and Smith (2001), in conjunction with the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, examined how five high-poverty Texas high schools attained notable achievement levels on selected academic indicators. The schools shared several characteristics: most students were economically disadvantaged; the schools were located in large urban districts, each school's scored rating of acceptable, recognized, or exemplary; and student achievement on at least one of three academic indicators was higher than the state average. Results from the research found that, despite commonalities, each school implemented its practices in unique ways. Practices that were critical to high performance included setting clear goals and establishing high expectations, using data to guide instruction, focusing on instruction and individual learning, supporting teachers and enhancing collaboration, and fostering an environment of respect and affection for students. Although locations were different, the practices seemed critical to the performance of the five schools studied. Researchers expected to find the practices influencing success at these schools to be different from those at the elementary school level, yet several of the findings of this study echoed findings of the Dana Center's research on high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools. Since 1996, the Dana Center has conducted three studies of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools as well as a study of successful Texas school districts with a large percentage of low-income students (Lein, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

In the five schools, administrators realized the critical part teachers played in the success of the school and worked to build an environment where teachers felt appreciated and supported as professionals. They worked to develop collaboration, not just among teachers, but also among administrators, parents, and the community. They also tried to involve a wide range of school and community stakeholders in developing the academic goals of the schools. Support was given by principals, assistant principals, and district-level administrators on a daily basis. Everyone became accountable for the schools' success. They worked in partnership with teachers to identify and solve problems related to student achievement. They listened to teachers' needs for professional development and committed to the time and resources to make it available. Budgetary decisions were made with teachers' needs in mind. Monies were safeguarded for teachers to attend conferences.

Teacher collaboration became a priority in all five schools. No time was taken for extra duties. At one school, the principal decided not to require teachers to perform any nonteaching duties, such as monitoring the halls or the cafeteria. Instead, the school's four administrators, including the principal, remained visible on campus, allowing the teachers to focus exclusively on instruction. In addition, administrators at these schools facilitated collaboration and teamwork among their teaching staff. They structured time for teachers to meet in departmental and cross-departmental teams and maintained open-door policies so that teachers and students felt free to go to them at any time with ideas, questions, or concerns (Clubine et al., 2001).

Teachers at the five schools credited the students' increased achievement to the high degree of collaboration and teamwork around curriculum and instruction. Teachers used common planning time to work together on lessons and to discuss instructional strategies and data. One teacher described the difference collaboration made for her school:

> Before, when we were not scoring high; it was everyone to his own. I would teach something, she would teach something else; we were not coordinated. That's not what's happening now. We are together now. We plan together, and we know exactly what] we're going to be teaching. (Clubine et al., 2001, p. 21)

According to Clubine et al. (2001), collaboration of academic goals was not limited to educators. Staff at these high schools considered everyone on campus, including the students, as partners working toward student academic success. Communication was open among students, counselors, parents, teachers, and administrators. There was a strong sense of transparency. Parents and students felt free to voice their opinions as well as to seek guidance from faculty and the administration (Clubine et al., 2001).

The site-based decision-making was one avenue some of the schools used to build collaboration in achieving goals. In Texas, state law required public schools to establish school-based management teams that include administrators, classroom teachers, staff, community members, and parents. The teams proved beneficial to the five high schools studied.

Some of the schools relied on the teams to make budgetary, curricular, and policy decisions. This empowered all stakeholders to take ownership of the education provided by the school (Clubine et al., 2001). At one of the schools, a member of the Campus Education Improvement Committee emphasized, “We’re the ones setting the policy and what we want to do” (Clubine et al., 2001, p. 21). The schools made creative efforts to enhance collaboration with parents. For example, report cards were distributed during parent-teacher conferences. Teachers would take advantage of the time to inform parents of the learning process and curriculum. The school also began having parent nights to showcase the great work students were doing. Another avenue to foster collaboration was by building strategic community partnerships. In some of the five schools, classroom activities were supported by field trips and community organizations.

Teacher Motivation of Students

Some parents play an active role in their children's education, while others leave it up to schools and teachers to cultivate academic motivation from students who are unmotivated and reluctant. Teachers play a critical role in motivating students. According to the Center on Educational Policy (CEP; Usher, 2012), school faculty can be trained to recognize students with social, emotional, or developmental challenges that affect motivation, instead of simply waiting for students to ask for help. In order for teachers to be most effective at motivating students, the school may seek to offer professional development programs that address skills teachers can use in motivating their students. For example, some programs have focused on ways to help teachers encourage autonomy among students, emphasize goal mastery over performance, or create environments where students are willing to take on risks and challenges without fear of failure. According to CEP (Usher, 2012), students, whose teachers hold them to high expectations, while creating and maintaining a caring and democratic climate in the classroom, seem to benefit from motivation. In addition, when teachers engage families in the education process, it can be helpful in improving student motivation, as parents also want their children to be successful in school.

Motivation and Purpose

According to the CEP, almost all students recognize that learning is important; however, not all are motivated by academics or love of learning alone. Perhaps if that learning was reframed as a means to achieve a certain goal, they would be better able to see the importance of learning (Usher, 2012).

Students are no different from adults we know in our lives. Some things they are motivated to do and other things they are not. Usually, if a task is exciting and of interest, most people are motivated to complete it, but if a task has no relevance or purposeful meaning, most would rather abort it. Purpose plays a big role in motivation. If the goal is not articulated or implied, people may feel it is a waste of time or unimportant. When it comes to learning, some students are intrinsically motivated. It may be due to a natural or learned love for learning from parents or other caregivers, or it may be due to students being goal-oriented. According to CEP,

> For some people, simply having a certain end point to aim for is motivation enough. It makes sense, then, that some students would be motivated by setting goals—whether short-term, concrete goals, such as passing a test or achieving a certain grade, or long-term, abstract goals, such as getting into college or pursuing a certain career. (Usher, 2012, p. 1)

Motivation refers to “internally driven engagement” related to achieving a particular goal (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002, p. 775). Goals can change over time and can be simple or complex. Teachers give students goals based on objectives taught. Parents may give their children goals each day of doing their best in school. Students may also create goals for themselves based on grades they want to make or objectives they want to master. When it comes to goals, students face frustrating tasks and failure daily while trying to reach their goals. An important point for teachers to consider is why some students are more frustrated by failure and less motivated to persist after failure than other students. Those who persist after a failure or setback are described as having a mastery orientation, whereas students who give up in frustration are described as having a helpless orientation (Diener & Dweck, 1978, 1980). When students are less motivated, teachers must be creative in getting them to put forth effort and hard work so they can experience success.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

In many schools where students struggle with self-motivation and need an extra dose of it, some teachers rely on the dangling carrot of presenting them with external rewards for work completed. Some students are driven intrinsically to do well in school, while others need an extra push to put forth effort and succeed, and rely on motivation from their teachers to do so. In Daniel Pink's "Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us" (2009), he discusses two sets of conditions that motivate people, which can be applied to students as well. Both are research-based and date back to the 1950s—intrinsic and extrinsic. To move away from the extrinsic and to the intrinsic, Pink (2009) discusses three conditions that do a much better job of motivating people intrinsically to try hard, do their best, be successful at whatever they undertake, and do so willingly. They are autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Teachers can use these conditions to motivate students who are reluctant to put forth effort.

When teachers give students autonomy, they are entrusting them to complete tasks without micromanagement, and students actually have a choice and voice in their work. Students do not have to be guided every step of the way and actually discover learning while teachers can serve as facilitators or coaches. When teachers introduce concepts, the goal is for students to master the content. This would mean students have become proficient at putting forth effort to learn the concepts. Mastery is based on growth and effort, which trumps talent. Mastery takes time, deliberate practice, guidance, and good instruction. Purposeful teaching and learning means the tasks are really important to both teachers and students. Parker (2012) states purposeful tasks are "worthy of the best that we have to have to give, a higher-order goal" (p. 33). When discussing these three conditions, Parker (2012) believes they produce the best results when they are interrelated and are mutually reinforcing. He states,

> What struck me most about all this is that over the past decade, in the hundreds of low-performing schools in which I've worked, we have been the most successful when these three conditions have been effectively cultivated. This approach has provoked high levels of encouragement, inspiration, hope, hard work, positive relationships and new solutions to old problems in some of the most struggling schools in the state. (p. 33)

The key to making a difference in the lives of children is not about which group they belong to (African American, Muslim, Latino, Asian, rural, Southern, etc.); it is about nurturing individual children, especially those who do not have access to resources that foster learning and promote high achievement. It is paramount to look at children as individuals and not just as members of groups. School personnel who focus on differences of groups instead of the needs of individuals may be missing the opportunity to make a difference so all students experience success. When schools take the focus off transforming students and instead focus on transforming the way schools do business, the achievement gap will lessen.

Summary

The use of effective, research-based instructional practices, how teachers motivate students, the use of collaborative practices among teachers, and use of instructional programs that enhance learning can prove beneficial to schools that serve high populations of at-risk students. As a result, high achievement increases the likelihood of postsecondary education or careers beyond high school, which is associated with increased lifetime earnings and skills. Success in school will allow students to improve their lives as adults and escape the limitations and lack of opportunities associated with poverty.

In order to share a wholesome study, it was paramount to become situated in the school and experience firsthand how stakeholders were beating the challenges associated with serving a high population of students experiencing poverty. The approach to the research was crucial, and gave voice to the practices being demonstrated on behalf of students. In order to accomplish and capture a holistic picture, a qualitative approach was used.

The focus of Chapter III is on research design and methodology. A qualitative study was used to tell the stories of how one Title I school consistently met and beat the challenges of working with a high population of students experiencing poverty. The stories and advice given to help similar schools are shared. Each participant shared their perspective of how the school consistently maintained success. The qualitative study was marked by observations and interviews, which blended the voices of the storytellers beautifully. Most perceptions blended harmoniously; however, there were a few outliers that didn’t quite fit into the flow, yet were just as important to the overall picture of the setting. Research questions and the role of the researcher are presented in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction of Research Design

In this study, an in-depth qualitative approach was used to examine the contributions to the success of a consistently high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school. Qualitative research is about the process, meaning, and understanding of the research. In order to process and understand the research, the researcher must be immersed in the setting. Holliday (2007) states, “The setting is a physical, geographical ‘place,’ which the researcher can describe simply by ‘being there’ long enough and ensuring ‘authenticity’; by focusing on what ‘local characters’ say in interviews, personal accounts, and conversation” (p. 18).

Qualitative Approach

According to Creswell (2013), the qualitative approach is one in which the researcher often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern). This study drew on the multiple meanings of stakeholders in a high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school. Qualitative research makes use of narratives and uses open-ended data from interviews to tell the story of the setting researched. Creswell (2013) asserts the researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data.

Gaining Access to Conduct Research

After speaking with district personnel regarding my research and the feasibility of conducting it in one of their schools, a school was selected. Several conversations were exchanged with the principal and agreement was made to allow research to be conducted. The school was chosen based on three criteria: being a Title I school, student achievement status, and proximity to the researcher. Once numerous email exchanges resulted in approval from the district, minor changes needed to be made to the researcher's application before final approval was granted.

After approval from the district, the UNCG Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted and approved. Stamped documents with IRB approval were sent to the district, and final approval was given to begin collecting data. I talked with the principal several times to set up the dates for research. It was fortunate my spring break occurred the week before the research site's Spring Break. This allowed a reasonable time period for me to become situated in the school setting to conduct research.

Upon arrival at the research site, I was greeted by the principal and the school's state consultant with whom I had a work history. As a Title I school, regardless of achievement levels, an assigned consultant regularly made routine visits to the school to monitor progress by conducting walkthrough visits and being available to assist with any professional development needs. The consultant knew of my passion for helping students in Title I schools and recommended the district and was instrumental in setting up the initial meeting with the assistant superintendent to get me approved to do research.

Next, I was given a verbal summary of the school's journey to high student achievement, followed by a detailed tour of the school by the consultant. Because the principal had informed the staff of my arrival and purpose, the entire staff was prepared for my visit and welcomed me. After another brief meeting with the principal and consultant, I was given the freedom to walk around and observe the school setting from a personal lens. This took a considerable amount of time as the school was fairly large, although the population was small.

While conducting research, as someone who was completely new to the school, I had no knowledge of what the school was like or what I would see or hear. This was beneficial to my positionality in the research, as I do the same work in a similar school. My positionality had an effect on the findings. Although the only connection I had to the school was the state consultant with whom I had worked while moving my school to full accreditation, I felt connected due to similar challenges of working to move from a turnaround school to true transformation. The state consultant knew of my passion for helping students in Title I schools and recommended the district and was instrumental in setting up the initial online meeting with the assistant superintendent. My knowledge of the success of the school came through a personal search of high-poverty, high-performing schools in the state of Virginia. I inquired about the school with the consultant and the school was selected based on its success with Title I students.

Research Begins

When Holliday (2007) refers to “being there” and ensuring authenticity, it is precisely what happened during the research process. From the day I interacted with the principal by phone, I immediately gained a sense of belonging. There was an instant connection. Perhaps, our connection had something to do with the fact that she was presenting her oral defense the week before my arrival and could devote her full attention to ensuring I had what I needed or that we both loved and preferred to work in Title I schools. Whatever the reason, we became instant educational companions, which is rare for me. There was a sense of empathy that connected us. I knew and felt I was welcomed to be privy to the transparency that existed throughout the school.

Walking into the school felt like home to me. I felt like I was in my own school, among my team of teachers and staff. My immediate inclination was to reach out and assist in whatever capacity was needed. It felt natural to me, which is one of the attributes of conducting a qualitative study. The authenticity was present because of the level of realness fostered by the principal. We hit the ground running with a conversation about what I would see—real teachers and students in a real setting. There was no fluff and no need to entertain or impress me as the researcher. I wanted raw data and was assured that is what I would get.

Although the school felt very familiar to the climate created within my school, I had to step back and harness this feeling of closeness to the school, so my research was not compromised in any way. Holliday (2007) discusses the “judicious balance” (p. 8) that must occur when presenting qualitative data: freedom to explore creatively the best way to approach the scenario, and carefully accounting for every move. More on how I accomplished this balance of encountering the research setting while maintaining principles of research is found in the section below that describes observer as participant.

Research Question and Sub-questions

The study was designed to examine and determine how administrators and teachers address the challenges and issues associated with teaching and learning in a Title I school, and how they develop approaches to teaching that lift students from poverty into school success. The overarching question that guided the research was: “What educational factors, such as programs, practices, and expectations, do principals and teachers in a high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school use to improve their performance in the school?” To answer this question, the following sub-questions were used to gain a more in-depth understanding:

- What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high-poverty, high-performing school?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies and structures contribute to high achievement?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to the school’s success?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to the school’s success?

The Setting

The school in this qualitative study was a high-poverty, high-performing elementary school, which meant students exceeded state and federal accountability benchmarks and achieved average scores on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in English and mathematics at or above the 85th percentile. In addition, the school consistently achieved 100% of its Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. According to the school's report card provided by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) during the accreditation years of 2012–2013, 2013–2014, and 2014–2015, the school scored higher than the state's target benchmarks. The school received district and state recognition for its student achievement and is a source of pride in its community. As a result of accomplishing these goals, the school is identified as a high performing school. Table 4 displays data for the years noted above. All documentation was retrieved from the VDOE's website (www.doe.virginia.gov).

To further break down the data of subgroups of students, Table 5 shows the accreditation performance of all subgroups for 2011–2014. All subgroups are included, although only subgroups with 40 or more students count for accreditation purposes. All reported scores are above either the division or state.

Table 4

State Accreditation Results for All Students

		2012–2013		2013–2014		2014–2015	
Subject	Accreditation Benchmark (State Goal)	1-Year Average	3-Year Average	1-Year Average	3-Year Average	1-Year Average	3-Year Average
English	75	94	94	69	87	67	77
Math	70	88	95	80	89	74	81
History	70	99	97	91	96	86	92
Science	70	98	98	87	95	77	88

Table 5

State Accreditation Results by Ethnicity

	2011–2012		2012–2013		2013–2014	
Ethnicity	English	Math	English	Math	English	Math
Black	96	88	70	80	59	69
Hispanic	<	<	<	<	<	<
White	<	<	<	<	<	<
Multi-Ethnic	<	<	<	<	<	<
Students with disabilities	89	67	50	67	58	40
Economically Disadvantaged	95	78	65	78	51	63
Limited English Proficiency	<	<	<	<	<	<

Note. < subgroup too small

According to the spring data (March 2015) provided by the VDOE, the school was comprised of 439 students: 0.2% (Asian), 82.6% (Black), 12% (Hispanic), 3.4% (Multi-Ethnic), and 1.5% (White). Table 6 displays the demographic data of students in the participating school.

Table 6

Demographic Data of Students in Participating School

Race/Ethnic Category	*n*	%
Asian	1	0.2
Black	363	82.6
Hispanic	53	12.0
Multi-Ethnic	15	3.4
White	7	1.5

Research Participants

Participants in the study volunteered after the initial research information I shared at a staff meeting. In order to receive a good sampling of teachers and parents, I worked with the principal to get the word out prior to my visit. The principal was able to talk about the study and ask for possible volunteers. After my information meeting, several teachers asked questions about confidentiality before signing up; others just volunteered without asking questions. All those who volunteered to interview were interviewed. Due to the small size of the school, with most grade levels only consisting of three teachers, I was fortunate to interview two people from each grade level. Table 7 displays participant profiles to assist the reader in gaining a visual of the participants of the study.

Table 7

Participant Profiles

Name (Pseudonyms)	Race/Gender	Age Range	Years of Experience	Grade Level	Origin of Location
Lori McCall	White/Female	29	6	K	Virginia
Dee Mayson	White/Female	32	8	K	Virginia
Malika Spain	White/Female	63	25	1	Virginia
Lana Boulder	White/Female	35	9	1	Wisconsin
Selema Brown	White/Female	42	9	2	New York
Sandra Donovan	White/Female	29	5	2	Virginia
Maya Tanner	White/Female	40	14	3	Virginia
Cheyenne Lawson	Black/Female	36	8	3	Virginia
Robbin Bristol	White/Female	61	18	4	Connecticut
Marietta McPherson	Black/Female	47	11	4	Virginia
Yvette Walton	White/Female	60	15	5	Virginia
Lynda Keats	Black/Female	39	8	5	New York
Nancy McNeil	Black/Female	42	13	Principal	Virginia
Silvia Warren Patricia Ellis Sonya Martin Sean Roberts Greg Sprowls	3 Black Females; 2 Black Males	22 25 28 32 35	1 1 2 3 3	Parents	Virginia

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods for this study included observations and interviews. Observations were conducted of teachers, a staff meeting, grade level meetings, the whole school environment, arrival and dismissal procedures, and the principal.

Interviews were conducted of 12 teachers, two from each grade level, the principal, and a parent focus group of five. Detailed information is shared below.

Observations

When I first created the protocol for observing the school and classroom settings, I had many assumptions of what I thought I would see or perhaps wanted to see; however, after streamlining and allowing the data to speak for itself, the way was open for more data of what I did and did not see or hear. For the school setting, I categorized the observation by the following: physical environment, climate, procedures, interactions, communication, community partnerships, and resources. These categories provided a holistic view of the school setting. An in-depth description of each category is listed in Appendix A. In addition to observations of the school as a whole, I also conducted observations in ten classrooms in which I observed nine female teachers and one male teacher. Indicators observed included setting (climate, appearance, what is seen/not seen); instructional orientation (direct, collaborative, cooperative, etc.); organization (groups, seating, arrangements, centers, etc.); procedures (norms, rules, consequences, teacher-centered, student-centered); instructional strategies (teacher’s role, Bloom’s level, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching); engagement and interaction (students, teacher, motivation, types of interaction); assessments (performance-based, standards-based, formative, summative, absence of, etc.); and resources (technology, supplements, etc.). In addition to doing a general observation of the school and classroom observations, I also observed a staff meeting and shadowed the principal for two days. Shadowing the principal was a comfortable observation because her job duties and role was very similar to a typical day in my school. Both of these observations yielded a different perspective on how staff members and administrators interact and engage one another.   The total time spent for observations was 27.5 hours.

Time Spent in School

Being immersed in the culture of this school was a rewarding experience. I was afforded the opportunity to observe the school community in its natural environment. Having the chance to observe another Title I school was invaluable, as I was able to ascertain how the school utilized its funding. It gave me insight into what was most important to the school community. Spending time with teachers, during their planning block, allowed me to talk with them in a relaxed setting. Meeting with the state consultant, principal, and parents provided me with different perspectives about the school's success. What was most intense for me during my time was not what stakeholders said or how they performed during observations, but what they did not say and what I observed as I walked about the entire school. Everything in the school spoke volumes about what was important. From the numerous leadership affirmations, to the mission statements outside each classroom door, I visibly saw leadership was a critical component of their vision and mission. Considerable time was taken to observe the different aspects of the school day. Arrival and dismissal procedures were extremely methodical, despite the fact there were about 30 daycare vans that picked up students. Lunch time was pleasant, but as loud as any school in America. Meetings were focused and data-driven. The people were friendly and very accommodating. I felt like I was in my own school. I felt a part of the school culture.

Interviews

Initially, my goal was to audiotape interviews; however, upon talking about the process with participants, the request from staff was that they not be audiotaped. I was assured more would participate if audiotaping was eliminated. To ensure accuracy of responses, I explained the interview responses would have to be handwritten, with participants giving me time to record and validate their responses by member-checking and having them to sign-off on the accuracy of their responses. They agreed and the process worked very well. Most interviews were conducted during the hour of planning time; however, a few were conducted after school hours, each lasting an average of 50 minutes to an hour. Parent interviews occurred during the day at various times and interviews with the principal occurred over several days at various time.

The staff at the school was extremely accommodating of my request to interview. All interviews were conducted during non-instructional time on campus. Participants chose not to be recorded but allowed the researcher to take copious notes of their responses. The time allotted during their planning gave participants ample time to fully elaborate and express their thoughts as well as giving the researcher time to write complete responses. Interview participants, within the school, included teachers at every grade level and the principal. This gave a good sampling of the school’s stakeholders. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. All participants were given a number for coding purposes and to identify quotes. Questions were developed to determine the educational practices in this Title I school that consistently makes it high performing. All interview questions were focused on perceptions of success and its root causes in the school, leadership, communication among all stakeholders, programs, accountability, and student achievement. Questions were based on the research of effective schools and its five correlates: leadership, instructional focus, orderly and safe environment, high expectations, and accountability of achievement.

Parent Interview Group

For the interviews, outside the school, a group of parents were interviewed together. Parent interviews occurred during the school day. The protocol for interviews can be found in Appendices C and D.

Document Review

Prior to the research, I reviewed online documents of the school's history, information about the mission of the school, its staff and leadership, and the past three years of the school's performance in high-performing status. During the research process, I reviewed documents regarding the school's demographics, school improvement plan, and more historical testing data.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection from observations and interviews, qualitative, interpretational, and reflective analyses were used to evaluate the data from the qualitative study. "Interpretational analysis allows one to examine . . . data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 466). Interpretational analysis allowed me to use the rich stories and observations to code what participants said and did. After going through each page of interviews and observations, numerous codes were marked. From the many codes, I grouped similar codes into categories to define the data (citation needed). Using the categories, four themes that ran throughout the data were developed. Triangulation of data, through a combination of teacher, parent, and principal interviews, and observations of teachers and the school setting was used to collect data that represented several different viewpoints about the same situation.

After the research was complete, all notes and artifacts were organized and carefully reviewed and additional clarifying notes were taken. A mini-checklist was created to ensure I included all necessary information about those interviewed and observed, i.e., gender, name, years taught, time, grade level, number of students, etc. A brief handwritten summary was completed of each interview and observation. As I read interview responses and noted observations, I coded commonalities from each interview and observations. The numerous codes were then reduced to categories, which were developed into themes to use to guide the answers to research questions. All interviews and observations were organized by grade level to determine any common threads among teachers of the same grade level, then among all grade levels. A review of the parent and principal interviews were also checked against what teachers had to say. Not much was different from stakeholder to stakeholder. There was consistency in responses. A summary of each participant’s responses was completed for member-checking and verification to be finalized later. After categories of responses and observations were completed, a summary of what each stakeholder said about each category and actions during observations was written and compiled as a holistic review to ensure an accurate picture was obtained.

All participants were given a pseudonym, so identifying information, such as roles, grade levels, gender, and ethnicity were not known. Once all information was recorded in qualitative (descriptive) detail, the results from interviews and observations were shared with administrators and participants to ensure accuracy. Once validated by participants for accuracy, the research results were imported into the researcher's written work and submitted for approval before moving forward.

Data were stored on a password-protected laptop, which was stored in a locked file cabinet, with the researcher having sole possession of the key to the file cabinet. Once the data were analyzed and shared with administrators for accuracy and validity and the study finalized, data were collected to be stored for a period of time before being destroyed by shedding all documents.

Summary

This study was about how the principal and teachers in a high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school consistently improve student performance. Observations were conducted to determine instructional practices, collaborative approaches, motivation of students, and use of programs that enriched students' academic success. In addition, interviews were conducted to allow staff to share their personal insight into how the school maintained success. Categories of interview questions were connected to the research on effective schools. Participants were also given the opportunity to share advice for Title I schools struggling to meet the academic needs of their students. A parent group was interviewed to allow parents to give their perspective on the success of the school. Parent interview questions were similar to teacher interview questions, but from a parent viewpoint.

In Chapter IV, the actual research findings are presented. Data from observations and interviews are interwoven to illustrate the themes derived from coding and categorizing responses. Evidence of how the school consistently met the needs of its students is detailed within the four themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, qualitative data will be shared from stakeholders' interviews and observations. Categories and themes emerged from coding the data.

The study was conducted to examine how administrators and teachers addressed and met the challenges of a high-poverty school while maintaining consistency in students' performance. Lichtman (2013) discusses "thick descriptions" and how they give a clear picture when telling the stories of stakeholders. In order to obtain a rich account of how the school consistently maintained success, the responses of those in the trenches—teachers, administrator, and parents—were gathered, coded, categorized, and are thematically presented in this chapter. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms have been given to each stakeholder interviewed and/or observed. The data in this qualitative study may be used to assist schools with similar settings. What follows is a detailed description of the themes and the categories that support each theme.

Themes from the Research

From the research, interview and observation field notes were coded and reduced into several categories. From the categories, several themes were identified, which will be discussed using the categories as supporting details. The four themes and supporting categories include:

1. Working as a team to support instruction and achievement
2. Resources focused on improving achievement and professional development
3. Communication to support accountability for high expectations
4. Investment in connections between staff and students

Using the categories to support themes provided concrete examples of how the interviews and observations are interwoven. What follows is a detailed description of each themes.

Working as a Team to Support Instruction and Achievement

In this section, evidence of what stakeholders shared about their unified effort to work as a team to support instruction and achievement is discussed. Contributing factors included: teacher support and collaboration; internal support from administrators; professional development support; instructional strategies that support learning; instructional best practices; support through school organization and procedures; and supporting instruction through monitoring.

Teacher Support and Collaboration

As stakeholders were interviewed and observed, there was much evidence indicative of teamwork, the staff working together with parents, towards supporting instruction and student achievement. When referencing support and collaboration, teachers discussed how colleagues provided assistance by sharing best practices for teaching objectives. This was evidenced during grade level planning sessions. During the daily planning time, teachers met for one hour to review and discuss data. A weekly data calendar was used to determine what data was to be reviewed: math, reading, word study, or content. Based on results, teachers tiered students based on mastery and remediation. Teachers shared skills for teaching objectives. Students were grouped and assigned to flexible intervention and enrichment groups. Only students in first through fifth grade participated in the flexible groups.

This level of grade level support and collaboration was meaningful to teachers, although sometimes, conversations got heated. One grade level had a particularly tough planning session because two of the three classes were successful and one was not as successful. The teacher whose class performed poorly was on the defense because she had missed two days during the unit on adding unlike fractions. One teammate stated, “Your kids missed a lot of instruction because you were out.” The teacher responded by stating, “I am not like you; I know when to take a mental health day.” This changed the tone of the meeting for about 2–3 minutes until the grade level chair reminded them they had a guest observing the meeting. I could tell by the sarcasm this type interaction was normal. The teacher who made the comment stated, “She will be ok; she is just acting offended because we have a guest.”

In a separate interview, I asked a fourth-grade teacher, Ms. McPherson, about transparency during planning sessions, and she stated, “People are free to be open and honest if they need help. This benefits the students.” During another interview, when asked if all grade levels were transparent during the planning sessions, a fourth-grade teacher (Ms. Bristol) stated, “If I have difficulty with students learning an objective, I can seek assistance from my team and not feel judged because of it.” In addition to teacher collaboration and support, sharing best practices, and discussing data to drive re-teaching and mastery, stakeholders shared data about internal support they received from administrators.

Internal Support from Administrators

Another way the school worked as a team was through internal support from administrators—the principal and literacy facilitator. This was observed in numerous forms and discussed in various contexts among the stakeholders. Teachers discussed how administrators check on them throughout the day to see if anyone needed a break. According to teachers, this was due to the hard work of teaching bell-to-bell. One teacher stated, "Sometimes, we just need a five-minute breather." The same teacher talked about a time the principal, Ms. McNeil, saw her walking with her head down after she dropped her class off to music. She said, "I was having a particularly hard day. I had personal things going on, and as soon as she put her arm around my shoulder, the tears fell. She told me I mattered and things would get better. That's all I needed and I was fine for the rest of the day."

According to teachers interviewed, administrators showed unwavering support, a constant commitment, for staff as they held grade level and leadership meetings to focus on teaching and learning, discuss data, and determine support and resources needed. Teachers felt they had everything they needed to successfully do their jobs, so students could achieve. Ms. Brown, a second-grade teacher, discussed the reciprocal nature of support in the school. She stated, "My principal supports me by standing behind me and what I do in my classroom, and by doing her best to get me what I need in order to be successful with my students. I support students by giving them what they need to learn.

It is a give-and-take process." When Ms. McNeil was asked about supporting teachers, she affirmed that it was how the focus stayed on achievement. She stated, "As long as student learning is first, teachers will have my full support, but the minute I sense an adult problem, we have to have a different type of conversation. It may sound harsh, but it keeps the school moving forward (as long as we remember why we are here)." Parents also agreed the principal supported instruction by keeping the focus on learning because they felt every decision was based on student learning and achievement.

In a study of five high-poverty, high-performing schools, Ragland et al. (2002) noted administrators sought teachers who shared beliefs critical to school success. They encouraged teacher creativity and leadership and supported effective classroom instruction with a focus on teaching. This type of support was observed during grade level planning, as administrators collaborated with teachers and support staff and took an active role in the planning sessions.

To demonstrate an active role during the planning sessions, administrators relied on the grade level chairs to build leadership capacity by creating a pre-arranged agenda (created by administrators) that the leader was assigned to facilitate. Administrators were participatory versus taking charge, and asked questions about suggestions teachers made, with the intent to lead them into thinking differently and creatively about the curriculum. She said to one team, "Don't think outside the box; there is no box. Have fun with the curriculum." Teachers shared quite a few instances of internal support from administrators, which included checking in with teachers throughout the day, providing time for daily grade level meetings, fostering a reciprocal nature to support, in which they support teachers and teachers support the school program, and administrators taking an active role in planning. Another means of support was through professional development.

Professional Development Support

According to six teachers being interviewed in the upper grades (third-fifth), all believed Ms. McNeil supported teachers by making sure they had the necessary professional development to teach students. During an interview with Ms. McNeil, a discussion was held on her reliance on the district support to provide coaches to teach professional development or model best practices for teachers. As a Title I school, she shared how small the budget was and due to its size, teachers did not attend many outside professional development, but relied on the district's instructional coaches for reading and math and professional development from administrators on other topics such as co-teaching, analyzing data, instructional walkthroughs, etc. While observing a fifth-grade class, the math coach co-taught with the teacher, with a focus on using higher questioning stems to encourage students to think differently about number sense.

Administrative support was demonstrated by building time into the master schedule, so teachers had adequate time to teach core subjects of math, language arts, and science and social studies. Time was also built into the schedule for daily collaborative planning, with grade levels having planning the same time each day. Teachers expressed their appreciation for the constant support provided to them by administrators when it came to the master schedule and planning. They believed it proved to them how much administrators valued teaching and learning and valued their time. One of the fifth-grade teachers stated, “We know teaching and learning is important here at our school because time is built into the schedule for core instruction. Many schools do not have that, and we are grateful.” As previously stated in the literature, Riddile (2010) discusses real change in schools, and the responsibility of leaders to set the master schedule to define learning time.

Because there was planning each day, Ms. McNeil did not feel a need to overburden teachers with unnecessary staff meetings. She expressed the need to prioritize meetings, “There are meetings going on in this build every single day, so if there is no need to meet school-wide, I give teachers that reprieve.” In addition to having the necessary professional development, support from the district’s coaches, time built into the master schedule, and valuing teachers’ time by not meeting for the sake of meeting, another means of support for learning was through instructional strategies.

Instructional Strategies that Support Learning

An additional means of teachers working as a team to support instruction and achievement was through instructional strategies or methods whether whole or small group instruction, blended learning, or personalized learning.

Blended Learning

Blended learning occurs when part of a student’s learning is through digital content. Supplemental reading and math programs were utilized in all classes observed and students spent varying amounts of time on the computer based on the level of intervention needed. Some students worked individually on technology programs, and others worked in a small group using a set of four devices. The teacher worked with students simultaneously.

Personalized Learning

Personalized learning occurs when teachers tailor the learning environment based on how students learn best. In a fourth-grade classroom, students were working on adding fractions with unlike denominators. Some had manipulatives and were creating fractions, some were on the computer completing an online tutorial program (Interactive Achievement), some worked in a small guided math group (similar to guided reading) with the teacher, and others worked independently. These strategies and methods of teaching and learning were identified as I completed classroom observations, and Ms. McNeil credited the practices for supporting instruction and achievement.

Small Group Instruction

Teachers used small group instruction in reading and math. Other subjects such as science and social studies were whole group with small group or collaborative activities. From an observation standpoint, small-group instruction seemed to have several benefits such as improved use of teacher and student time, maximized instructional time, and lower student-to-teach ratios. In the study completed by Ragland et al. (2002), in the high-poverty, high-performing schools

> Faculty and administration created many opportunities for students to receive small-group instruction. Support teachers often helped classroom teachers provide small-group reading and mathematics instruction. Special education teachers participated in regular classroom instruction by providing small-group or individual re-teach opportunities, monitoring students during direct instruction, or assisting with modifications during guided and independent practice. (p. 21)

As I completed observations, I noticed use of small groups to better individualize, or differentiate instruction. With support personnel implementing inclusion or pulling out small group, students were able to access the curriculum to fit their learning needs. I was taken aback at the less frequent use of inclusion versus pull-out. Students seemed to miss a lot of core instruction by the classroom teacher. When I asked Ms. McNeil about the use of pull-out, she explained that inclusion was not used as much due to the low number of ELL and special needs students. She stated, "We have very few students who need ELL support, but those who do, need intensive support, so pull-out is best."

Instructional Best Practices

Some instructional strategies observed in classrooms included setting objectives and providing feedback; generating and testing hypotheses; providing homework and practice; and utilizing questions, use of cues and advanced organizers, and level of questioning. Of the ten classrooms observed, the strategies were observed consistently in the third- through fifth-grade classrooms, although utilized sporadically in the lower grades.

Before, During, and After Instruction

In classrooms where I observed the beginning of lessons, teachers did a good job of setting the stage for learning by stating the purpose and letting students know what was expected of them. During instruction, teachers provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in guided practice and work with a partner or group before working independently. Teachers also provided modeling for students. In the tested grades, questions were usually higher-order stems, with students having to think or process before answering. Homework and practice were provided daily so students could master the concepts. After instruction, teachers used journals to check for understanding. During a fifth-grade planning session, I inquired about the marbled subject journals one of the teachers collected, and was told the journals were used to check for understanding and for students to review learning material, whether math facts, word study, or science words.

Vocabulary Usage

I asked how students learned vocabulary using the journals, and was informed word work occurred every day, so students could learn words at the application level and build their vocabulary. I did notice that some of the words were ones in which students would never use, such as "triskaidekaphobia"—a fear of the number 13. The second-grade teacher seemed to randomly pick words she thought were interesting. I asked if I could make a suggestion, and she was accepting of my suggestion to pull grade level words, so students could use them in the context of their learning. She expressed surprise when she replied, "No one has ever really said anything about the choice of words, I guess as long as students were learning vocabulary." I stepped outside my role and said, "Vocabulary should be meaningful and applicable."

Teaching from Bell-To-Bell

According to the Ms. McNeil, teachers were expected to teach from bell-to-bell. No time was to be wasted, and she frequently checked during walkthroughs. She discussed how a few teachers thought she went too far with expecting them to account for every segment of the day, but she stated it was how they kept achievement up. She expressed her constant battle with those with whom she had concerns about performance, “You know, when teachers complain about not having down times, I just remind them our kids can’t afford it. It is usually from the few (teachers) I am monitoring.” When asked about the schedule, during an interview, Ms. Lawson, a third-grade teacher said, “Make every second count.” Another said, “There is no time wasted here.” Numerous instructional strategies were shared, which teachers believed supported effective instruction. Some included blended learning, personalized learning, small group instruction, setting the stage for learning, providing guided and independent practice, checking for understanding after instruction, and use of homework. Another means of support was through the organization and procedures of the school and classrooms.

Support through School Organization and Procedures

Another means of working as a team to support instruction and achievement was through the organization and procedures throughout the school and classrooms. The school implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) program, which helped the school establish a climate of appropriate and orderly behavior, so students were expected to follow rules adopted by the school in main areas: classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms, playground, and arrival and dismissal. Hanging outside the door of every classroom was a mission statement of how students would behave in their classroom. As observations were conducted, most students complied with teachers’ directives; however, not every student was on task during observations. For example, in a Kindergarten classroom, a student was being disruptive by constantly calling the teacher’s name as she conducted a small guided reading group. I could sense Ms.

Mayson was trying to use restraint. After a few minutes, she went over to the student, talked softly in his ear, and the student moved to a table to work alone. When asked if this was the procedure for disruptions, the teacher confirmed the student had issues with hyperactivity and often had to be removed from the group to work alone.

In an observation in a fifth-grade classroom, several girls were off task during a math class and had to be reprimanded by the teacher, who used a firm motherly tone when correcting the girls. They immediately got back on task, constantly glancing at the teacher for approval. The teacher made reference to the DoJo system, a classroom management program in which teachers award points or notify parents via an email message of students' behavior. She stated, "If parents get a text, you know what will happen." This seemed to get the girls' attention and made them re-focus on their work. In most classrooms, teachers gave students opportunities to self-correct and get back on task. Having students focused helped them to reaching their learning targets, which contributed to overall achievement. Energy was spent on teaching and learning versus discipline issues, although a few students were non-compliant. Parents credited the PBIS program for the school-wide orderliness, which kept students focused on learning. Ms. Martin, one of the parents, stated, "The PBIS program helps students do the right thing and behave, so they can learn. It is a good program and students are rewarded with praise for doing the right thing in school."

Instead of teachers spending a lot of time reminding students of rules in the common areas, posters with affirmations about leadership were visible throughout the school. There were posters on every hall that read, "Begin with the end in mind."

According to research on evidence-based practices in managing classrooms, various strategies and procedures are used by teachers for effective classroom management and to create efficient learning environments, two of which are the use of praise statements and opportunities to respond to teaching and learning (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). Most teachers used praise and encouragement. Others took a fussier motherly tone when correcting students who were off-task. A little more about this strategy will be addressed when discussing relationships. The school implemented PBIS and Class DoJo school-wide and it added to the orderliness in the school and classrooms. Parents also credited the programs for helping to keep students on task. Monitoring instruction was another means of providing support.

Supporting Instruction through Monitoring

Another means of supporting instruction and achievement was through the use of assessments to monitor student learning also supported instruction and achievement. Teachers developed common assessments across grade levels to assess students' knowledge of content. For the grade level planning sessions I observed, teachers studied data, made teaching suggestions, asked critical questions about classes that did not score well, and offered feedback. During interviews, several teachers spoke about a collective responsibility for all students. Ms. Lawson, a third grade teacher stated, "Feedback from colleagues on job performance strengthens the morale and builds efficacy of all staff, which makes teachers feel good about the job they're doing." She felts her team truly worked as a team, planning together and reviewing and discussing how students performed. She believed this allowed them to draw upon one another's strengths and meet the needs of students. From assessing regularly and monitoring student growth, teachers stated, “It showed gaps and holes in our instruction.” Teachers also used teamwork to plan after assessments, so they could enrich and remediate. As Ms. Spain, a first-grade teacher stated, “Our team works smarter by dividing up students and matching talents to needs.” Students were ability grouped, based on data, and the teacher either re-taught the objectives to students needing mastery or offered suggestions for re-teaching. The groups were flexible and conducted during intervention and enrichment time. With all the measures of support for instruction and achievement, teachers have no excuse for ineffective teaching, according to Ms. McNeil. She stated, “We try to take away any reason for teachers not to do well or feel supported.” Support through frequent monitoring of assessments and feedback from colleagues about the data was a means of supporting instruction. In addition to this, focused use of resources provided support for achievement.

Summary

Data from interviews and observations illustrated the school’s teamwork approach to ensuring teaching and learning remained the focus. Teachers supported one another in collaborative planning sessions as they reviewed data, planned for re-teaching, and shared best practices for teaching and learning. Administrators showed their support by being involved in the planning sessions and building capacity with teachers. According to Ms. McNeill, administrators also supported teachers by providing professional development to teachers, based on walkthroughs—such PD as using higher questioning stems, analyzing data to drive instruction, and using best practices such as spiraling back to revisit prior lessons, use of pre and post assessments, etc. A myriad of instructional strategies and orientations were present in classrooms observed. These varied from classroom to classroom; however, students received the differential support needed from teachers. The PBIS program provided an orderly school-wide environment and added to classroom management, which kept teachers focused on instruction versus discipline. For students who had behavioral issues, teachers were firm, but nurturing. Using assessments to drive instruction and monitoring student progress was another way teachers and administrators worked as a team to support instruction and achievement. In addition to monitoring student progress, focused resources were utilized to improve achievement and for professional development.

Resources Focused on Improving Achievement and Professional Development

The school had an extremely small Title I budget, so resources had to be carefully allocated to what was most important. The principal collaborated with the leadership team, on an informal needs assessment, to determine which areas needed funding.

Funding

The principal was very clear about the small Title I budget for the school. She stated, “With the funds we do have, we have to make it stretch, and what better way to do that than put it on our best investment- our students.” The federal Title I program allocates additional funds to help high-poverty schools with resources and professional development needs to help increase student achievement. Although the school had a reduced Title I budget, all funding was spent on resources teachers and administrators identified as necessary to strengthen and improve teaching and learning. This came through leadership and decision-making by the principal, leadership team, and building consensus among the staff. Teachers believed they had a say-so in how funds were allocated to support teaching and learning. Ms. Brown, a 2nd grade teacher, stated, “Administration asks for and gets staff feedback concerning all school-wide decisions that impact learning.” Another teacher (Ms. Lawson) said the staff is often given a choice in decisions, so consensus is gained. “Buy-in is strong because teachers have a voice in what goes on inside the school. Administrators often say, it’s our school, so we make decisions about resources together.” A third-grade teacher (Ms. Tanner) stated, “Because the staff makes decisions together, we own it and there is no reason not to be our best when we made the decisions.” In addition to having resources focused on student learning, they were also focused on giving teachers the tools they needed to do their jobs.

Tools to Do the Work

In the school, administrators made sure teachers had the tools they needed to do their jobs. This was the sentiment of several teachers when interviewed. While observing classrooms, learning stations were equipped with plenty of manipulatives, books, and other resources to assist students in learning, especially during intervention and enrichment time. Technology consisted of iPads and desktop computers for students to use, and several digital learning programs were used to enhance learning. Smartboards and individual student white boards were used for instruction versus a lot of worksheets. This allowed for simultaneous participation for students to show their work.

Ms. Bristol, a fourth-grade teacher discussed several of the “tools” she believed were valuable in providing teachers with rich data about their students’ learning. One such digital content was MAPS (a progress monitoring assessment used by the district for grades 3-12). Interactive Achievement, another digital content program used as an intervention tool for reading and math, was beneficial in providing practice and formative and summative assessments to gauge students’ performance and drive instruction. While observing classrooms, I observed students’ use of the program during a blended learning block. When inquired of the teacher, she stated students were required to use the tool for a specified number of minutes per week, based on their learning tier, with lowest tier level using it the most.

Intervention and enrichment (I/E) time was a no-cost (in-house) program used to re-teach objectives for students who did not master skills, and enrich objectives for students who showed mastery. Reading A-Z and Raz Kids, two additional digital reading resources for students performing below grade level, were utilized. Benchmark Universe, a quarterly formative assessment tool, was provided by the district. The school focused its resources on materials for teaching and learning, technology products and programs that improved learning, and SOL Tutoring to help struggling students. Another means of ensuring resources was used to improve instruction was for supplemental programs used for instruction.

Programs to Supplement Instruction

Leader in Me. Another means of ensuring resources focused on improving achievement was through the *Leader in Me* program, which taught Covey's seven habits for students to become leaders. The school was in their first year of piloting the program, and had positive feedback about its effectiveness. Teachers received professional development to implement the program with fidelity. The program emphasized students being focused and intrinsically motivated to do their best on all work. Teachers stated, during interviews, that the program took some time to catch on for some of the school's most challenging students, but as teachers learned how to motivate students through praise and incentives such as free technology time, students fell right into place with the program's goals of developing students as leaders.

Teachers interviewed affirmed the *Leader in Me* program was used throughout the school and encouraged and fostered a climate of students working hard. A second-grade teacher (Ms. Brown) stated, "Teachers encourage students from kindergarten through fifth grade to "begin with the end in mind". We don't accept "I can't", but we show them how they can." Teachers say the program helps to create an environment where students want to succeed and do their best. When asked to describe students who are hard to motivate, Ms. Brown added, "That *best* may look different for each student, but all success is celebrated at the school. For some, you take what you can get when you can get it and move from there." While observing in a Kindergarten room, this was evidenced by a student who needed frequent breaks to stay focused. The teacher took what work she could get when she could get it. Teachers and administrators credited the program for the level of motivation and effort students put forth on a daily basis.

PBIS. Another resource being used, that only required professional development (no funding), was the Positive Behavior and Interventions Support (PBIS) program, which worked in conjunction with the principles of the Leader in Me program. These two programs supported the behavioral and motivational aspects of teaching and learning. While PBIS was no easy fix for all behaviors in the school, it did offer teachers a good classroom management structure to keep the focus on teaching and learning. During the parent group interview, parents discussed how important the PBIS program was to students. One parents stated, "Students gain recognition every nine weeks through PRIDE celebration parties (Practice self-control, Respect, Integrity, Discipline, and Effort) and they look forward to going to the parties. It's a big deal for them." PRIDE is the incentive part of PBIS. Having the two programs that helped students stay focused, the Leader in Me and the PBIS program ultimately improved achievement because students remained focused and on task. Tutoring and enrichment clubs were another means for supporting and improving achievement through focused resources.

Tutoring and enrichment clubs. Priority was on teaching and learning, so resources also included personnel, with teachers being paid to tutor students after school. The school's after school clubs were used for remediation and enrichment. Other personnel, being utilized to assist with teaching and learning, included a math coach from the district level and a state coach who routinely monitored the school to ensure administrators had the support needed to be successful. These two positions were a part of the district's plan to provide additional assistance to its Title I schools. Additional professional development was made available to teachers based on data from administrators' walkthroughs and observations or per teachers' request to build their professional development. While observing classrooms, central office personnel (math coach) co-taught in a fifth-grade classroom. She used higher thinking skills and problem-solving with students. While interviewing the fifth-grade teacher, she confirmed the math coach was a free resource the school often took advantage of, especially for students performing well-above grade level. In addition to having resources that supplemented teaching and learning, evaluating the impact of resources kept the focus on teaching and learning by making sure programs were beneficial to learning.

Impact of Resources

An additional way to ensure resources remained on focusing on improving achievement and professional development was by the principal and leadership team consistently evaluating what programs and professional development worked. During interviews, teachers discussed that feedback was solicited and welcomed, by administrators, for the digital content resources and professional development attended. While observing a grade level meeting, teachers talked about the recent success students had with Interactive Achievement formative assessments. They discussed how beneficial the program was to teaching and learning because they were able to create their own assessments using the system's item-bank. During an interview with the principal, she stated, "Teacher-use and recommendation for technology programs is how to determine if funds are allocated on renewal subscriptions year after year." It was important that teachers used the programs with fidelity and not just have them at their disposal. Evaluating the use and impact of resources helped keep teaching and learning as the focus with programs that truly supplemented teaching and learning.

Summary

During classroom and school-wide observations, there was evidence of resources used to keep the focus on improving achievement. Leadership decisions to determine how to allocate funding were manifested in the tools being used in classrooms. Digital content was plenteous and students were observed using devices with various programs during blended learning blocks. The programs were used for intervention and enrichment for students. Other programs used, which required funding, included the *Leader in Me* program and the SOL Academy after-school program. Priority was kept on reading and math, so resources targeted instruction in those areas. Observations showed evidence of students using the programs in small groups or one-on-one with devices. Leaders kept tabs on how effective the use of programs were with students, so they could determine if renewals were warranted. Teachers felt welcomed to give positive and negative feedback about any resources. In addition to focused resources and evaluating their effectiveness, another component of support for improving achievement was through the use of communication.

Communication to Support Accountability for High Expectations

Four-Way Communication

A huge part of what made the school function as a unit was the level of communication in and outside of the school. Much effort was put into making sure everyone was informed and on the same page when it came to high expectations regarding teaching, learning, and accountability. Communication occurred on four planes: between administrators and teachers, amongst grade level teachers, between teachers and students, and between parents and the school. Communication between administrators and teachers happened daily during planning periods. Meetings were scheduled weekly regarding student data. Teachers were responsible for writing student action plans, which had to be submitted to administrators, as a measure of accountability for growing all students. Administrators also met with teachers concerning student attendance, behavioral issues, and parent concerns. In addition to ensuring communication among all stakeholders, planning was another form of communication that helped to improve achievement.

Planning

Teachers discussed how they communicated throughout the day on anything having to do with teaching and learning. Planning time was scheduled every day and teachers used the time to hone in on how students performed and what they needed. When interviewing a fifth-grade teacher (Ms. Keats), she talked about the level of transparency that could be misinterpreted. She stated, “Sometimes, our communication is so transparent, that it can get ugly at times, as teachers talk about the good and the bad. Everyone brings something to the table and is encouraged to share their successes, needs, and areas needing improvement.” So I could experience the transparency of the planning sessions, I attended the fifth-grade meeting. At first I was taken aback at the level of transparency. It did seem over the top with some of the comments; however, as the meeting continued, I noticed no one took anything personal. One teacher asked another, “Why did your kids bomb on that assignment? You have to take ownership of it.” To that the other teacher replied, “I know I did not do a good job teaching that because halfway through the lesson, no one understood it.” What cannot be typed into this response is the tone of the teachers. I knew exactly what they meant by the “good, bad, and ugly” from their tones; however, it was their norm and they understood and accepted it. The frequency and transparency of communicating during planning kept teachers on point with teaching and learning. In addition, communication with students ensured students were free to use their voice to help create a climate that fostered working together with classmates and building trust with teachers.

Communication with Students

Communication between teachers and students began each day with morning meetings, which were held each day to allow students to use their voices to express concerns or needs. Teachers also communicated with students daily about their data and overall performance, using journals or data notebooks. During interviews, several teachers reiterated the importance of building trust with students and how it affected communication with them. One fourth-grade teacher (Ms. Bristol) stated, “Students know we want the best for them, and when we have to discuss performance or behavior, they know it is because we care.”

Communication between the school and home was consistent, according to parents during interviews. Parents affirmed they were kept abreast of how students progressed via bi-weekly progress reports and school-wide folders sent home weekly.

Teachers were required to have face-to-face conferences with parents each quarter. Several evening events were held to connect with parents concerning academic areas. All communication helped to improve achievement by keeping students focused on learning. Accountability for high expectations was another means of communication that supported achievement.

Accountability

Another means of using communication to support accountability and high expectations was by holding all staff accountable for teaching and learning and student growth. To hold staff accountable, administrators conducted daily walkthroughs and observations and communicated with teachers their successes and areas for growth. Professional development was differentiated based on data from the walkthroughs and observations. According to the principal, walkthroughs were conducted to ensure the written, taught, and tested curriculum were aligned and executed using best practices. Teachers received feedback immediately following the walkthrough to determine areas of growth and those needing improvement. The principal stated, "All who work with children must be accountable for their work. For those with whom I have performance concerns, even if they are not on-cycle for observations, I include them on the rotation. I must inspect what I expect of teachers, so students achieve. My expectations are high for everyone- teachers and students."

Teachers discussed their perceptions about accountability, as it required extensive work on their parts. Ms. Lawson, a third-grade teacher, contributed her success, as a teacher, to the high accountability measures set by administrators. She stated, "Teachers must submit detailed lesson plans each week, and the written, taught, and tested curriculums must be aligned. Each lesson must address the pacing guide's objectives and must include pre/post assessments, vocabulary, differentiation, cooperative learning, accountability for learning the material, and reflections for teaching and learning." Other teachers discussed having to complete a weekly agenda to show administrators student data and how instruction was being driven by the data. One teacher showed me an assessment calendar, which showed administrators how frequently they assessed what was taught. Assessments did not have to be formal tests, but could consist of formative, quick check-ups. The principal stated, "Teachers need to think about how students will know they learned an objective. If their knowledge is not tested, they will never know." In addition to holding everyone accountable for student learning by making sure lesson plans were aligned and lessons were paced appropriately and contained elements of good teaching. The various forms and purposes of communication within the school was also a means of helping to improve and support achievement.

Forms and Purposes

Various forms of communication were used to inform parents of how their children performed in school. Teachers communicated students' growth to parents via conferences, home visits, and the Class DoJo system, which was used school-wide on a daily basis. Other means of communicating information about academics, events, and important news were sent utilizing newsletters, fliers, email, and phone calls. Administrators communicated with parents during evening programs focused on academics. School-wide meetings were also held with parents, in which the principal shared student progress. The principal affirmed that anytime a concern is raised due to a student not performing well in school, she set up a conference with the teacher and parent. Although she stated parents were not as involved as she would like, she did have their support. She stated, “Many of our parents are simply working and cannot come to the school. There are also those who just choose not to be involved, but you will have that at any school, not just Title I.” As a part of the Title I program, parents, teachers, and students were required a Title I Compact to ensure each party knew their responsibilities for making sure learning and achievement were priorities. During an interview, Ms. Brown (a second-grade teacher) stated, “Every single person in the school community is held to some standard of accountability and it is communicated daily. Students are accountable for their learning and related work. Teachers are accountable for teaching and doing their very best for students. Administrators are accountable for the level of support they give teachers, professional development, and teaching that occurs on a daily basis. Parents are accountable for supporting their children and school-wide efforts.” According to Ms. Brown, weekly meetings are held to communicate, reiterate, and document expectations given by administrators and how teachers will measure accountability. In the meetings I observed, teachers talked about what was working and what needed to be fixed.

The *Leader in Me* program and PBIS were also used to communicate high expectations to students throughout the day. Students knew exactly was expected from them and were rewarded with incentives for working hard and putting for effort. Having all stakeholders accountable for their own aspect of the school day and for teaching and learning, kept the focus on student achievement. Each stakeholder had their own part to keep achievement moving upward.

Summary

Communication was used to support accountability of teaching and learning and high expectations. An effort was made to be consistent with communication, so everyone knew what was expected of them. There were four planes of communication: administrators, teachers, students, and parents. All communication kept stakeholders accountable for student learning, even if it had to do with behavior. Students were expected to behave and follow the rules of PBIS and the principles of the *Leader in Me* program. Various forms were used for communication. Administrators used walkthroughs and observations to assess teaching and learning. Teachers used conferences, newsletters, phone calls, email, and the DoJo system to communicate progress to parents. Administrators used technology and evening meetings to share school-wide data, or conferences to meet one-on-one with parents. According to teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed, the school needed to do a better job of reaching out to parents to get them more involved. As one teacher stated, "Communication between home and school needs some serious work by the school." The final theme used to support data in improving and sustaining achievement was through investment in connections between students and staff.

Investment in Connections between Staff and Students

During interviews, teachers stressed the importance of building meaningful relationships with students. They believed it to be one of the main reasons students worked so hard; they wanted to please teachers and make them proud, and it had to do with the time invested to build relationships. In addition to building relationships that fostered a climate of trust and care, recognition of staff and students' efforts also added to investment into relationships and connections.

Recognition of Efforts

One form of investing in connections between students and staff was through the use of recognition of everyone's efforts. In interviews, teachers discussed how administrators recognize their efforts by shout-outs during team and staff meetings, by email, or in person. Ms. Walton, a fifth-grade teacher stated, "At our school, everyone is expected to work hard, and when we work hard, we are celebrated- all of us. It is a win-win situation because everyone is celebrated for effort." Teachers also stated they recognized students' hard work each quarter as well as each day. Students participated in **P.R.I.D.E.** parties through PBIS for working hard and doing well in their school work. Incentives were also given within the classroom with student-choice rewards. This helped most students stay motivated and proactive in their own learning. Recognizing the efforts of students and staff added a layer of care and relationship-building in the school. Another means of doing this was through teachers investing in students' lives outside of school.

Investing in Students' Lives Outside of School

Another way to invest in connections between students and staff was being involved in students' lives in and out of school. They felt this let students know they cared about them. For most teachers, they believed students worked hard to please teachers once they knew they cared, although they admitted not all students were so eager to please. To combat reluctant students, teachers spent time outside the school day, investing in the lives of those hard-to-reach students. They attended games, recitals, church services, and other events. According to parents, students knew teachers cared about them. One parents stated, “Students know it is not just about school work, but what is important to them after the school day that mattered to teachers.” Teachers also spent time tutoring and managing student enrichment clubs after school. One teacher (Ms. Boulder) said she spent the most time with her least secure students. She believed the ones who did not always follow rules were crying for attention. She stated, “My favorite is the one who needs me the most, so it changes every single day.”

As I interviewed teachers, many said they felt a collective responsibility for all students, which was an investment into what was important in the school- students. One parent stated he felt everything in the school centered around students, and from observations and interviews, I concluded the same. No one seemed to mind that from bell-to-bell, it was all about students. Even during planning meetings, lunch, and recess, I observed teachers discussing students.

Administrators also kept student relationships as priority, and checked on the “frequent fliers” (her term for students she saw often in her office), according to the principal to make sure they knew she wanted to catch them being smart. While observing in a fifth-grade room, the principal walked in to check on a couple of students, and although they were a little off-task, they quickly changed when they saw her. In addition to supporting students outside of school, which added to the investment of relationship-building, interactions within the school also supported this effort of the connections between students and staff.

Interactions

Additionally, a means of connections between students and staff was in the day-to-day interactions within the classroom, among students and between students and teachers. As I observed students interact within the classroom, the impact of relationship-building seemed to have an outcome of positive relationships among peers. Students were engaged and worked well in collaborative groups or partner work. There was a sense of being responsible for one another. Students also praised and high-fived one another when they did well in class or gave right answers. Interactions between teachers and students were very positive and there was a mutual respect. Within the classroom, teachers made it a priority to build relationships, and felt students trusted them because of the rich relationships they worked hard to build. According to parents interviewed, the relationships their children had with teachers also made parents trust teachers because they felt they had their children’s best interests in mind at all times. One parents added, “I know my son can be a handful, but the teacher never makes me feel she singles out my child. The respect and care is there. She is tough on my child, but she has to be, so she can teach.” The Class DoJo system also helped teachers build better relationships with parents because they were only a text message away. Students seemed to love getting good marks on the DoJo system because they knew the teacher was communicating with their parents. Interactions were positive within the classroom and let students know they were in a safe place, with teachers who valued relationships with their students.

Summary

Connecting with students was a priority at the school, probably one of the most important priorities. Teachers expressed a need to let students know they genuinely wanted to be at the school to help them learn. Teachers built connections by rewarding students' efforts and celebrating growth and hard work. Teachers' efforts were also rewarded by administrators. Teachers connected with one another by using the Golden Apple Award to recognize colleagues for hard work. Being interested and involved in students' lives in and outside of school was another way teachers bonded with students, especially those students who seemed harder to reach. This interest in students' lives had a direct impact in the classroom, and students worked hard to do well, especially when they knew teachers would be at special events. The impact of relationships was evident, as observed in classroom interactions among students and between teachers and students.

Summary of Themes

The themes that were the result of the observation and interview data was supported and aligned with the categories that were common during the same. The school was united in its quest to work as a team to support teaching and learning. All resources were allocated to support the work of continuous school improvement and professional development for teachers. Teachers received the tools they needed to do their jobs, and professional development was conducted based on walkthrough and observation data or teachers' request for professional growth. Communication kept everyone on the same page and students at the forefront of the school's agenda. Accountability and high expectations were held for everyone in the school and communicated in various ways. Administrators communicated with teachers daily about student growth, while teachers created plans of action to show they would grow all students. Parents were kept abreast of their children's growth through conferences, home visits, and a myriad of other media. Investing in the lives of students was a priority for the staff, as it showed students teachers cared about academics as well as things that mattered to students outside of school. These strengthened teachers' relationships with students' families and built trusting, meaningful relationships.

Reflection on Gathering Data from Interviews and Observations

The interviews and observations of the qualitative study yielded rich details and provided insight into how the school met its challenges and how students consistently performed well on state-mandated assessments. The qualitative approach provided the method for me immerse myself into the natural setting of the school. The period of time spent in the school permitted me to gain a holistic picture of the people and how their behaviors brought meaning to what occurred in their setting. Holliday (2007) discusses how a natural setting allows the researcher to gain authenticity by focusing on what "local characters say in interviews, personal accounts, and conversation" (p. 18). Listening to stakeholders' stories and perceptions of how their school maintained success was very enlightening, as each group spoke from their personal frames of reference. The interviews were very candid and observations transparent, as participants seemed very comfortable and welcoming as I spent time in their natural setting. After spending time in the school and intimately getting to know the school community, I resolved that the school was successful, not just because of test scores, but because the focus was on learning and achievement for all, which connected to the original goal of the Effective Schools movement- education for all children. The school was not perfect by any means, and had its challenges; however, being transparent and realizing the school remained a work in progress, helped stakeholders tackle each challenge as it came. As I helped students with learning, worked with administrators, held conversations with teachers and parents in their natural environment, and observed teaching and learning, all stakeholders were accepting of my sharing their school culture, which made the work of research more meaningful and achievable.

In Chapter V, an overview of the qualitative study will be presented with answers to the research questions, backed by concrete examples, from the themes, of how success in the school was consistently maintained. Implications and recommendations will be shared to benefit principals and their staff, in similar school settings, who may struggle to consistently meet the challenges of educating all students.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what administrators and teachers did to ensure all students' educational needs were met, according to the mandate of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), in which districts must ensure all students show progress. Specifically, the study focused on the educational practices administrators and teachers used to maintain consistently high performance with its students. I was also interested in learning how the correlates of Effective Schools, which were school-based practices found in higher performing schools serving disadvantaged children, would be reinforced within the context of the study and if the correlates would emerge as themes. In my inquiry, I observed to see what role the interconnectedness of poverty, race, and achievement had in this study, with an examination of instructional practices, expectations for growth of all students, how teachers motivated students, how teachers collaborated and the impact it had on student achievement, and what, if any, instructional programs were used and proven successful in enhancing teaching and learning. The research was naturalistic in character because as the researcher, I was immersed in the school setting, so participants would feel comfortable in their natural environment. Through the use of interviews and observations with stakeholders, data regarding contributing factors for success in the school were revealed. Administrators, teachers, and parents participated in interviews, and observations were conducted in classrooms, meetings, and of the whole school environment. The stories and observations provided rich detail into the foundation and root of the success of the school.

Overview of Problem

In Chapter 2, I shared the start of the Effective Schools movement when the Coleman Report's findings held the predominant thought that "schools didn't make a difference" (Mace-Matluck, 1987, p. 4) in producing student achievement. According to the report, what mattered more in determining children's academic success was a child's family background. Dispelling this belief, other researchers, led by Ronald Edmonds, the author and educator who introduced the concept of Effective Schools, set out to identify schools that in fact did make a difference in measured achievement for all children, regardless of socioeconomic status and family background. Edmonds (1979a, 1979b, 1981), maintained that there were five correlates to effective schools and that they were all related to one another and present in effective schools:

- Strong administrative leadership
- Focus on basic skills
- High expectations for student success
- Frequent monitoring of student performance
- Safe and orderly schools. (as cited in Daggett, 2005, p. 1)

The Effective Schools movement supported the premise of education for all and based it on the following three principles: all students can learn; the individual school controls many of the critical variables to assure such learning; and schools should be accountable to ensure learning for all students.

Further research, beyond Edmonds supported the Effective Schools movement with similar characteristics and principles of the original correlates, and shared the belief that learning should be for all students, and could be successful for all students if conditions included effective practices, research-based strategies, and other common elements of effective schooling specified by research. Researchers believed schooling should be an equalizer for all students, equipping them with a solid, successful education. The compilation of research surrounding effective schools shared the following attributes:

- strong leadership,
- focus on achievement with challenging goals,
- high expectations for students and staff,
- frequent monitoring of students' performance and analyzing data to drive instructional decisions,
- focused professional development,
- safe and orderly schools,
- parental involvement and support, and
- a positive culture and climate

As identified above, studies intensified, by numerous researchers, after Edmonds began the initial Effective Schools movement. With substantial evidence that schools did, in fact, matter to the success of students from disadvantaged households, school improvement efforts were on the rise with schools and districts being intentional in creating learning environments inclusive of the characteristics of effective schools, especially those schools serving large percentages of students experiencing poverty.

Research Methodology

For this research, a qualitative study was conducted in a consistently high-performing Title I school. Data were collected from interviews and observations to answer the research question.

The overall research question that guided this qualitative study was:

What educational factors, such as programs, practices, and expectations, do principals and teachers in a high-poverty, high-performing Title I elementary school use to improve performance in the school?

To gain an in-depth understanding of the overall research question, the following sub-questions were used, which added specificity to the research question:

- What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high poverty, high-performing school?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies, and structures contribute to high achievement?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?
- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to the school's overall success?

- According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to the school's success?

As the study progressed, what stakeholders had to say (via interviews) about the research questions began to align with the actions observed in classrooms, meetings, and school-wide observations. The validity of answers became reality as the triangulation of data (from all participants) spoke to the school community's hard work and efforts to maintain success. Stakeholders seemed to be very transparent while interviewing, and their words matched their actions in the observations. For example, when teachers talked about collaborative planning, I observed exactly what they said in the interviews. Although not described or perceived as a school without its share of challenges, there remained a sense of pride and oneness throughout the school community.

In the findings below, the research questions are presented and answered. Table 8 summarizes the research questions and findings related to them. Recommendations will follow based on what I learned from the research.

Table 8

Research Findings

What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high poverty, high-performing school?	According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies, and structures contribute to high achievement?	According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?	According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to the school's overall success?	According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to the school's success?

Table 8

(Cont.)

Having the right people on board	Focused purpose of resources	Alignment with stakeholders	Relationship-building	All held accountable for data and interventions with students
Collaboration	Programs that improve climate- Leader in Me & PBIS	High expectations for all stakeholders	Now secrets school	
Transparency	After-school tutoring Technology use	Data known, shared, and used for instruction	Recognition of efforts by staff and students	
Focus on teaching and learning	Differentiated professional development			

What Do Administrators, Teachers, and Parents Say About Achieving and Sustaining Student Success in a High-Poverty, High-Performing School?

Educating for All

The overall findings for this study demonstrate a lot of hard work from all stakeholders went into making the school successful. In order to achieve and sustain success, administrators, teachers, and parents share insight about several contributing factors; having the right people onboard; collaborating with all stakeholders; being transparent about what goes on in the school; and keeping the focus on teaching and learning. Each of these factors will be discussed in depth after each subheading.

The school's data showed it consistently accomplished and sustained success with student achievement; however, there was a lot more than test data that made the school successful. Riddle (2010) best summed it up when he said, "Schools are about so much more than the walls that define the building. They are about what goes on inside those walls" (p. 66). Inside the walls of the school, there were challenges and celebrations alike. Challenges described by school staff included attendance issues, a few discipline problems, transient families, lack of parental involvement, and keeping the focus on teaching and learning at all times. Ms. McNeil, the principal, confirmed teachers get burned out towards the end of each quarter, and she has to constantly keep the climate upbeat and positive. Celebrations included student growth, success with the *Leader in Me* and PBIS programs, students becoming leaders, home-school connections, and low staff turnover. The school was unified in its mission to educate all students. This was done by working together to support instruction and achievement.

The Right People

One major factor, quoted by stakeholders, for the school's ability to achieve and sustain success lie in its team of educators. The principal stated, "It took several years to get the right staff on board." Having to recruit, hire, and retain effective teachers was critical to accomplishing the challenging goals set before them. In many school systems, it is extremely difficult to get rid of ineffective teachers, and studies show that teacher effectiveness is the most dominant factor affecting student achievement (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). When asked about how the Ms. McNeil got the right people onboard, she affirmed it took a lot of hard work weeding out candidates who were not a good match for the school. Candidates' answers to questions about working in a challenging environment led her to conclude they were not up for the challenge of working with students who were from disadvantaged home or who needed intense interventions in the classroom. She stated she told candidates upfront how much hard work it would take to work in the school. She also included teachers in the interview process for an extra set of eyes and ears to pick the right candidates.

Collaboration

An additional factor to contributing and sustaining success was the collaborative nature of the staff. Several teachers alluded to a “collective responsibility” for student learning. This was evidenced by daily collaboration that occurred on each grade level. Whether it was behavior, re-teaching a skill to students, or sharing best practices with colleagues, teachers used their greatest resource (one another) to keep the responsibility of every student at the forefront of everything. Grade level support was tremendous, according to teachers. They depended on one another for feedback on data, execution of lessons, and how to spiral back to re-teach objectives not mastered. The comradery among the teachers seemed to be unfailing. There was a one-for-all mentality that seemed to exist on all grade levels. Teachers met on a daily basis to discuss teaching and learning. No common planning time was wasted. Teachers used their collaborative time to plan effective lessons, create formative assessments, review data, and plan for intervention and enrichment. They stated their daily goal, as grade levels, was to work smarter by dividing up subjects for which to write plans. All was not a matter of teamwork all the time, as one teacher commented, “Like family, we argue, we disagree, we fight, but at the end of the day, we are still family.” As discussed previously, this supports what literature says about teacher collaboration. Darling-Hammond (as cited in Collier, 2011) suggested that time in schools for collaborative planning is essential, and in order to move high-poverty schools to high-performing, teachers must have the time to build partnerships in planning by collaborating about the entire teaching and learning process.

Transparency

A third factor for sustaining success was the staff's ability to be transparent about student data. Administrators stayed on top of data and required teachers to submit student data every two weeks, along with a plan of action for growing all students. As I observed a third-grade meeting with administrators, teachers brought portfolios of action plans to discuss each student's data, whether or not they made progress, and how they intended to help students grow. Teachers used grade level common formative assessments and data from intervention and enrichment time as data points for the action plans. Growth was not just expected of low-performing students, but all students. Administrators also collaborated with parents on school-wide data to keep them informed and to garner support for students not progressing as rapidly as others. She did this by having quarterly learning nights and would discuss school-wide data during the first part of each learning night. At the district level, administrators collaborated with personnel on data and professional development support needed for the school based on walkthrough data. According to research by Ragland et al. (2002),

> High-poverty, high-performing schools were communities in which every teacher was invested in the success of every student. Their sense of shared responsibility was both a catalyst for and the result of frequent communication and collaboration among teachers. Faculty and staff at the schools were accustomed to turning to one another for help. They collaborated both by providing instructional support for students outside their regular classes and by offering advice and ideas to one another. (p. 19)

Focus on Teaching & Learning

Keeping the focus on teaching and learning was another critical factor in achieving and sustaining success. Stakeholders believed every decision made was directly connected to student achievement. From class placement to detailed action plans for each student, all decisions, according to the principal had to be strategically-based on the advancement of students. This level of strategizing kept teachers and administrators focused. Teachers stated that occasionally, some students get off track and regress, but intervention meetings are held to ensure services are provided to get students back on track, as all students were expected to show various measures of growth. Observations were another means that kept the focus on teaching and learning, as administrators gave specific feedback to teachers' instructional practices. Literature reiterates the significance of feedback. Codding, Feinberg, Dunn, and Pace (2005) affirm when teachers are observed, the performance feedback consists of reviewing data, praise for best practices observed, corrective feedback, and opportunities for teachers to ask questions. Teachers affirmed they embraced feedback from administrators because it helped them to hone in on teaching and learning and to grow professionally, which impacted student achievement. According to Riddile (2010), high-performing schools have a clear focus on teaching. Teachers are given time to focus on teaching and learning. Teachers also focus on cooperative learning from their colleagues, and encourage the same with students—to learn from one another. In addition to these factors for achieving and sustaining success, stakeholders discussed programs, strategies, and structures in place that contributed to achievement.

According to Administrators, Teachers, and Parents, What Instructional Programs, Strategies, and Structures Contribute to High Achievement?

Focused Purpose of Resources

As a Title I school, the district provided access to additional resources such as programs and additional personnel to work in classrooms. According to the principal, the school's leadership team was strategic when allocating funds for resources. The team was adamant that the school did not need a lot of programs, but needed to be intentional to continue to build reading and math skills, as well as continue to grow higher-performing students. Although the Title I budget was small, the resources provided were used for two reasons: increasing achievement and providing professional development for teachers. In this section, five resources were clearly represented in the data to support and enhance the work in the school. They include: the *Leader in Me* program, after-school tutoring, the use of technology, the PBIS program, and differentiated professional development. The five resources are discussed in the order prioritized by stakeholders.

Leader in Me

The data found to highly correlate with student achievement was the school's adoption of the *Leader in Me*, a Covey model that focused on building leadership and other skills in students. The program was piloted this year to build positive habits in students and to encourage them to work harder in school. The program's seven habits include: be proactive; begin with the end in mind; put first things first, think win-win; think first to understand, then to be understood; synergize; and sharpen the saw. This gave students a say in their own leadership skills. In the literature, (Usher, 2012), students, whose teachers hold them to high expectations, while creating and maintaining a caring and democratic climate in the classroom, seem to benefit from motivation. Administrators, teachers, and parents stated the program, although in its first year, had transformed the culture in the classrooms. Students worked hard to finish strong on each assignment. The program's goal was to build leadership skills in students as they worked to stand out as role models. The one thing I noticed immediately was the absence of rules and consequences posted in classrooms. Instead, teachers quoted some of the habits as reminders while students worked. This seemed to keep students focused and on task as they worked. For the students I observed, who were not on task, teachers spoke to them in a discreet manner, often having to move them to a different work area, so as not to distract others.

After-School Programs

In addition to the leadership program, the instructional afterschool programs were also credited for contributing to achievement. Students were given opportunities for remedial and enrichment afterschool programs, which were differentiated based on students' academic needs. With many parents not being able to afford private tutors, the education gap is closed because the school offers certified staff to serve as tutors for students who needed additional learning time. There were a number of teachers who tutored students after school. Students would have a snack immediately after school, get some physical activity in for about 10 minutes (running or doing a structured exercise), then participate in tutoring for an hour. Students would receive reading or math remediation, based on student data shared by teachers. The data was drilled down to the specific skills students needed to master. For those above grade level, other clubs were offered as enrichment activities.

Technology

Another strategic component that contributed to achievement was the use of technology. Blended learning included technology to enhance and remediate learning. Video clips and games were used to strengthen reading and math skills. Details of some of the digital content were discussed in Chapter 4. Even through technology, differentiation was utilized to meet the specific needs of students. In some classes, students were partnered with devices for tutoring purposes. In Ms. McCall's Kindergarten grade class, she stated her reliance on technology, "This (technology) has been the best thing to help in small group instruction. Without teacher assistants, students can still get instruction on their levels without being in a group led by a teacher or assistant.

PBIS

A factor contributing to the orderliness of the school was the PBIS program, which was discussed previously in Chapter 4. This kept students focused on learning and ultimately contributed to achievement. Again, as with the *Leader in Me* program, it added a sense of democracy (Usher, 2012) to the classroom because students have a voice in the outcome of their day. For teachers, instead of spending time reminding students of classroom rules, they sermonized positive affirmations to encourage students to do their best. In a 5th grade classroom, the teacher actually sounded as if she was preaching, as she randomly called out affirmations. A few instances were noted where students were off task, but teachers simply and quietly reminded then to be proactive or to keep the end result in mind. I never witnessed any punitive actions towards students who were off task.

Differentiated Professional Development

Lastly, the factor that teachers stated benefited each one differently, was the manner in which professional development and resources were utilized. This contributed to achievement because teachers stated they felt empowered to do their work. Riddile (2010) discusses how critical it is for administrators to plan professional development and give feedback to teachers to improve their teaching methods. To do this, administrators conducted daily walkthroughs and observations to determine needs of teachers. Teachers also felt free to ask for professional development they needed individually. The school also moved towards differentiated professional development based on needs. The plan for professional development came directly from needs determined during walkthroughs. For instance, Ms. McNeil noticed some of the second-grade teachers needed more training with word study and explicitly teaching vocabulary. The plan was made to have the literacy coach meet with those teachers during their grade level planning. Professional development is essential, according to Riddile (2010), because it allows teachers to have continual, ongoing professional standards and procedures to enhance and improve their skills. Another strategic component that moved the school towards success was its intentionality with communication.

According to Administrators, Teachers, and Parents, How Does Communication Contribute to High Achievement?

Alignment

Communication was cited as one of the school’s strengths. All stakeholders agreed it kept everyone on the same page and fostered a no-secrets environment. Parents added that although they needed to work on involvement, they always knew what was going on with their children’s learning. In this section, data supported strength in communication in the following areas: high expectations for staff and students, expectations for parents, data, expectation for work efforts, and communication with parents.

Communication was aligned vertically and horizontally within the school. From the beginning of the year, teachers stated Ms. McNeil made it very clear that all staff was expected to do well, and hold the same level of high expectations for students. This same level of communication was shared with parents, who were encouraged to expect success from their children, and demonstrate the same level of letting their children know they were supportive of the school. Administrators and staff credited communicating with parents, regarding student progress, as a means of keeping parents informed and gaining support for achievement. One means of keeping parents informed was through the use of a weekly folder system. Each grade level had the same folder, but in a different color. Progress notes and weekly graded work were sent home for parents’ review and signature. Teachers stated the practice had been a consistent practice, so parents knew what to expect from one grade level to the next. In research completed by Ragland et al.

(2002), the same practice was found in high-poverty, high-performing schools: Teachers communicated with all parents through the use of a daily homework folder, which established a habit of daily communication between home and school. This assured both teachers and parents that a system was in place for communication. In addition to communication of high expectation, the level of expectations were also given for work efforts for students and staff.

High Expectations for Staff & Students

An additional contributor for communicating in a way that supported achievement was that high expectations were expected of everyone—staff and students. No signs of deficit thinking were observable in the school, as teacher and administrators frequently stated their belief that all students could learn and grow. As I observed in classrooms, teachers often reminded students "can't" was not a word they embraced, another signal that deficit thinking was not a factor in learning. Students were reminded if they began with the end in mind, they could accomplish whatever task was before them. The curriculum was not watered down, nor did teachers lessen the rigor of the teaching, but all students were expected to grow academically. According to Weiner (2006), educators who operate within the deficit thinking concept believe that unless students of color change background factors such as their culture, values, and family structures, they have little or no opportunities to have successful outcomes in school.

Coming from an impoverished environment had no bearing on the school's expectations for all students to learn. Within the classroom, teacher expectations were high on the list of why students were successful. They expected the best from all students, regardless of their ability levels. As I observed teaching and learning, there was a no-excuse approach to students' work. Teachers held all students accountable for working toward the content objectives for the day. Whether students were lower-performing, higher-performing, English language learners, or had disabilities, they were all expected to work hard and do their best. As stated earlier, one teacher said, "That best may look different for each student, but we expect their best." Administrators expected staff to work hard and expected nothing but the best from all students. Of those interviewed, teachers said they expected administrators to raise the bar and hold them accountable for teaching and learning. Most welcomed feedback on their teaching, although the principal stated, "It depends on what I see when I conduct walkthroughs. Teachers know when feedback will not be positive." As supported by literature on effective schooling, high expectations is imperative (Lezotte, 2001).

High Expectations for Parents

High expectations were also required of parents to give their full support to teachers and administrators, so their children could continue to grow academically. The Title I parent-student-teacher compacts, an annual agreement between the home and school, were required of all parents. The district expected success from the school each year and put supports in place to assist with teaching and learning. Parental involvement is a required component in Title I schools, and funds are allocated and must be spent to encourage parents to get involved with their children's learning. The school hosted a learning night each quarter, where parents are informed about what students are doing in specific subjects (one per quarter), and how they can assist their children at home.

Although staff felt communication was effective within the school, they also felt there was room for improvement with parents. Some staff believed parents did not take advantage of the school's efforts to communicate, either because of work or not feeling comfortable. By their own admission, the staff believed they needed to do a better job of collaborating with parents outside of school hours (when attending student events), so they see the commitment the school has to their children. Teachers affirmed they worked hard to keep parents informed and encouraged them to become engaged.

Data

An additional way communication contributed to achievement was through teachers sharing student data to administrators every two weeks, along with a plan for increasing growth for all students. Ms. McNeil was adamant about teachers knowing their students, their success, and areas for improvement. She stated that her expectation was for teachers to know their data without looking at a spreadsheet. The difference observed in this practice was that many schools require plans for how to increase lower-performing students, but the school was tenacious about growing all students. Communication about achievement occurred in daily and weekly grade level meetings, leadership meetings, parent meetings, parent-teacher-student contracts, Connect-Ed messages, fliers, emails, and the school-wide Class DoJo program. Students are being held to high expectations, and these programs are means of keeping parents connected to their children's success. As discussed previously in the literature, students are being challenged and held to high expectations and standards. Best practices and effective instructional methods are being used to improve teaching and maximize student learning.

Research-based programs are being utilized to enhance instruction (Barth et al., 1999; Izumi, 2002; Ragland et al., 2002). In the next section, several suggestions were cited for the school's overall success.

According to Administrators, Teachers, and Parents, What Contributes to the School's Overall Success?

In addition to keeping the data before parents, stakeholders also cited several overall contributors to the school's success. They included: relationship-building, having a no-secrets school environment, and recognition of students and staff's efforts.

Relationship-building

There were numerous factors stakeholders listed as contributors to the success of the school, with staff and administrators being number one. Everyone agreed it was the staff that made the environment conducive for success. Teachers stated they had seen many come and go, even administrators, but those who were willing to put in the work remained. Teachers who were interviewed talked about the day when Ms. McNeil came. They requested a meeting with her to share their concerns about the high turnover rate of principals. They shared with her how they needed her to trust them to do their jobs. They told her they would give her 100% if she would trust them to do what they were assigned to do- teach. Teacher relationships with one another and with students were paramount to the school's success. The interactions I observed, among teachers, was very light-hearted, but with a determination to get the job done. Each meeting had that climate. Interactions between students and teachers were positive and teachers acted as mothers when they needed to. For example, in a 1st grade class, a student was being defiant about getting his work done. The teacher said to the student, “Now, you know why you are here. I need you to get settled and do what you came to school to do and that is to learn. You will have plenty of time to play when that time comes.” It was not a fussy tone she used, but a concerned, motherly tone. Relationships between administrators and teachers were positive. I observed the nature of these interactions during grade level meetings. Ms. McNeil was positive but very matter of fact in her responses. Teacher investment in students’ lives outside of school was stated as a contributing factor of why the school was successful. Parents and teachers shared that student-teacher relationships were stronger because students knew teachers cared about them.

No-Secrets School

With the school being transparent with data and meaningful in the relationships with students and parents, staff and parents believed there were no hidden agendas and the school was upfront about how students were progressing. With parents and staff keeping the conversation open and honest, students were able to get the true support needed to be successful. Teachers shared students’ data with them by having mini-conferences with them using the students’ subject journals (in K-2) and data notebooks and assessments in (3-5). Administrators having an open-door policy also helped teachers feel they were valued and that feedback was important. Teachers stated they felt the school was a safe zone, in which they could agree or disagree with colleagues and administrators without punitive actions. Teachers felt because administrators were transparent, all cards were on the table and everyone was on the same page with the goal of ensuring student achievement being the number one goal of all stakeholders. This made relationships stronger among adults, which positively impacted relationships with students. During an interview with the principal, she stated there were only 2-3 people who resisted relationship-building with colleagues. She stated, “Those are some pretty good odds, I think.” In addition to the school having a no-secrets climate, stakeholders also discussed the importance of everyone being recognized for efforts.

Recognition of Effort

Recognition of students’ and teachers’ efforts was cited as one of the reasons achievement was high. Due to meaningful relationships built, teachers stated they worked harder when they knew administrators and colleagues believed in and appreciated their hard work. Administrators highlighted best teaching practices and other accomplishments of staff via shout-outs on the intercom, announcements during meetings, or posts in newsletters or emails. Colleagues passed the Golden Apple around to brag on one another’s accomplishments within the classroom. In that same vain, teachers recognized students for their hard work with student-choice incentives such as extra technology, games, or reading time. Students were also recognized every quarter for their academic achievements. Every student was celebrated for any growth, which was good for students who were lower-performing. The impact of relationships seemed to positively affect work efforts. In addition to contributions of overall success, the data supported how accountability also was a contributing factor.

According to Administrators, Teachers, and Parents, How Does Accountability Contribute to the School's Success?

Accountability

According to those interviewed, everyone, who worked with students, was held accountable for student learning. In grade level planning meetings, I observed every adult, who worked on a grade level, participating in the planning. Each adult gave input about students' progress or challenges noted. Teachers knew how their students performed daily because of formative assessments. They knew the data without having to review a spreadsheet because it was expected (by the principal) to know all students' areas of growth and opportunities for improvement. According to Ragland et al. (2002), in the high-poverty, high-performing schools studied, "Frequent feedback isolated problem areas and gave teachers the opportunity to refine their strategies and re-teach the objectives before moving along in the curriculum plan" (p. 20).

One teacher said she believed the accountability factor had shifted from performing because of district or state mandates, to performing well because students' learning depended on it. Several teachers said they were self-motivated and driven to do well for the sake of the students. When asked about data and accountability, no one complained about the massive time devoted to planning and collaborating. One teacher (Ms. Keats) stated, "It's just part of our job as teachers, and we would not know what students needed if we didn't assess them." Holding everyone accountable, at some level, for students' learning, added another level of the collective responsibility discussed previously. In the next section, data from interviews and observations will be merged to give an overall picture of what stakeholders said that made their school successful.

Summary of Answers to Research Questions

The categories that surfaced during the interview questions provided a rich, detailed picture of what stakeholders believed made the school successful. One thing I noticed was that not one person gave test score data as a reason the school was successful. In talking with staff and administrators, they believed that if the supports and structures were in place, good test scores were a given. Many effective practices took place at the school that made it a successful place for students, starting with having the right staff on board. Support from administrators and colleagues helped teachers with the resources, professional development, and critical dialogue to enhance teaching and learning. Student engagement and best instructional practices resulted in quality work from students. Recognition of teachers' and students' hard work was reciprocated by even more hard work. Use of effective instructional strategies such as small group instruction, hands-on activities, use of technology, inclusion and small group pull-outs, differentiated instruction, re-teaching for mastery, and frequent common assessments that drove instructional decisions were attributed for success for all students, regardless of ability levels. Consistency with communication between school and home and transparency of students' progress afforded trusting relationships between the school and community. High expectations and high standards for everyone pushed everyone towards growth, even if very minute. All of these factors were cited and observed as contributors to the success of this school.

Recommendations

Title I principals are constantly bombarded with mandates and directives from local districts and State Departments of Education to ensure all students are successful. However, with all that research reveals about effective schooling, especially for students from disadvantaged families, the struggle is very real for schools to successfully educate *all* students. Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations and implications were developed for practitioners in similar Title I settings as displayed visually below. Figure 1 demonstrates the recommendations needed to move a Title I school forward to consistently high-performing status. It will require schools to transform how they do schooling, rather than try to transform students. This work, although geared towards Title I administrators, should be implemented in all schools, as they are best practices. The people in the school are the most important to this work and are symbolized on the outside of the circle. The red is a part of each component and signifies the interconnectedness of all recommendations. If one piece is missing or not fully developed, success will not be consistent. All of the work below is required of the school, and if done with fidelity, students benefit.

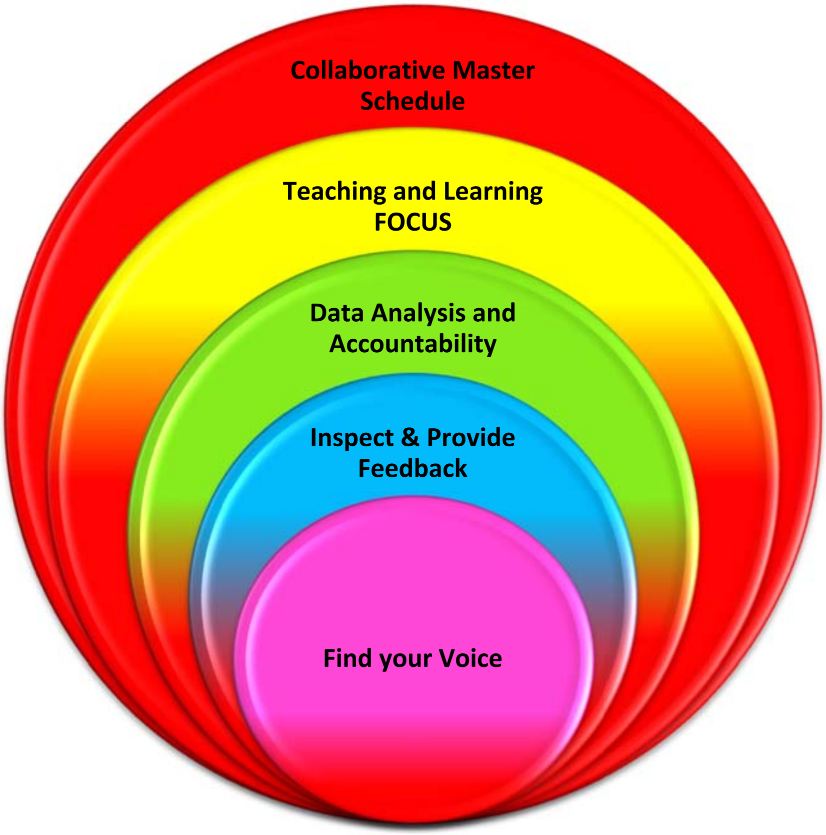
Collaborative Master Schedule
Teaching and Learning FOCUS
Data Analysis and Accountability
Inspect & Provide Feedback
Find your Voice

Figure 1. Recommendations for Moving Title I Schools Towards Sustained Improvement.

Get the Right Staff Aboard

As Title I schools search for teachers to meet the highly qualified requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), they must also ensure individuals can meet the challenges of working in an impacted school and increasing student achievement. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all teachers of core academic subjects are required to be "highly qualified." This is defined as a "teacher who is fully licensed by the state, has at least a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated competency in each subject taught" (VDOE, 2012, para. 1). In the state of Virginia, new teacher's licensure exceeds the federal standard of being highly qualified (VDOE, 2015b). Whether federal or state regulations apply, effective teachers are proven in the classroom, not necessarily by a piece of paper. When school leaders have ineffective teachers in schools serving marginalized students such as those in Title I schools, students' education is sacrificed for the lack of effective teaching. Research from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (Sanders & Horn, 1998) has shown teacher effectiveness is the single most important factor in student academic growth. Students who have ineffective teachers do not perform as well as they would have with effective teachers.

According to Sanders and Rivers (1996), the more a teacher's effectiveness increases, students who are low-achieving are the first ones to benefit. The first recommendation to consider is for school district leaders and administrators to develop recruitment, hiring, and retaining practices to ensure principals have access to highly qualified staff with proven records of performing effectively in high-poverty schools. Darling-Hammond and Post (2000) assert,

> The fact that the least-qualified teachers typically end up teaching the least-advantaged students is particularly problematic. Recent studies have found that the difference in teacher quality may represent the single most important school resource differential between minority and white children and that it explains at least as much of the variance in student achievement as socioeconomic status. (p. 128)

Administrators at the school confirmed it took several years to weed out ineffective teachers and secure truly highly qualified teachers. With the right team onboard, the school has moved from turnaround to transformation. Providing administrators with access to hiring qualified teachers would be crucial in moving impacted schools towards true transformation. A recommendation would be for districts to hold special recruitment fairs just for Title I schools. An additional recommendation for the recruitment of teachers to work in Title I schools is to include a question about working with disadvantaged students, so leaders get a sense of teachers who have no desire to do so. Qualities Title I administrators should look for, when recruiting teachers to work in their schools include: possesses a strong philosophy of teaching and learning; is a team player; believes (without a doubt) all children can learn; has knowledge of the curriculum; possesses good classroom management skills; has the ability to analyze data and use it to drive instruction; has a good attendance history; does not participate in negativity; puts the needs of students first; possesses great work ethics; and is it for the long-haul. More research needs to be done regarding the highly-qualified status, required by Title I, of its teachers. Possessing a document that confirms classroom hours, does not constitute a teacher is qualified to work with marginalized students.

Master Schedule

The second recommendation is the master schedule, which should be created to allow time for daily grade level collaboration and planning. Teachers need time together to plan for instruction, review data, and share strategies for effective implementation and execution of lessons. One of the consistent correlates of effective schools is having a clear focus on teaching and learning. In order to accomplish this, teachers must have time to plan together. Gallagher (2012) stresses the importance of principals giving teachers time to plan and focus on data, but more importantly trusting them to be creative with the curriculum. Rettig (2007) acknowledges the fact that finding this time is cumbersome for administrators; however, in order to provide support for teachers to engage in their work so students benefit, the master schedule should provide the following in support of professional learning communities (PLCs)—time for common planning, time for common teaching, time for common intervention and enrichment, time for specialists to work in the classroom with general education teachers, and occasional extended planning time for teams. At this school, the master schedule afforded time for teachers to plan together, and the scheduled time was one of the top reasons teachers and administrators cited for an increase in student achievement. Teachers were not mandated to perform non-instructional duties during the day, but used available time to plan with colleagues. Administrators need the freedom to create a schedule that encompasses the needs of their students and teachers.

Accountability and Data Analysis

A third recommendation is to mandate data analysis and accountability as non-negotiables for all licensed staff who work with students, to include resource teachers. Oftentimes, classroom teachers are the gatekeepers of student data, while other teachers may not feel a need to collect and analyze data. All teachers must be held accountable for the success of all students. In order to be effective in meeting the needs of all students, they must know, at all times, what is expected, how students are progressing, and what interventions and monitoring are in place for improvement. Without the ability to analyze data, teachers simply take jabs in the dark as to what students need instructionally. Formative assessments should occur on a daily basis, so teachers can gauge whether or not students understand the content. The goal is for both teachers and students to grow from formative assessments. Simple checks for understanding can provide invaluable data for students and teachers. Teachers should always make sure students know what is expected and how they will know if they obtained mastery. Students must also be accountable and take ownership of their learning. They should be able to manipulate the content to show mastery. Teaching and learning should always be a no-secrets zone, as the goal is for students to be successful; however, if teachers are unable to disaggregate data, they cannot effectively differentiate for students.

Inspect What is Expected

Administrators must monitor all aspects of teaching and ensure that learning is effective and aligned with the curriculum. Reviewing and providing critical feedback on lesson plans weekly, conducting daily focused walkthroughs and providing teachers with timely feedback, and scheduling regular observations would ensure the written, taught, and tested curriculum are aligned and meeting the needs of all students. If this is done with fidelity, student achievement would increase. This was a common practice at this school, and although laborious at times, teachers believed it kept them accountable for student learning at all times. Ms. McNeil stated, “It’s a lot of work for me, especially for those with whom I have performance concerns, but it’s the only way to critique skills, offer support, then move them out, if necessary.” As literature confirms, teacher effectiveness is paramount. Rosenburg (2012) states, “Great teachers have some innate skills, but also must be effectively trained and supported” (p. 10).

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

The fourth recommendation to consider is for administrators to be diligent to set high standards and expectations for all staff and monitor frequently. Often in Title I schools, administrators become overwhelmed with discipline, parent complaints, ineffective teachers, central office requirements, and a backlog of emails, phone calls, and meetings, and fail to follow through with expectations set forth by the mission and vision of the school. Daily walkthroughs and observations get pushed back and teachers are left on their own to do business as usual. For teachers who are not driven to help students succeed, the lack of administrative presence can lead to a haphazard job of teaching, and when the time comes for observations, these teachers put on a dog-and-pony show to impress administrators, who are so out of tune they do not see or may not care that the observation was staged. This need for leadership presence bears out in literature, as Riddile (2010) affirms that although the real work happens in the classroom, leaders set the tone. As such, administrators must make their presence felt every single day, and the best way to accomplish this purposeful task is to keep the main thing—teaching and learning—a priority. They must be present in all classrooms daily. Students should see and know their administrators value their learning. Teachers must also know administrators support and value teaching and learning. At this school, administrators were very visible in classrooms, teacher planning meetings, and parent events. Additionally, best practices should be expected and monitored in all classrooms. In the school studied, many of the effective instructional strategies occurred only in the tested grades. Success is not unique to students in third through fifth grades, but is cumulative.

Empowerment to Do What Works in Your School

The final recommendation is for school leaders (administrators at the local and district levels) to combat politics that control school leaders and teachers and prevents them from being successful. There are so many mandates that can easily pile up on administrators' and teachers' plates until schools become a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Administrators must push to have a voice in what is good for their local schools. All schools are not the same and should not be cookie-cutter institutions of learning. Building cultures vary, as do student and teacher populations. Just because the State says a textbook adoption is mandatory, administrators must speak up if they feel it should not be mandated for use, especially if the students learn best from hands-on or digital content. I recently asked my supervisor if quarterly benchmarks were mandated for my higher-performing students because I felt their time was being spent on standardized tests, which most could easily score in the 90–100% range. I felt it would benefit them more to work on project-based learning, so they could use their imaginations and creativity to show how they learn. I felt they were being boxed in. Because I was firm about my belief, I was given permission not to test my high-performing and ELLs who would take an alternate assessment at the end of the year. The goal should always be to help students feel successful about their learning, but if educators put students in a one-size-fits-all type box, learning and growth are stunted. Administrators should be strong advocates for what is the best fit for their schools; and keep their plates clear of anything that does not advance student achievement. In the school studied for my research, when administrators felt adamantly about a program being pushed on their school, they made a plan to propose it be optional for their school. The instructional programs were of choice and few at this school. Although this study was of an elementary school, there should also be recommendations for middle and high schools.

Conclusions

The findings of my study yielded data that is consistent with research on what makes schools effective, especially for students from impoverished backgrounds. Research supports the premise that schools control the factors necessary for all children to be able to master core curriculum (Lezotte, 2001). As a result, research showed many schools did in fact overcome the challenges and were successful in ensuring all students' academic needs were met. The most current research translates effective classroom, school, and leadership practices into actions and behaviors that are definitive of such practices (Marzano & Waters, 2006). This study looked at practices, programs, leadership, and other factors to determine how they impacted the effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of students.

The study was conducted through a series of interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents. Observations were conducted in classrooms, of the school-wide setting, arrival and dismissal procedures, a staff meeting, several grade level meetings, and of shadowing the principal. Data revealed teachers had the biggest impact of how students progressed in school. As stated previously in the research, evidence has revealed teachers and teaching can be the most powerful *inside-of-school* predictors of success for students (Barton, 2003; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In the school studied, students were being challenged and held to high expectations. As research has shown, in high-poverty, high-performing schools, research-based programs are being utilized to enhance instruction (Barth et al., 1999; Izumi, 2002; Ragland et al., 2002). In the school, I observed best practices and effective instructional methods being used to improve teaching and maximize student learning.

During my study, I found the effective school research to be in direct correlation to my findings; however, I also found additional data to support how schools are meeting the challenges associated with working in high-poverty schools. From the interview and observation data, four themes emerged: working as a team to support instruction and achievement; resources focused on improving achievement and professional development; communication to support accountability for high expectations; and investment in connections between staff and students. Encompassed in these themes are all of the correlates found in effective schools.

Implications for Further Research

There is a need for further research in Title I schools. What is the number factor for schools not making progress? Are the required Comprehensive Needs Assessments driven by data? Do these schools really know what they need? Who are the leaders and teachers who work in these schools? Is there specialized training available for these educators? Has research been done exclusively on Title I schools, or just students from disadvantaged home dispersed throughout schools? These are questions State Departments of Education and the Title I Office should consider for research. With all the research about effective schools and what should be done, a further look into implementation of these practices should be carefully examined. This research may have to occur on the state level, so individual schools can be carefully studied and monitored. Research of the highly qualified status should give specifications for actions, characteristics, attributes, etc., not just paper documentation. Anyone can present a degree, but if they are ill-prepared to teach students in Title I schools, there will always be high turnover rates in these schools. Research should be conducted in all Title I schools that are not consistently high-performing. A determination of strategic evaluations should be conducted to evaluate effective practices of teaching and learning, procedures, and structures in place, and whether or not they are foster success for the nation's neediest students.

From One Title I Principal to Another

For the bulk of my career, I have worked in several Title I schools by choice. As an educator, I have a call in my life to help effect change in schools that serve marginalized children, especially those from impoverished households. I used to be one of "those children," and had it not been for a teacher investing in my life and seeing beyond the challenging external factors associated with poverty, I cannot tell you where my life would be at this point.

For principals in Title I schools, I urge you to be reflective and count up the cost of serving the precious lives and teachers with whom you are entrusted. As I am sure you already know, it is a lot of work, more than others can imagine. Once you count up the cost, sit down and see who you have aboard to help you with the task before you. If there is any dead weight, I urge you to inspect carefully what is expected and document, document, document. Get the right people on the bus (Collins, 2012). It will make all the difference. Beginning with your leadership team, although most schools hold elections or rotate grade level members, I implore you to choose wisely the people who will help make decisions for the whole school. This doesn't mean choose a team of "yes" people because you need your thoughts and decisions to be challenged, so the best results will come forth, so ultimately, students benefit from your decisions. Make certain to heavily make your presence known in your building. Daily walkthroughs, with a good "look for" checklist that ensures alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculums. Make your presence count! Your students' lives depend on it. Always remember to keep the main thing (teaching and learning) the main thing. Do not get distracted. Go to bat for your teachers and students, and if necessary, solicit help from your supervisor to take unnecessary things off your plate, so you and your staff can move forward, implementing best practices with fidelity. That cannot be done with too many initiatives. Lastly, remember the three Rs: relationships, rigor, and relevance. Without those three elements, you can derail well-meaning efforts. Stay balanced, transparent, and touchable. Run a no-secrets school and keep every matter above board and in the best interest of your staff and students.

For teachers in Title I schools, reflect upon why you are teaching. Were you called, or was it just a backup career? If you feel you were not called to serve students from impoverished backgrounds, then I urge you to get out now! The work required in Title I schools is insurmountable, as I am sure to which you can attest. If you are called, sit down with you principal and grade level team and determine what skills and training you need, then make a plan of action for professional growth. Your students deserve that. In addition, work smarter by collaborating with your colleagues on best practices that yield high results for students. Whatever you don't know, be transparent and say so. Students do not have time to sacrifice their learning while a teacher gets it together. Show up every single day ready to set the world on fire (within your classroom). Challenge your students—all of them. Keep your expectations high for all students and for yourself. Make sure your plans reflect the curriculum with many opportunities for students to master the objective, assess their learning, and grow. Make your classroom a no-secrets classroom, so students know exactly what they will learn and how they will know if they learned it. Always plan for re-teaching and enrichment because there will always be students who do not get it or who are way ahead of you. Teach to their needs. If your students are not learning the way you teach, then teach the way they learn. The goal is for them to learn. Lastly, stay far away from negativity and do not get trapped in the lounge with people who run the school down. It will only transfer to the atmosphere in your classroom.

To parents of children in Title I Schools, be present. If you cannot physically make your presence known, technology can be your best friend. Email, text, or instant message your child's teacher, so you can stay on top of what's going on in the classroom. As a principal, I can be transparent with you to let you know that teachers work harder when they know parents are vested in their children's education. Do not be afraid to advocate for your child. You are your child's first teacher and biggest cheerleader. In addition to being present, work with your child at home to help prepare them for learning. If you need resources or knowledge to help you help your child, ask. If the teacher does not provide for you, ask the principal. Your child will perform better and take more interest in learning when they know it is important to you.

Last, but certainly not least, to students in Title I schools, know that you matter! Point. Blank. Period. All that happens in the school is for your advancement. We are called to serve you. Use your voice and tell us what you need. Tell us how you feel about school. Tell us when you don’t feel good about school. Stand up and advocate for yourself. If you need something, that’s what the adults in the school are there for- to help you. Show up every day ready to learn. Your teachers and principal are waiting and willing to help you learn, so you can become ready to change the world. Always begin with the end in mind and work hard to be smart.

Title I schools are some of the best places to work and learn because we have the challenge to do what some say cannot be done—educating all students. If you are fortunate enough to work in a Title I school, I challenge you to let your every action, every decision, every plan of action, every word, and every deed be done in the best interests of students, staff, and the school community. If it does not advance learning, let it go! Let everything you do be done *on*, *for*, and *with* purpose!

Reflections

So many emotions ran through my mind as I sifted through the individual pieces of oddly-shaped papers on which I scribbled thoughts and feelings along this journey. This research had personal meaning to me, because I was looking in a mirror at students who now sit in seats where I once sat. As I read, wrote, researched, contemplated, started over, erased, then started over again, I could not divorce myself from the feelings this study provoked. As I read through what seemed like a thousand articles and books, I constantly saw myself in every single classroom in high-poverty schools. As I have been with my personal life, so I was in my work—determined to effect change that would result in students benefitting from schooling.

I believe all things happen for a reason, and the fact that the first school in which I was to conduct my study did not work out, I was fortunate to be introduced to a school I researched long before thinking about research. I vividly remember saying to myself, “I would love to see how that school runs,” and behold, that is exactly where I landed. From the first conversation with the principal to the ongoing conversations we now have, being afforded the privilege to be a part of the school family was a milestone I will never forget.

I was not sure what I would face, if the staff would embrace me, or if I could gain a holistic picture of the school, but I remember the advice I received from Drs. Cooper and Davis—“Go in with no assumptions. Let the school speak to you as a researcher.” With that mindset, I was open to let my biases go and open myself up to learning as a researcher and educator. Being a part of the school setting was so familiar to me. It felt like a compilation of all the Title I schools in which I have worked. There were beautiful marginalized groups of students who were hungry for knowledge, who were absorbing teaching and learning like a sponge absorbing water, and who were the friendliest, sweetest students any educator could ask to serve.

I positioned myself in the seat as a learner, and I felt full every evening when I left the school. I was fortunate to spend time with the school team and the principal and not once felt I was inconveniencing anyone. As I observed and interviewed stakeholders, they became real to me. They were no longer a pseudonym or assigned number, but were real, compassionate people who loved their calling in life. I saw myself in them. As I sought to discover what made their school successful, I immediately realized half the equation was solved by looking at the people serving the school. All the other factors were icing on the cake. After I saw the heart of the servants of the school, I knew the students were in good hands.

As I learned of the best practices in place at the school, I constantly dialogued with my staff via email because it confirmed for me that our school was on the right track, although I noticed a few tweaks we needed to make. As I share with other Title I schools in my district, they were open to implementing some of the ideas. As an educational leader, the research caused me to grow and I continue to grow. The research on Effective Schools, while is considered outdated my many professionals, still works if those who actually serve students will make it work. No matter how current the research, all of it can come full circle to Ronald Edmonds's (1997) research. Of course, times have changed and the methods of teaching and learning have advanced, but good solid foundational truths still work.

From this study, I am a better thinker of the world around me and how I can effect change for teachers and students so they benefit from schooling. I am a better contributor to critical conversations about teaching and learning and what works in schools serving marginalized groups. I have not only observed it, but I live it daily. I am a better collaborator with my peers, teachers, students, and parents, as I realize everyone has a voice that needs to be unmuted. I am a better leader who wants my life to count and mean something to the teachers and children I serve. I am a better dreamer because I still believe change is possible and will dedicate my life to effecting change for students who cannot fight for themselves. I am a better person because I was open to be transparent and vulnerable to admit that although I researched for months, I still did not know the missing variables to maintain consistent performance in my school. Now, I am more enlightened that the first step is to get the right people aboard, and there is no limit to where students can go with a determined, purpose-driven team of educators pushing them to excellence.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION OF CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

Date:

Indicator	Location	Notes
Setting (i.e. appearance, climate, what is seen/not seen)		
Instructional Orientation (i.e. direct, collaborative, cooperative)		
Organization (i.e. groups, seating, centers, arrangement)		
Procedures (i.e. norms, rules, consequences, student-centered, teacher-centered)		
Instructional Strategies (i.e. teacher's role, Bloom's, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching, etc.)		
Engagement/Interaction (i.e. students, teachers, motivation, expectations, types of)		
Assessments (i.e., formative, summative, data-driven, standards-based, performance-based, types of)		
Resources (technology, supplemental materials, etc.)		

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL SETTING PROTOCOL

Date:

Indicator	Types (types if applicable)	Notes
Physical Environment		
Climate		
Procedures		
Interactions		
Communication		
Community Partnerships		
Resources		

APPENDIX C

ADMINISTRATOR/TEACHER/STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me what makes your school successful.
2. What type of support do you give and receive from your school?
3. How are decisions made in your school?
4. What does communication look like among faculty, staff, and parents?
5. How are people in your school recognized for accomplishments?
6. Tell me about any programs in place that contribute to student learning and how they are implemented.
7. How does accountability look in your school?
8. Why are students achieving, and what factors contributed to their success?
9. Describe what has the greatest impact on your leadership/teaching practice.
10. How do you interact with administration and/or colleagues, and does it impact your leadership/teaching practices, positively or negatively?
11. What advice would you give staff members in other Title I schools that are struggling to become consistently high-performing?
12. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your school?

APPENDIX D

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me what makes your school successful.
2. What type of support do you give and receive from your school?
3. What does communication look like among faculty and parents?
4. How are children in the school recognized for accomplishments?
5. Tell me about any programs in place that contribute to student learning.
6. How does accountability look in the school?
7. Why are students achieving, and what factors contributed to their success?
8. Describe what has the greatest impact on your child’s learning.
9. How do you interact with administration and staff?
10. What advice would you give parents in other Title I schools that are struggling to succeed?
11. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your school?

APPENDIX E

RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
RQ 1 What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high-poverty, high-performing school?		Interview question(s) What makes your school successful?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s) What makes your school successful?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s) What type of support do you give and receive from the school?
RQ 2 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies and structures contribute to high achievement at their school?		Interview question(s) What programs are in place that contribute to student learning and how they are implemented?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s) What programs are in place that contribute to student learning and how they are implemented?	Interview question(s)

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
RQ 3 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?		Interview question(s) What does communication look like among administration, staff, and parents?	Interview question(s) How are decisions made in your school? How do you interact with administration and/or colleagues, and does it impact your leadership/teaching practices, positively or negatively?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s) What does communication look like among administration, staff, and parents? How do you interact with administration and/or colleagues, and does it impact your leadership/teaching practices, positively or negatively?
RQ 4 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to their school's success?		Interview question(s) Why are students achieving, and what factors contributed to their success?	Interview question(s) What has the greatest impact on your teaching or leadership practice?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s) How are people recognized for their accomplishments?	Interview question(s)

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
RQ 5 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to their school's success?		Interview question(s) How does accountability look in your school?	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s)	Interview question(s)

APPENDIX F

RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
RQ 1 What do administrators, teachers, and parents say about achieving and sustaining student success in a high-poverty, high-performing school?		Observation Protocol **Instructional Strategies** (i.e. teacher's role, Bloom's, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching, etc.) **Instructional Orientation** (i.e. direct, collaborative, cooperative)	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol **Instructional Strategies** (i.e. teacher's role, Bloom's, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching, etc.) **Instructional Orientation** (i.e. direct, collaborative, cooperative)	Observation Protocol **Engagement/Interaction** (i.e., students, teachers, motivation, expectations, types of) **Organization** (i.e., groups, seating, centers, arrangement) **Procedures** (i.e. norms, rules, consequences, student-centered, teacher-centered)	Observation Protocol

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
RQ 2 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what instructional programs, strategies and structures contribute to high achievement at their school?		Observation Protocol **Instructional Strategies** (i.e. teacher's role, Bloom's, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching, etc.)	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol **Engagement/Interaction** (i.e. students, teachers, motivation, expectations, types of)	Observation Protocol
RQ 3 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does communication contribute to high achievement?		Observation Protocol **Procedures** (i.e. norms, rules, consequences, student-centered, teacher-centered)	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol
RQ 4 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, what contributes to their school's success?		**Instructional Strategies** (i.e. teacher's role, Bloom's, differentiation, inclusion, co-teaching, etc.) **Engagement/Interaction** (i.e. students, teachers,	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol	Observation Protocol **Assessments** (i.e. formative, summative, data-driven, standards-based, performance-based, types of)	Observation Protocol

Research questions in this column	Conceptual Framework Elements in this Row →	Element 1 Climate of high expectations for success and safe, orderly school	Element 2 Instructional leadership	Element 3 Clear, focused mission	Element 4 Opportunities to learn and frequent monitoring of student progress	Element 5 Home-school relationship
		motivation, expectations, types of)				
RQ 5 According to administrators, teachers, and parents, how does accountability contribute to their school’s success?					**Assessments** (i.e. formative, summative, data-driven, standards-based, performance-based, types of)	

APPENDIX G

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Educational and Non-educational Practices of Administrators and Teachers in a High-Performing Title I School that Improve Student Performance

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Carl Lashley and Gail Brady

Participant's Name:

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary.
With proven research on what makes schools effective, it is still difficult with the challenges of increased accountability and high stakes testing and the required components of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, to meet the goal of ensuring all students experience academic success. The challenges continue to be more pronounced in schools with high rates of poverty. The question remains, "With all the research about and what we already know about what makes schools effective, why are schools still not meeting the needs of students experiencing poverty?" The rationale behind this study is

to help educators realize, that despite the challenges of poverty, achievement is possible. With all that is known about poverty and its effect on achievement, there are schools that are overcoming the challenges and closing the achievement gap. Schools are proving that success is attainable despite poverty, if adults are willing to put in the hard work required. This study will reveal how administrators and teachers addressed the challenges and issues and developed approaches to teaching that lifted students from poverty into school success.

Why are you asking me?

The reason I am asking you to be part of this project is because you have proven to be a responsible volunteer who also appears to be interested in continuing this experience. You have been personally recruited for your honesty (which is much appreciated as I want to know as much as I can from your experience to benefit future participants and communities). In order to ensure that individual discussions and reflections do not become therapy sessions, individuals with certain diagnosed and self-describe mental health issues (such as severe chronic depression or uncontrolled schizophrenia to name a few) or debilitating physical (lack of mobility) or cognitive (Alzheimer's) dysfunctions are not be appropriate for this particular study. For this study, I am asking active school personnel and parents to participate. In essence, any active individual associated with the school would qualify for this study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

This research project will take place at your school. It will consist of approximately 7-10 days (spread over a few weeks), with a commitment of a minimum of 15-20 minutes for an interview. The remaining research will consist of classroom and teacher observations to determine practices used, motivational techniques, teacher collaboration, and programs used to enhance instruction.

There are general questions that you will be asked during the interview:

- What's special about this school that makes it successful?
- What type of support do you give and receive from your school?
- How are decisions made in your school?
- What does communication look like among faculty, staff, and parents?
- How are people in the school recognized for accomplishments?
- Tell me about any programs in place that contribute to student learning and how they are implemented.
- How does accountability look in the school?
- Why are students achieving in the school, and what factors contributed to their success?
- Describe what has the greatest impact on your teaching practice.
- How do you interact with administration and colleagues, and does it impact your teaching practices, positively or negatively?
- What advice would you give staff members in other Title I schools that are struggling to succeed?

You may answer, as you feel comfortable doing so, through discussions, individual conversations, or e-mails.
If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Carl Lashley, Gail Brady's UNCG Dissertation Chair, at
Carl.lashley@gmail.com or (336) 549-9163, so you fully understand to what you are consenting. You can also reach Gail Brady at (571) 409-4663 or gaildbrady@gmail.com.

Is there any audio/video recording?
There will not be any video recording of the sessions. There will be an audio recording just to make sure that everything presented in the study is what actually occurred. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will allow limited access to these tapes for the purpose of transcribing. The researcher's Dissertation Chair will have access to the tapes, if requested.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Minimal risks are similar to the minimal risks involved in any volunteer activity and in the process of learning and growing. Any stress (physical, psychological or emotional) related to this study will be the same as, or less than, in your regular volunteer services because you will have the support of this student researcher as well as that of your administrator. You will not be required to share any information with which you are not comfortable, if you do not wish to, although we hope you feel comfortable enough to add to the process. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Alien in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by me, Gail Brady, student researcher, at (571) 409-4663 or gaildbrady@gmail.com or Carl Lashley, principal investigator, who may be contacted at carl.lashley@gmail.com or (336) 549-9163.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
The community may benefit from your direct service and from your broadened viewpoint. It may also benefit from the results of this study and offer more learning opportunities for schools similar in nature.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?
You may be able to broaden others' perspectives regarding the education of students in a high-performing Title I school and community through your participation.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study. Although you will not be paid or compensated financially for your service, you may help others become richer in experience and knowledge.

How will you keep my information confidential?
Privacy refers to a person's desire to control the access of others to themselves. No one will be required to share more than they feel comfortable sharing with others. Confidentiality refers to how your identifiable private information will be handled, managed, and disseminated. All information obtained in this study is held strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law (only the case if you are planning to harm yourself or others). We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is held in strict confidence. We will not use any identifying information in reporting the results of this study, but will use pseudonyms. All information will be kept in a locked file cabinet and all data on the computer will be password protected. Maintaining confidentiality of information collected from you means that only the research team can identify your responses.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing this consent form/completing this survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Gail Brady.

Signature: _________________________ Date: _________________