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Stories of Student Success in Title I Elementary Schools

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**STORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS
IN TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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Executive Summary:
Stories of Student Success in Title I Elementary Schools

In Virginia, as elsewhere nationwide, reform efforts have placed increased demands on schools to raise the academic performance of all students. Statewide benchmarks identify the minimum levels of acceptable student achievement, and pressure has been placed at the school level to improve the school's academic standing to meet these requirements.

Schools serving disadvantaged populations traditionally face additional difficulties in attempting to meet benchmark standards. The effects of poverty on student achievement have long been acknowledged. However, in the current era of reform, rhetoric abounds for these schools, calling to "close the gap" and accept "no excuses" in the drive to improve student achievement for all. Efforts to do so, however, have met with mixed results. Some schools serving student populations with high rates of poverty have demonstrated the ability to "beat the odds," to use the rhetorical vernacular, while others have been unable to raise and/or sustain test scores.

This study was commissioned to identify those factors perceived to contribute to success in student achievement in schools serving communities with high rates of poverty.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors present in schools with students who performed higher or demonstrated greater improvement on SOL (Standards of Learning) tests than might have been expected based on student demographics. The study identified factors present in these schools that contributed to their success. The study examined four Title I elementary schools, including three designated as high achieving and one as low achieving for purposes of comparison. The study was initially designed to examine equal numbers of schools representing each phenomenon (high and low achieving); however, the perceived pressure associated with state and local reform efforts narrowed the pool of potential study participants. An in-depth examination in each school included interviews with principals, teachers, and parents; observations; and document reviews. Qualitative methods of analysis were employed.

Findings

Four major themes emerged in this study of high achieving Title I schools. These included:

1. *Defining and Pursuing Success:* High achieving Title I schools defined success differently than simply adhering to state and local expectations. In addition, personal and professional efficacy drove faculties to attain success with students.
2. *Care:* A culture of care and respect was embedded deeply in these schools.
3. *Leadership:* Leadership was shared throughout the school, and was exercised by many.

4. *Diversity and Challenge*: Participants in these schools celebrated diversity and/or challenges inherent in the student population.

First, effective Title I elementary schools defined “success” based on a variety of indicators relating to individual student progress and growth, not merely on SOL test scores. Principals and their faculties acknowledged the presence of external definitions based on school test scores, but were not driven primarily by such measures. Teachers demonstrated a strong sense of efficacy in their work, a belief and confidence in their abilities to positively impact student learning.

Second, successful Title I elementary schools demonstrated a culture grounded in an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984). The environment in these schools was one of mutual respect, trust, and attention to the needs of the whole child—and his family. Principals, teachers, and parents alike identified this pervasive sense of care as evident throughout the school.

Third, leadership in these schools was shared by and distributed to many in the school community. Principals and teachers assumed leadership and responsibility for their work with their colleagues, demonstrated a strong sense of organizational identity, and provided opportunities for leadership among students as well. Leadership was demonstrated through formal roles, but also significantly through symbolic and informal means.

Finally, these schools demonstrated pride and respect for cultural diversity, where present, and a sense of honoring the conditions of poverty and challenge inherent in a Title I school population. Teachers displayed a commitment to and sense of purpose in working in a Title I school. In the two schools that were culturally diverse, faculty and parents identified the diversity as a strength of the school community.

In comparison, findings from one school that had not yet demonstrated high or improved student achievement based on SOL test scores pointed to a major difference in the culture of the school. While some attributes of high achieving Title I schools were noted, inconsistency among perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators was noteworthy. In the comparison school, negative opinions were voiced by teachers regarding: the lack of involvement by parents; the negative impact of poverty and “uncaring” parents on student learning and the school culture; a sense of disconnect between teachers and administration and the school as a whole (frequent use of “they” in reference to the school); negative perceptions of teachers by their peers; a poor sense of professional efficacy among teachers; and a prevailing climate of stress and pressure. Concerns among parents included a sense of not feeling welcome at the school, and stress observed in their children.

Implications

The findings in this study have implications for state and local policy makers, administrators, school principals, teachers, and parents. Clearly, effective Title I schools

in this study experienced a pervasive positive culture in which mutual respect, a fundamental belief in the goodness of children and families, and a strong sense of personal and professional efficacy were evident. Schools need support, not criticism, in their efforts to build a strong, positive culture to surround student learning. Fundamental culture building within a school and its community is key. Strong, positive leadership by principals, teachers, and students is essential in developing a shared responsibility for student learning and development. Schools with a focus on the whole child—including, but not limited to, academics—should be supported and provided with assistance to address the many needs of children and their families.

In these high achieving Title I schools, improving test scores became a natural byproduct of the driving focus on children, not the focus itself. This is an important finding in a time of state and national reform efforts to improve student achievement as measured by standards-based test scores. These schools were driven by their own individual and collective definitions of success, not by external pressures or expectations. Their motivation was intrinsic and interwoven within the fiber of the school community.



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Preface

This is the final report of a project sponsored by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC). This consortium is a collaborative research effort in central Virginia involving Virginia Commonwealth University and seven surrounding school divisions: Chesterfield County, Colonial Heights, Hanover County, Henrico County, Hopewell City, Powhatan County, and Richmond City. This study was initiated in 1999 to explore the phenomenon of high achieving or improving schools serving populations with high rates of free and reduced lunch. The project was directed by a research team that included representatives from each MERC school division, and a professor and two research fellows from Virginia Commonwealth University. The team shaped the design and implementation of the study. This final report reflects findings of the study and does not constitute official policy or position by Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Introduction

National trends over the past two decades have pointed toward increasingly rigorous academic standards, the prevalence of high stakes associated with standardized test results, and greater pressure on school leaders at the local level to demonstrate success according to state and local benchmarks. In addition, it is commonly assumed that schools serving economically disadvantaged communities will produce lower student test scores than those serving more affluent students. Further, research has pointed repeatedly to an increasing gap between achievement of poor children and their wealthier peers (Hodges, 2001). Meanwhile, campaign slogans and political banners (e.g., “no excuses,” “close the gap,” and countless others) have proclaimed with fervor that schools must achieve at or above expected levels, regardless of the population served. These factors have served to increasingly focus the spotlight on low achieving schools, most frequently those serving communities with high levels of poverty.

According to 2000 Census data (Children’s Defense Fund, 2001) 13.5% of Virginia children under the age of 18 were living in poverty. Nationally, 17.5% of children lived below the poverty line, a decrease from prior years. An interesting note in the census data was that child poverty rose among full time working families. Thirty-seven percent of children in poverty lived in families where someone was employed. This has more than doubled over the past decade. It is anticipated that poverty rates will rise again due to increased layoffs and unemployment beginning in 2001. These trends have implications for schools resulting from the impact of poverty on learning. In addition, schools are impacted by the changing profiles of parents with children living in poverty.

In Virginia, dramatic changes impacted K-12 education beginning in 1995 (Tucker & Grogan, 2001). The Standards of Learning were revised, as well as the Standards of Accreditation, Standards of Learning assessments, and school report cards. Prior to this time, teachers were able to make individual decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and principals often operated under a hands-off approach, unless they had expertise in instruction. In conjunction, schools serving varied populations of students were not expected to achieve results similar to other schools (Falk, 2000; cited in Tucker & Grogan, 2001). With the changes implemented beginning in 1995, new pressure was placed in particular on low achieving schools serving disadvantaged or lower SES student populations. This positioned new demands on these schools to increase student achievement to meet benchmark levels regardless of student demographics.

Schools in Virginia have demonstrated varying success in meeting the new demands for student achievement. In some cases, schools with high populations of students on free or reduced-price lunch demonstrated student achievement at levels higher than those of schools serving similar student populations. To shape this study, questions were raised regarding the apparent success of some schools serving low SES student populations, in contrast to similar schools that were not meeting with success in student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors present in schools with students who performed higher or demonstrated greater improvement on Standards of Learning

(SOL) tests than might have been expected based on student demographics. The study identified factors present in these schools that contributed to this success.

Review of the Literature

In many research studies an extensive review of the literature is conducted prior to designing the study. In these cases the review points to prior methodologies and findings in other studies, therefore, contributing to the shaping of the new study. In the case of this study, the study team chose to review a sampling of related studies for the purposes of identifying methodology employed in those studies. With regard to the findings of those studies, however, the study team preferred to explore the local phenomenon first, rather than enter with *a priori* expectations of factors contributing to the apparent success of these schools. The intent was to enter the sites without preconceived expectations of what factors might be present. The questions in the minds of the researchers were: "What is happening here, specifically, in this local region? What factors are evident in these schools from the perspective of the staff and parents? What factors are evident to an outside observer?"

Initial Review of the Literature

Prior Methodologies.

There were five studies reviewed that used noteworthy research designs. In the first study of 21 high poverty, high achieving schools throughout the county, Carter (2000) examined the practices of these successful principals. Three-fourths or more of the schools' populations qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. All of the schools scored above the 65th percentile on national achievement tests, and eleven of the schools scored

above the 80th percentile on these tests. The author explained that most schools with these kinds of poverty statistics scored around the 35th percentile. Fifteen of the schools that participated in the study were public schools, three were charter schools, three were private, and one had a religious affiliation. Carter carried out an extensive interview with each school's principal to tell the story of each school. Carter described how "although each school solved its own problems in its own way, a certain number of 'best practices' emerge, and deserve study" (p.13). Through analysis of the interviews with these 21 principals, five practices for high poverty, high achieving schools were revealed.

In 1998, The Education Trust (1999) surveyed and received responses from 366 elementary and high schools. This study looked at schools nationwide that were in 50-100% poverty, yet were among the top ten high poverty schools in their state during the 1996-1997 academic year. Data were collected through a survey given to school officials that focused on how the school increased achievement. The survey was followed by open questions asking what factors contributed to student success at that particular school.

Connell (1999) studied elementary schools in high poverty neighborhoods in New York City to attempt to capture the practices of day-to-day life. All the schools chosen for the study had made recent improvement, boosting their scores to passing or above. Schools with selected admission were eliminated from the final study. Connell carried out 56 guided interviews with principals, teachers, and parents that focused on principal leadership. School selection criteria included: appearing at least twice on three New York Honor Roll Lists, two-thirds of the students eligible for free lunch, at least one-third of the population receiving public assistance, not recruiting large numbers of students from talented and gifted (TAG) programs, and continuing (not new) principals.

In his 1999 study, Hughes looked not only at high achieving, high poverty schools, but low achieving, high poverty schools as well. Hughes researched seven elementary schools in high poverty areas of rural West Virginia that had similar student demographics and SES. The five-year average of 560 elementary schools on state standardized tests was used to rank the schools from highest to lowest. Hughes looked at 17 school variables of the top and bottom 33 schools. From there, schools were paired that had similar student demographics and SES (matched for free and reduced price lunch, father's education level, and mother's education level), but had different levels of achievement. Seven schools were selected: three pairs, and the highest achieving, high poverty school in the state. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using three methods: surveys, interviews, and observations. The Diagnostic Assessment of School and Principal Effectiveness was given to 82 teachers, 632 parents, and 670 students. Interviews (taped and transcribed) were conducted with 50 parents, teachers, and administrators. Observations of school location, condition, appearance, business locations, and nearest business district were also made for each school. Data were analyzed and revealed that high poverty, high achieving schools had shared characteristics that differed greatly from the high poverty, low achieving schools.

The U.S. Department of Education (1999) studied nine successful Title I schools nationwide that served high poverty and minority communities. Criteria for school selection included: the majority of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch; schools were urban without selected admission policies; student achievement in math and reading was higher than the state average; no evidence that a large part of the school was exempt due to lacking English proficiency; and consenting to the study in an appropriate

length of time. Two-day visits took place in all of the schools. Interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, parents, and other school personnel. Classroom, cafeteria, and playground observations were made and school documents (planning documents, meeting agendas, school budgets, reports, etc.) and achievement data were reviewed. Case studies were written for each of the nine schools telling the stories of the schools' change and process. The research team consisted of 12 individuals with varied backgrounds and skills. Summaries of these five studies are provided in Table I.

Table I.

Carter (2000)	Connell (1999)	Education Trust (1999)	Hughes (1999)	US Dept. of Educ. (1999)
21 schools nationwide in varied settings	14 local schools in urban setting	366 schools nationwide in varied settings	7 local schools in rural setting	9 schools nationwide in urban setting
Interviews	Interviews	Surveys	Interviews, surveys, observations	Interviews, observations, reviews
Principals	Principals, teachers, parents	School officials	Administrators, teachers, parents, students	Superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers, parents

These five studies provided examples for a potential methodology framework. Based on the methodology used in prior studies, it was determined that this study would examine target schools through qualitative data to explore perspectives of key stakeholders and to observe the schools in action. This study's method of data collection most closely resembled that of the U.S. Department of Education (1999) study that used interviews, observations, and document reviews as information sources.

Subsequent Review of the Literature

After data collection and analysis were conducted, a deeper review of the literature was conducted. A report of this review is provided here.

Socio-Economic Context.

Child poverty is a traditional concern in all aspects of the educational field. Though poverty for children has declined since 1993 (Olson, 2000), 14.5 million of this country's children still live below the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999, cited in Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). Larry Aber of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University, said there were three factors for the decrease in child poverty: a robust economy, more parents working, and lower wage jobs now paying better because of the federal earned income tax credit. Parents were leaving welfare; however, they were still below the poverty line and many of them were outside urban areas. Single parent families, low education levels, and part-time or no employment were the top contributing factors for lower SES in all locations (Olson, 2000). As noted in the *Introduction* to this report, recent changes in poverty demographics point to an increase in childhood poverty among those living with at least one working parent (Children's Defense Fund, 2001).

Education is, of course, affected by child poverty levels. The National Committee on Education, Paul Hamlyn Foundation (1996) defined "educational disadvantage" as the denial of equal access to educational opportunities. Negative social and environmental factors also hinder achievement, and students tend to leave school at the first opportunity. Sanders (1998) stated that adolescents living below the poverty line are less likely to see

the relationship between education and future success. According to Olson (2000), concentrated poverty in schools is associated with lower achievement for both lower and higher SES children who attend such schools. Teachers in these schools tend to be newer, less experienced, and less prepared, Olson also explained. High poverty in the schools can also lead to schools developing more negative climates. Comer (1992) characterized schools with more negative climates as “problem schools” that possess students who fight, disrespect teachers, have difficulty concentrating, lack spontaneity and curiosity, and cannot get along with others. He added that the teachers in these schools view the children as “not smart” or “bad,” use punishment to control problem behavior, have low expectations for students, and have no hierarchical or authoritarian organization.

The British National Commission on Education found that the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged is widening in regard to school achievement (National Committee on Education, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 1996). Another finding of their study concluded that social class accounts for differences on Standards of Assessment Tasks for seven-year-olds; however, many students and their schools have successful scores against the odds. It is conceivable that social class also accounts for differences in test scores in this country as well. Therefore, results in Britain also have implications for education in the United States as well as locally.

A current trend in research focuses on those schools that succeed despite financial, social, and educational disadvantages. The remainder of this review of literature describes factors that have been identified as contributing to school success and to outline strategies that have been found to help high poverty schools achieve despite obstacles of the schools’ populations.

Resiliency.

The National Committee on Education, Paul Hamlyn Foundation (1996)

explained that disadvantage includes prejudice and unfavorable circumstances such as low income and unemployment, and environmental conditions such as poor housing and health care. Resiliency is a coping process that can help those experiencing disadvantage to overcome disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in ways that provide the individual with additional protective strategies and skills (Milstein & Henry, 2000). Children who possess these qualities are often more academically successful. Cowen, Wyman, Work, and Iker's (1995) study identified five variables that can determine whether or not a child is resilient: global self-worth, empathy, realistic control attributions, social problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. When children develop these characteristics, they also become more resilient.

According to Doll and Lyon (1998), many school-community characteristics often foster resilience. These environments provide access to positive adult role models, pro-social organizations, and responsive, high quality schools. In their 1994 study, Zimmerman and Arunkmar illustrated how schools promote resiliency by promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy through providing opportunities for students to experience success and develop social and problem-solving skills. Skinner and Wellborn (1997) contended that children in schools that foster resiliency learn "academic coping," or how to interpret and react to academic challenges. The role of the school is to develop student mastery versus helplessness. The objective is to relieve stress on a student by helping to change his attitude to one that is consistent with high self-esteem. All of these suggestions involve schools going beyond meeting only students' academic needs.

School Environment.

School culture and climate are among the primary non-academic factors that can contribute to academic success. According to Comer (1992), students learn optimally when their developmental needs are met. Hansen and Childs' (1998) article synthesized previous results describing schools "where people like to be." Their findings showed that typical school climates have been described as ones that value compulsory attendance and test scores and do not give teachers choice in curriculum (Brophy, 1998, cited in Hansen & Childs, 1998). Darling-Hammond (1997, cited in Hansen & Childs, 1998) affirmed that most schools mandate regulations that make schools impersonal, indifferent, and generally insensitive to individual students. School climate has been described as one of the major factors that can cause a school to be unsuccessful and can also involve a mechanical model of teaching, teachers trying to "control" behavior of students, and students having few support systems (O'Neil, 1997). O'Neil claimed that "it is difficult to internalize a sense of well-being, high self-esteem and a passion for achievement in an environment that is chaotic, abusive, or characterized by low expectations for students" (p. 16).

Comer (1992) mentioned that unfavorable climates (including lack of teacher-student respect, low collegiality, misbehavior, and low academic expectations from students) can negatively affect the administration, the teachers, and the students. When students, especially those living in poverty, must learn in negative school climates their performance is affected.

Many schools that have been studied, however, possess positive school cultures. Authors characterize these schools in many different ways. Hansen and Childs (1998) described schools “where people like to be” as those that:

- show students respect;
- provide a safe environment;
- offer a place of belonging and a feeling of security;
- have open spaces and interesting/beautiful objects in the environment to set the tone;
- have consciously-established policies that encourage and permit rather than restrict or direct;
- encourage all students to participate;
- encourage students to take responsibility for their own behavior and participate in school governance;
- tap outside resources.

Positive school environments where diverse student bodies succeed also have a sense of family/community that can be felt by parents, teachers, and students (Goodson, CARE, & Foote, 2001). Johnson, Johnson, Stevahn, & Hodne (1997) described Highlands Elementary School in Edina, Minnesota. They felt that Highlands was an example of a positive school climate that nurtures students physically and psychologically and promotes well being of faculty and staff. The authors described the “3 C’s” plan for developing a positive school environment—cooperation, conflict resolution, and civic values. Pool (1997) also identified characteristics of quality schools as those that:

- use developmentally appropriate practices with young children;
- encourage parent and community involvement;
- provide children with health and nutrition needs;
- provide connections and referrals to social services;
- have low student/teacher ratios; and
- provide safe and secure settings. (pp. 75-76)

Similarly, in a powerful interview with Herb Kohl, founder of the Open School Movement, Scherer (1998) gathered descriptions of ways to create a positive classroom environment where kids feel they belong and where they learn to love learning in a dysfunctional, poverty-ridden urban school district. Kohl felt that classrooms and teachers must inspire hope and convince students of their self-worth. Kohl reiterated the need for mutual student-teacher respect and beautiful objects in the schools, as well as the need for every child to be literate in math, technology, literature, language, and real-world events. These proficiencies come out of the inspirations a positive school climate can provide.

Noddings (1984) explained the ethic of care as a moral obligation, a commitment, or an imperative to act. She suggested that when ethical caring is present, individuals act because they feel they must. She distinguished this notion of caring from natural caring, which implies that individuals act in a certain way simply because they want to do so. Noddings explained also that ethical caring differs from empathy, which is a projection of the self onto another. Noddings further explained the essence of moral caring:

[Moral caring] involves stepping out of one's personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs,

and what he expects from us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves. (p. 24)

There are many ways to create this kind of environment in high poverty schools. Noddings (1992) stressed schools giving students a feeling of ownership in the curriculum as a way to foster a caring and positive school environment. Trusting students to be a part of governing their classrooms and schools can help develop this sense of ownership. One way to educate children is to understand them by engaging with them in meaningful conversation, as Pianta and Walsh (1996) suggested. Academic success must also be understood through looking at students in their societies, communities, and home environments (Rossi, 1994). Edwards, Green, and Lyons (1996) claimed positive classrooms are characterized by:

- well behaved students;
- less-stressed teachers;
- higher achieving students;
- satisfied teachers; and
- teachers who would choose teaching as their career again if given the chance.

Much of the literature described school culture and climate based on interactions of a number of different variables. Pianta and Walsh (1996) described their theoretical perspective of school climate. Pianta and Walsh explained “the invidious triangle” in their book on constructing relationships with at-risk students. This triangular model attacks blame for lack of student success and claims that failure is a result of combined factors of home and community environments, the schools, and the children themselves. These authors also used this model in their 1998 article to describe the development of

resiliency in children. Resilience is not only a characteristic of individual students, but also the result of multiple systems. Three factors—the family, the school, and the child—work together to create either a positive or negative school climate which can, in turn, affect resilience and student success. Reynolds, Bollen, Creemers, Hopkins, Stoll, and Lagerij (1996) agreed that a combination of factors including curriculum, teacher professionalism, strong educational leadership, and school culture are keys to both school effectiveness and improvement. Similarly, Wang, Huertel, and Walberg's (1998) study identified four commonalities of programs that help schools reform. All programs use research-based practices, increase the professional role of teachers, improve the culture and climate of schools, and include family and community involvement. All of these suggestions indicate various factors involved in school culture and climate that can shape student success. Three areas of this research are of particular interest to our study: teacher quality and efficacy, diversity, and effective leadership.

Teacher Quality and Efficacy.

Teacher attitudes and the quality of teacher work are integral parts of a school culture. When teachers understand their students' needs and can relay the subject matter accordingly, the students learn. Darling-Hammond (1998) explained that teachers can enhance successful student learning by possessing deep and flexible knowledge of the subject matter, making connections across fields, having knowledge of child/adolescent development, understanding curriculum and technology resources, reflecting on teaching practices, and assessing the effects of their teaching. As research suggests, teacher quality does not only refer to curriculum. Bernliner (1989, cited in Schlosser, 1992) explained that perceptions of the classroom, teacher behavior, and school life often have more of an

effect on how much students learn than actual events. According to Schlosser's (1992) findings, teachers must show genuine interest in their students in order for them to become engaged. Students in Schlosser's study reported that the most successful teachers helped to engage students through knowledge about the students' backgrounds and cultures and got to know them on a personal level. These teachers also had knowledge of their students' developing needs. When teachers provide high-quality instruction, their students experience success, which, in turn, can improve teacher confidence or "efficacy."

Two types of teacher efficacy exist—general teacher efficacy and personal teacher efficacy. The term "efficacy" comes from Bandura's (1977) theory that defined "self-efficacy" as how a person feels about her abilities to do a certain task, a phenomenon that can also affect behavior. Bandura (1980) later explained that people often avoid tasks that exceed their capabilities. In more recent research, general teacher efficacy is defined as whether teachers believe that children can learn, and teaching as a profession can affect this outcome. When referring to personal teacher efficacy, one means whether the individual teacher feels he can make a difference (Moore & Esselman, 1994). Hoy and Wollfolk (1993, cited in Hipp, 1996) explained that there is a significant difference between general teacher efficacy ("What I think *we* can do") and personal teacher efficacy ("What I think *I* can do"). Both of these forms of efficacy are affected by aspects of school climate such as effective principal leadership style and the presence of community and "family spirit" (Hipp, 1996).

Positive school climate and culture contributes to strong teacher efficacy (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1996; Hipp, 1996; and Moore & Esselman, 1994, 1992).

According to Edwards, Green, and Lyons (1996), the school culture characteristics that can affect teacher efficacy include teacher professionalism, goal setting, administrators treating teachers professionally, and teacher collaboration. Schools with positive environments are shown to have high teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is also correlated with teacher empowerment (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1996; Moore & Esselman, 1992, 1994). Empowerment refers to teachers' "perceived influence...in important decision-making activities" (Moore & Esselman, 1992, p. 5). Moore and Esselman felt it is important for teachers to perceive they have some kind of input into decision making, even if their position does not give them official decision-making power. Other factors related to higher teacher efficacy include:

- teachers working with mentors;
- faculty working together to make instructional decisions;
- teachers knowing what the teachers in grades above and below them expect;
- teachers working together to coordinate curriculum (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1996);
- lack of disruptions (including paperwork);
- collegiality among teachers;
- classroom and whole school decision-making ability (Moore & Esselman, 1994, 1992).

There are conflicting results as to whether school SES is a factor with teacher efficacy. Bandura (1993, cited in Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1996) claimed that high transience, high absence rates, and low student achievement can lower teacher efficacy. Moore and Esselman (1992) supported Bandura's claim that schools with historically low

achievement tend to have teachers with lower efficacy. However, Edwards, Green, & Lyons (1996) reported that schools with low SES have higher teacher efficacy. Although high poverty may be a factor, there is still some support for high teacher efficacy in these challenged schools that may be in response to specific cases of these schools having positive cultures.

Diversity.

High achieving minorities are more likely to attend schools that are more racially and socially integrated (Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 1998). A study by Borman, Stringfield, and Rachuba (1998) that analyzed whole-school reform designs that contribute to minority advancement suggested that characteristics of peers, school resources, and school climate are school-level variables of success for minority and low SES children. The authors found that specific characteristics include:

- sufficient materials and resources in the schools;
- classes with high achieving peers;
- classrooms that are more student-centered, with advanced skills oriented curriculum and instruction;
- equal minority access to talented and gifted programs.

One of the most important characteristics of schools with high achieving minorities is having schools and families working together to promote resiliency. This means teachers designing engaging activities and having high expectations for participating in these activities and completing homework. It also means that parents have high educational expectations, try to move less frequently, and encourage internal locus of control, positive self-concept, greater self-efficacy, and a positive attitude toward school

(Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 1998). Because parental support is often lacking for some minority and low SES students, it is also important that the school model these values.

One way the school can model values promoting a positive attitude toward students and schoolwork is by celebrating diversity. This is another important aspect of school culture. The Council on Diversity in Extension (1991) stressed the importance for all organizations, both public and private, to emphasize diversity. The council explained that valuing diversity is key because it creates an environment where everyone is valued, integrity is established, and issues are addressed that are relevant to all people. A mindset must be established that is courageous and non-judgmental. Council members pointed out that valuing and celebrating diversity does not mean attending one or two training sessions; it is a long process that requires long-term commitment. People need to be empowered so they can deal with the differences between themselves and others. Schools that celebrate diversity establish clear goals, such as “pluralism,” or the valuing of diversity. When these are established, there will be “a core of sameness to make it safe to discuss differences” (Council on Diversity in Extension, 1991, p. 13). When schools possess open school climates that value student differences, all students improve self-esteem and they may be more likely to experience success.

Leadership.

Studies of effective schools have consistently pointed to leadership as a key element in their effectiveness. Several components of leadership were examined in this review of the literature.

According to previous research, the principal is consistently singled out as the most important agent of change in a school (Fullan, 1985, 1992a, cited in Ovando & Marek, 2000). The *role of the principal* in schools is critical (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Levine, 1989; Daresh & Playko, 1992). Principals have the opportunity to significantly impact a wide range of factors that can contribute to student learning. Principal effects on student outcomes may be indirect, but are significant (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Areas of impact might include school mission and goals, opportunities for student learning, academic and organizational expectations, the work of teachers, support and involvement of community, and various other factors in the school environment. Principals play a key role in helping schools respond proactively to changing forces (Goldring & Rallis, 1993).

In the United States, a number of different studies have focused on elements that determine effective leadership, especially in high poverty schools. Many of these studies identified *personal qualities* of these leaders. Bulach, Lunenburg, and McCallon (1994) found that “promoter” styles of leadership, while not significant, had the highest levels of achievement. These leaders are seen as outgoing, enthusiastic, flexible, dominant, socially skillful, and people oriented. These kinds of principals also take initiative, have confidence, tolerate ambiguity, have a clear vision and can convey this to faculty, and establish warm school climates (Ovando & Marek, 2000). Reed and Roberts (1998) reported similar findings to those of the first two research teams, but also added that effective leaders in high achieving, high poverty schools are innovative and encourage growth and development. These principals also have a clear sense of identity and are motivated.

Effective leaders in high poverty schools also implement a number of *general practices* to ensure their schools' success. These leaders have clear achievement goals and high expectations for their students, despite their socioeconomic status (Ovando & Marek, 2000; Reed & Roberts, 1998). Effective leaders are involved in what is going on inside the school by engaging themselves with people in active, rapidly changing situations, according to Bulach, Lunenburg, and McCallon (1994). These authors found that such leaders are not only involved within the school, but in the community as well. Involving parents is extremely important to the effective leader; s/he increases communication with parents (Ovando & Marek, 2000) as well as encouraging their involvement with the school and with their children's education (Ovando & Marek, 2000; Reed & Roberts, 1998; Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1994). Johnson (1998) also pointed out that effective leaders, particularly superintendents, are truthful about which practices are worth promoting and which are failing or should be revised. Problem-solving takes place within groups of colleagues. This form of leadership depends on trust (Johnson, 1998).

Effective leaders value staff and teacher relationships. Most studies investigating leadership styles in high achieving, high poverty schools acknowledged that *sharing leadership* responsibilities is an essential practice for administrators (Ovando & Marek, 2000; Bennet, 1998; Reed & Roberts, 1998; Leithwood, 1995). As mentioned in the discussion of teacher efficacy, teachers feeling a sense of ownership in the school can raise teacher quality. Ovando & Marek (2000) emphasized the importance of instructional leadership and supporting innovative teaching techniques and autonomy. These leaders also recognized teachers' needs for collegiality (Ovando & Marek, 2000;

Bennet, 1998). Principals in high achieving, high poverty schools foster teacher-administrator collaboration as well as teacher-teacher collaboration. These principals also practice site-based management and plan for staff development and for overall change in their schools (Ovando & Marek, 2000).

Characteristics of High Achieving, High Poverty Schools.

In the recent past, much attention has been given to how different school attributes mentioned above fit together to create an academically successful school with a high poverty population of students who are statistically predicted to fail. Previous research has identified a number of characteristics that describe high achieving, high poverty schools. These characteristics can be divided into a number of categories.

Many studies investigated the *characteristics associated with academics* when determining what made the targeted high poverty schools successful. As mentioned above, when discussing effective leadership, having high expectations for students is a key factor associated with success for students with lower socioeconomic status (Allen & Hallett, 1999; Revilla & Sweeny, 1997). But high expectations must extend beyond the administration. Allen and Hallett (1999) stressed that high standards must be developed and internalized by teachers and parents, as well as the principal of the school, and they must be aligned with the standards adopted by the school division and the state (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The school staff must also utilize the functions of state standards and testing. These tests should be viewed as a way to keep the curriculum on target, and not as an obstacle (Carter, 2000; Education Trust, 1999). The Education Trust (1999) also emphasized the importance for these schools to implement systems that monitor each student's progress so that support can be provided as soon as it is needed.

No excuses or lower standards should be made for lower income students (Carter, 2000; Allen & Hallett, 1999). These schools must believe that every child can excel, is an asset, and has something special to offer society (Bauer, 1997). Attention and rewards are given to children for good academic performance and behavior (Connell, 1999).

A strong, integrated curriculum is also needed for students to achieve (Revilla & Sweeny, 1997). The Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study (1996) revealed that successful, lower SES schools in Texas shared a common emphasis on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Particular attention must be paid to mastery of basic skills. Carter (2000) explained that many basic skills such as listening attentively, speaking persuasively, reading with comprehension, and writing with command are mastered at home for higher SES students. Lower income children, however, need more enrichment in these basic skills at school. The Education Trust (1999) reported that high achieving, high poverty schools often increase instructional time for reading and math in order to help students meet standards.

Connell (1999) described principals and teachers demonstrating mastery of the curriculum as another academic characteristic of high achieving, high poverty schools. Principals and teachers at these schools work long hours and collaborate and share instructional information. Teachers also assume responsibility for teaching (Revilla & Sweeny, 1997). Teachers in high achieving, high poverty schools do not merely teach to the test, but use creativity and a rich curriculum to create a challenging educational environment (Johnson, 1997). Langer (1998) described three teaching components that make a difference in English performance in high poverty and ESL schools: making connections between old and new material, helping to engage students in both oral and

written communication, and helping students explore and analyze new material in a hands-on manner. Principals also play a significant role in instruction. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999), principals at high achieving, high poverty schools spend increased time on the quality and quantity of instructional leadership. Principals in these schools spend more time helping teachers attend to instructional issues and decrease the time teachers must spend on things that distract them from teaching and learning. Clearly, addressing academic concerns is one way for lower income schools to begin to achieve.

In most of the previous studies, academic concerns were only a small portion of the characteristics shared by high achieving, high poverty schools. Budgeting and other *financial concerns* are also important to school success (Bauer, 1997). Allen and Hallett (1999) mentioned that site authority over decisions including budget is an indicator of success. These schools also make the most out of the funds they are given (Carter, 2000). Carter (2000) explained that effective school leaders spend the majority of their money on two things, namely curricula and effective teachers. Similarly, the Education Trust (1999) found that supporting curriculum development is an important area in which to spend funds. Carter (2000) continued by saying additional funds can be raised and received through donations. As Hughes (1999) pointed out, schools that are more visible to central office succeed at higher rates. Schools increasing their visibility can also lead to higher funding and greater resources.

Most high achieving, high poverty schools also value contacts with the students' *families and communities*. Allen and Hallett (1999), the Education Trust (1999), and Revilla and Sweeny (1997) found maintaining regular interactions with parents and

communities was an indicator for success in low income schools. Carter (2000), however, claimed schools must go beyond interactions with parents, and they must aim to encourage parents to become personally invested in their child's education. According to Carter's study, schools that have experienced success often use covenants or contracts that parents sign, outlining what they are responsible for and what is expected of their child. Connell (1999) added to this idea by explaining that principals must communicate effectively with the students and parents. This means "selling" their ideas to all parties involved with the school. Zarate and Goodman (1997) found that achieving these goals can occur through hosting a "family literacy night" or "family math night" as well as sending folders home with the students everyday. Another way they personally invest parents in education is to encourage them to receive their GED or join ESL programs (Zarate & Goodman, 1997). All this must be done while showing respect for parents' differing lifestyles and cultures.

The school must also work to gain the confidence and respect from parents by increasing their students' achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Parental support and achievement go hand in hand. Parents at these schools are treated as partners instead of obstacles; staff and parents develop effective relationships that can increase community support (Revilla & Sweeny, 1997). These high achieving, high poverty schools, as Sanders (1998) described, establish support systems in areas such as community groups, agencies, and local churches and work in collaboration with them to provide parenting classes so that families know how to stay involved with their children's lives as they grow. Schools, families, and community agencies work together so that students' academic achievements are recognized. In addition, family and community

members work together with teachers and administrators to try to encourage pro-social, less disruptive school behaviors.

High achieving, high poverty schools also have staff members that work at a higher level of *professionalism* than lower achieving schools. Allen and Hallett (1999) stressed the importance of democratic governance and shared decision making in these schools, with a strong role for parents and community members once again emerging as evidence of success. They also mentioned professional development that is integrated daily. Collegiality was also noted as a valuable asset. Teachers work together on a regular basis to learn and reflect on their own teaching abilities (Allen & Hallett, 2000). Revilla and Sweeny (1997) agreed that solid and supportive administrations and shared decision making are keys to professional success in low-income schools.

Teachers in successful high poverty schools have been shown to be “on a mission,” and are not just there because they could not get a position elsewhere. Principals look for this quality as well as desire for improvement, love of learning and children, and potential as a team player when hiring new teachers (Carter, 2000). High achieving principals also act as instructional leaders that are not afraid to leave their paperwork to wander the halls and maintain visibility in the school. This also leads to policies on “open-door” classrooms. Such principals make frequent visits to classrooms, observe teachers, and view lesson plans (Connell, 1999). Connell continued by explaining that these principals supported their teachers, and in return expected them to perform well in the classroom. Although teachers need to be supported and have an organizational tone set for them, they must also be given freedom to make decisions about what they teach, and they need to feel a sense of autonomy and empowerment

(Zarate & Goodman, 1997). Successful schools find balance in the principal-teacher relationship. Hughes (1999) outlined additional professional characteristics that were found to be associated with success:

- teacher-turnover is low with a stable, hardworking, close staff that support the instructional program;
- teachers *want* to work at their school and are satisfied with their jobs;
- teachers are well educated and committed;
- all faculty members are determined that their children can achieve;
- teachers are sensitive to students' needs;
- faculty, students, and staff have pride in the school and show respect for it and each other;
- the principal has an open communication style and is supportive of teachers;
- central office pays high to moderately high attention to the school. (pp.55-56)

The U.S. Department of Education's (1999) findings further emphasized the value of identifying a visible and attainable goal, redirecting energy spent on conflicts between adults toward helping children, and creating a collective sense of responsibility for improvement.

It is this collective sense of responsibility and feeling of ownership in the school that leads to the next characteristic highlighted by these studies—*teamwork*. Bauer (1997) acknowledged that school quality can be denoted by everyone working together toward the same goal. Revilla and Sweeny (1997) mentioned that students, parents, and school personnel must all function as a team. Not only must the school have a clear and attainable vision, but all involved in the school must share this vision. They must also

share a sense of purpose, values, communication, participation, caring, trust, and respect which lead to a shared sense of teamwork (Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study, 1996).

Celebrating diversity has been found to be another key determinant of success. Allen and Hallett (1999) contended that high achieving, high poverty schools have a commitment to valuing diversity and other cultures. Revilla and Sweeny (1997) emphasized the need for a cultural democracy. Bicultural students in particular need to be given the opportunity to learn and/or maintain their native language and cultural identity. The parents' culture must also be respected, and successful schools do not work against it. Instead, these schools embrace their students' differences and their cultural and linguistic diversity. This attitude must be incorporated into the school's shared vision and values, according to the Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study (1996).

A culmination of these characteristics can be explained by the notion of educating and caring for the *whole child*. Revilla and Sweeny (1997) found that educating the whole child was a major determinant of success for high poverty schools. One aspect of this, they reported, is valuing each child regardless of income level or ethnic group. As previously mentioned, recognizing that all children can achieve, not judging them, and not making excuses for failure lead to an attitude of success (Zarate & Goodman, 1997). Successful schools show children respect, are child-focused (Connell, 1999), and also foster a sense of responsibility and appreciation for appropriate behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). High achieving, high poverty schools create an interesting environment where students want to be well-behaved (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Another dimension of caring for the whole child is creating and

nurturing a family-like environment (Revilla & Sweeny, 1997). Human relationships are central to student success (Johnson, 1997). In summary, a familial school environment that demonstrates care about the students beyond academics is a crucial factor in the culture of a successful low-income school.

Recommendations from the Literature

Prior Studies.

Many studies concluded by offering recommendations for improving achievement rates in high poverty schools. Bempechat's (1998) six-year study attempted to uncover the key to academic success for high achieving, high poverty schools. In addition to student motivation, other school practices were found to help these students succeed.

Recommended practices include:

- orient children to the process of learning;
- maintain high expectations and standards;
- encourage healthy self-perception of abilities;
- strengthen home/school partnerships; and
- practice cultural sensitivity. (pp. 108-116)

Perspectives from the Field.

A number of secondary sources and opinion pieces also provide information and recommendations for high achievement in high poverty schools. In his book explaining the belief that a school should function as a "community of learners," Barth (1990) provided a list of recommended principles:

- Schools have a capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the school is to help provide these conditions.
- When the need and purpose exists, adults and students alike learn and each energize and contribute to the learning of the other.
- What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, understanding of relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences.
- School improvement is an effort to determine and provide from without and within conditions under which adults and students who inhabit them will promote and sustain learning among themselves. (p. 45)

Fashola and Slavin's (1997) article reviewed programs of particular interest to Title I schools and offer comprehensive approaches to helping students achieve their maximum potential. The programs were evaluated based on their effectiveness, replicability, and application for low-income and minority students. School wide reform programs include as follows:

- *Success for All—or Lee Conmigo* (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996). A program for elementary schools with a large at-risk population, providing curricula and instructional ideas for reading, writing, and language arts.
- *Accelerated Schools* (Hopfenberg & Levin, 1993; Levin, 1987). An approach to school reform built on three central principles. The first is “unity of purpose,” where the whole school shares a common vision of where the school is headed. The second is “empowerment coupled with responsibility,” meaning that staff, parents, and students find a way to transform themselves

and use freedom and experimentation. The last is “building on strengths,” where the school identifies strengths of students, faculty members, and the school itself and uses these as the basis for reform.

- *School Development Program* (Comer, Hayes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). An approach to school reform that can be used with elementary and middle schools. Its focus is to build a common purpose among staff, parents, and the community and involves the school staff in deciding the changes that will take place within the school.
- *Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline* (Freilberg, Prokosch, & Treister, 1990). A program designed to improve classroom discipline in inner-city schools, emphasizing shared responsibility, focusing the relationship between the students and the teacher. The teacher involves the students in making the rules, and, because the students feel as though they have some ownership of the rules, they are more likely to follow and help enforce them.

The Success for All program was the only one that met all the criteria and was widely replicated. The Accelerated Schools and School Development programs partially met the criteria, but were also widely replicated. The Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline program does meet all the criteria, but was not widely replicated.

One opinion piece by Noddings (1992) explored the possibilities for creating caring schools that possess positive school climates. The book included suggestions for how to provide a nurturing environment:

- eliminate competitive grading;

- reduce testing and use a few well-designed tests to assess whether people can handle the tasks they want to undertake;
- involve students in governing their own classrooms and schools;
- accept the challenge to care by teaching well the things students want to learn.

Other suggestions included moving the schools' emphases away from test scores.

As mentioned above, some schools may place too much value on test results and not enough value on the individual child. James Comer, in his interview with O'Neil (1997), explained that when schools are influenced by only the demand to produce high test scores, they are overemphasizing cognitive development and assuming that we can adequately measure it. Most testing instruments ignore the affective/emotional and expressive components of intelligence. Instead of testing, he continued, "what children need is relationships with caring adults" (p. 14). Comer felt that teaching for depth and understanding is more important than teaching just for test scores.

Conclusion

In response to requests from superintendents in the MERC region, this research was designed to answer questions about high achieving, high poverty schools in the local area. There was a desire to know what was happening in local high achieving Title I schools. Through a qualitative study exploring attributes of each school visited, the intention was to explain why certain high poverty schools in the region were able to experience high or notably improving achievement scores.

Research Questions

This study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. How is success in student achievement defined in high achieving, high poverty schools?
2. What factors are present in schools with student populations that have succeeded in achievement measures beyond what might be expected due to student demographics?
3. What factors are present in these schools that are not present (or to the same degree or in the same combination) in schools with similar populations that did not demonstrate high achievement or significant improvement?
4. What factors, if any, are common among schools with low SES and high achievement?
5. What factors do these school communities (administrators, teachers, students, and parents) believe contribute to their students' achievement?

The first of these questions addressed the very nature of how "success" was defined, while the remaining four explored the factors perceived to lead to student success in these schools.

Methodology

Qualitative Case Study Research

The study was primarily qualitative in nature, utilizing interviews, observations, and document analysis to conduct an in-depth case study at each selected site. Qualitative methods were selected for the purpose of exploring factors perceived to contribute to

success in student achievement within the context of an individual school. Case study methods, in particular, were chosen as well suited to exploring the phenomenon of high achievement in schools serving a large population of students from low SES backgrounds. According to Merriam (1988), qualitative case study research provides a means for exploring “insight, discovery, and interpretation” (p. 10). Further, such research “seeks holistic description and explanation.” Qualitative research holds as an essential purpose to explore the meaning of experience—“how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their social worlds” (p. 19). Examining the meaning perspectives of participants in high achieving Title I schools is key to answering the research questions shaping this study.

In this study the focus was on in-depth analysis of school sites demonstrating the presence of a similar phenomenon (high achieving, high poverty). Options exist for framing a case study. According to Patton (1990), “cases can be individuals, programs, institutions, or groups” (p. 384). A rich case story of each school in this study would provide opportunity for in-depth examination of its unique culture and circumstances contributing to perceived success with the student body it serves. However, telling a school’s story in rich detail might jeopardize the anonymity of the school and its members. Further, given the current politically charged context surrounding Virginia’s Standards of Learning, identification of participating schools could be detrimental to their efforts. Therefore, a methodological decision was made to frame the case by phenomenon of interest across the participating schools. One negative to this framing is that analysis

can lose some of its potential power by minimizing individual attributes of each site. Protecting anonymity was deemed the more important goal in determining methodology.

This study also included only one school for purposes of comparison—other schools declined participation in this small, regionally focused sample. Providing rich detail from this setting would also compromise anonymity with potentially even greater ramifications. In addition, with only one comparison school, it is possible that this school would be an outlier among low achieving Title I schools, thereby skewing attempts to compare and contrast attributes among schools.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling methods of extreme or deviant cases were used to identify schools for this study (Patton, 1990). This method of selecting sites to study allowed examination of “highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, such as outstanding successes/notable failures” (p. 182). This sampling method focused attention on cases of schools that demonstrated high student achievement or notable improvement in achievement despite factors of high poverty that typically have a negative impact on student achievement. Demographic and test data were reviewed to identify Title I schools with low SES populations, based on free and reduced-price lunch data. Student achievement data were then reviewed for those schools identified. Schools with fifth grade achievement data at either extreme (high or low), as well as those demonstrating gains or progress over two years within a cohort, were considered for inclusion in the study. Three schools demonstrating substantial success or improvement were selected for

inclusion in the study, and one school demonstrating decline or lack of improvement was selected for a total of four schools.

Selection of schools resulted from examination of the following criteria:

- Title I schools
- SOL test scores
- 3rd to 5th grade cohort (1998-2000)
- English (Reading and Writing) and Math
- Marked improvement
- Representation across MERC region
- Other factors of interest (e.g., ESL)

It is of particular note that the study team chose to examine two years of data within a cohort of students. The team was interested in examining the performance of—generally—the same group of students over time. It was acknowledged that student transience might change a cohort, but identifying grade levels for which two points of data were available was key.

Principals of each school selected were contacted initially by MERC Study Team members in that division and then by the Principal Investigator. The study was described, approval at the school level was obtained from the principal, and visitation dates were established.

Within each case school, the principal was interviewed. Teachers were selected randomly from grades 3-5 (SOL testing grades) for individual interviews. Only teachers who had been at the school for more than one year were considered. Parents were identified by the principal to participate in focus groups; parents selected were to be

representative of the total school population. Researchers worked with principals to attempt to identify a cross section of parents in each setting.

Sample Profile

The initial design of the study called for identification of three schools with increased and/or high SOL scores, and three comparison schools with low and/or declining scores. However, upon review of possible sites for inclusion, it was determined that four focus schools and two comparison schools would provide the sample. The rationale for this decision was that there was greater interest in studying successful examples of schools. The final sample, however, included a total of four schools, three of which were identified as successful or improving and one as a comparison school. This sample size resulted from agreement by only one comparison school and three focus schools in the region. Decisions were made at the division or school level to decline participation of other schools.

To protect the anonymity of the participating schools, it was necessary to craft a composite profile of the four schools together. The schools presented these attributes:

- Schools represented four divisions within the MERC region.
- Approximately 45-75% of children attending these schools qualified for free or reduced price lunch.
- Approximately 50-100% of children attending these schools were minorities.
- Two of the schools served ESL students.
- The size of the population in each school was 300 or greater.

- In three of the schools, from the 3rd grade in 1998 to the 5th grade in 2000, test scores increased in double digits in English and math. In the fourth (comparison) school, one area increased in single digits while the other decreased in double digits.

Data Collection

A pair of researchers spent two to three days over the course of 1-3 weeks as participant observers at each school site. Researchers conducted individual and focus group interviews, observed in classrooms and other school locations, and reviewed relevant documents. In-depth, individual interviews were conducted with the school principal and teacher representatives from grades three, four, and five. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents. All interviews were conducted using an interview guide based on Spradley's (1979) descriptive question format. Observations were conducted in the classrooms of teachers interviewed. Informal observations also were conducted throughout the school, in other classrooms and general public areas such as the office, playground, hallways, and cafeteria. Each site visit included an extensive, informally narrated tour by the principal (in the three focus schools) or designee (in the comparison school). Document analysis was conducted on an array of available data in each identified school (e.g., communications to parents, minutes of meetings, handbooks, websites, etc.). Observation and document analysis notes were recorded on annotated checklists and forms.

Data were collected during the months of November 2000 to January 2001. Approximately three days were spent in each school by a team of two researchers. Due

to changing personnel assisting in this study, each team included the principal investigator and one of two long-term and/or one short-term research assistants. In each school, the research team was present in the building before, during and after school, depending on the particular schedule. One school, for example, held the parent focus group in the evening.

In the larger case of examining the phenomenon of success in Title I schools, the following volume of data was collected:

- individual interviews with four principals, and twelve teachers grades 3-5;
- focus group interviews with approximately 40 parents;
- informal interviews with guidance counselors, assistant principals, instructional specialists, other teachers, staff members, and volunteers;
- formal classroom observations in 12 classrooms;
- ongoing, informal observations through school tours and presence in schools before, during and after school hours; and
- document review of newsletters, faculty handbooks, volunteer handbooks and logs, curriculum guides, lesson plans, school websites, and numerous others.

Methods of Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by independent transcribers, then reviewed with the interview tapes for accuracy by the current, long-term MERC Research Fellow. Transcripts were then organized in two ways—by school and by role. The researchers discussed methods of coding and developed a plan for coding topics as they emerged from the data. *HyperRESEARCH*, qualitative research software, was used to

manage the data. This software program allowed for coding of transcripts by the researchers, followed by review and management of transcripts by codes. Initial analyses of the principal transcripts were reviewed by the research team (i.e., Principal Investigator and long-term Research Fellow) for comparison of coding. The interview tapes were reviewed again by the Principal Investigator after coding, to maintain an understanding of the holistic picture and how the parts related to the whole.

In this study, inductive analysis (Patton, 1990) was used to examine emerging findings from the data. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 390). The constant comparative method of coding was used. Chunks of data were coded, each one compared with the growing list of codes. A review of the coding took place and code names were revised to condense similar themes and more accurately label others. Codes were then clustered by role and then those clusters reviewed and subcoded. The codes and subcodes, through several iterations, developed into themes/categories. Links and interconnections between and among emerging themes were identified.

Methodological and field notes were maintained by each researcher to collect observations, commentary, questions, and theoretical ideas emerging throughout the study. These notes tracked the development of the study. Field notes became part of the data collected in each site.

Analysis of data examined within-case and across-case factors and processes perceived to contribute to student achievement. Emergent themes were identified from the data in each case. Themes were examined for commonality and/or differences

between cases. Themes were also compared and contrasted with those found in the comparison school. Finally, factors and processes identified within and across cases were examined in conjunction with a review of the literature on high poverty, high achieving schools.

Qualitative research methods to ensure credibility, or trustworthiness, were employed. Credibility was defined by McMillan (2000) as “the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy” (p. 272). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four attributes of qualitative design that can lead to “trustworthiness.” The questions posed by each concept are identified here, along with explanations of how these methods were employed in this study.

- **Credibility**—Was the study conducted in such a way as to “ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995)? In this study, time spent in the schools (approximately 2-3 days over 1-3 weeks) contributed to the opportunity to interact with numerous participants, observe in a variety of settings throughout the school, and review significant data from documents.
- **Transferability**—Can the research be useful in another setting? Can the design and data transfer to other research? First, this study was grounded in a review of methodologies employed in other studies of high achieving, high poverty schools. Following analysis, a more extensive review of the literature was conducted. In addition, one particular feature of this research that contributed to its transferability was the use of triangulation, or drawing from

multiple data points (in this case interviews, observations, and document review).

- **Dependability**—Did the researchers account for changes in the design of the study, or changing conditions of the case? In this study methodological journals or notes were maintained by the researchers, tracking decisions regarding design, analysis, and interpretation throughout the study. Such notes provide a means for collecting the thoughts, ideas and changes in the design of the study.
- **Confirmability**—Could the findings be confirmed by someone other than the researcher? Do the data support the findings and interpretations? Two researchers conferred during data analysis, checking coding and interpretation, and records of the data and analysis were maintained. A record of codes was maintained throughout analysis.

A final note regarding the methodology of this study: In presenting the findings in this study, extreme care was given to protecting the confidentiality of participants. All names and identifying information were changed for individuals, schools, and specific localities included in this study. Findings are presented as a whole and do not identify individual participants, only roles (teacher, parent, etc.). In this report, gender identification may have been changed in some cases to further protect the anonymity of participating schools. Protecting confidentiality is critical in all research, and particularly so within the context of high-stakes testing and accountability, as well as the context of the audience for which this study was conducted. Participants themselves expressed concerns regarding the honesty with which they should respond commenting on decisions

made at the state and local level. As a result, in some cases key illustrations of points in the findings have been removed from the report when their uniqueness might compromise confidentiality. While this results in a loss to the potential richness of the report, it was again deemed necessary to respect the anonymity of participants.

Limitations of the Study

This study was initially designated as an “SOL study;” however, during the pilot phase it became evident that a study linked specifically to the SOL might limit the study’s ability to identify factors perceived to contribute to the academic success of Title I schools. While the intent of the study was not changed, the way in which it was framed to participants and in which data collection was designed were modified. This decision is further explained below.

During the pilot of this study, focus groups of educators testing the interview protocol became irritated once questions arose surrounding the implementation of the SOL; in some cases, focus groups simply terminated the review of the protocol. Upon discussion of this phenomenon, it became clear that as soon as SOL questions were introduced in the interview, the “real” purpose of the study was revealed and participants felt less able to answer honestly about what might make their schools successful.

In addition, during the course of data collection educators asked questions about who would hear the interview tapes, if and how they would be identified, and how this would color their responses. In some cases participants spoke more freely after the tape was turned off, or actually requested that the tape be turned off at certain points in the interview process. It became increasingly evident that educators worked under an

assumption that they must respond in certain ways if central office and/or state officials were in the audience. In no cases did teachers or parents express concerns about trust with the building level administration—just with those outside the school.

Therefore, as noted above, the title of the study was modified to reflect a broader focus on “student success,” and how stakeholders of participating schools would define that concept. Data collection was modified to allow participants to identify factors contributing to such success, not limited to those efforts aimed at improving SOL test scores.

Findings

Four major themes emerged in this study of high achieving Title I schools. These included:

1. *Defining and Pursuing Success*: High achieving Title I schools defined success differently than simply adhering to state and local expectations. In addition, personal and professional efficacy drove faculties to attain success with students.
2. *Care*: A culture of care and respect was embedded deeply in these schools.
3. *Leadership*: Leadership was shared throughout the school, and was exercised by many.
4. *Diversity and Challenge*: Participants in these schools celebrated diversity and/or challenges inherent in the student population.

These themes are discussed and illustrated below.

Theme 1: Defining and Pursuing Success

Definitions of success in these high achieving Title I schools were holistic, emphasized growth and development, and focused on children both as individuals and as a community. Daily actions were guided by these definitions. A team approach was evident within the school, particularly among faculty and staff but also including parents, students, and volunteers working together to foster student learning. A clear sense of “doing whatever it takes” to achieve success in student learning and development was evident as well. In addition, definitions of success either were contradictory to, significantly broader than, or prioritized differently than those provided by others outside the school. Further, a theme of celebrating success within the school was present. Of particular note was the absence of student test scores on the SOL as the primary measure of success.

School staffs actively pursued success, driven by a sense of individual and collective efficacy. Teachers and principals approached their work with a matter-of-fact philosophy, believing that they could and would do whatever it took to help students succeed—and were confident that their efforts made a difference. In addition, this sense of efficacy was actively fostered in children, creating in them a shared sense of confidence and purpose.

A parent described the *holistic* nature of success this way:

“I think that the best thing about this school is they are interested in making the students feel well rounded. They don’t just push academics, they are pushing social concerns.... They are teaching the student to be responsible for their actions, they’re not just, ‘You need to know this’ and ‘You need to know that.’ They want to make their student have an ethic working in the society. And they are starting so early, even in kindergarten, that you don’t see as many problems as you see in other

schools. I think that is really good thinking. You can be academically sufficient but that's not going to keep you going through... society."

A focus on *progress* or *growth* was evident as described here by two teachers:

"Taking the student where he's at and trying to make them move forward, progress forward hopefully at a rate that's challenging to them, but not frustrating.... And seeing how far you can take them through the school year."

"I think most of us probably tend to look at how much progress have they made and how far they have come since the beginning of the year."

Demonstrating the *individualized* way in which success was viewed, a teacher told this story, expressed with tremendous emotion:

"I had a kid last year.... He was the neatest kid.... If he was in a work group and the work group would get a little silly or off task, he would bring them back to task. He was very gifted athletically. If he was out in the playground and the kids were picking sides, he'd pick the least athletic kid first to be on his team. He was just that great a kid. Well, he failed every SOL test, and he actually had been previously retained. Now, by any academic indicator he was the biggest failure there ever was. But he was one of the biggest reasons we passed the SOL tests-because of his work ethic and the way he got along with other kids. That's a success to me."

A parent at the school concurred:

"It's so individual, but whatever the kids need and whatever level they are, the teachers find a way to encourage them and get the information to them wherever it is."

An administrator at another school explained it this way:

"You look at a pre-K who comes in with some alphabet recognition then he or she goes out in fifth or sixth grade...is reading on or performing in all other areas on grade level. To me that is success. We have success with other areas. If a student starts out below grade level and he achieves grade level by the end of that year that is a success. If students have problems in areas of behavior we have worked on it and he or she improves that is a success. Success can be defined in many ways. It depends on the student."

A *team approach* to creating success for children was also evident. Two teachers explained:

“Everybody here really wants the children to learn. The group of teachers that work here are just wonderful. We all work together, and it’s so easy to go to [the previous] teacher and say, ‘Well, what did you do to have success with this child?’ Then they’ll give a suggestion. We all work together.”

“Teachers who value each kid no matter where they are in the learning spectrum, I think, is huge. Just all hands being on deck to make sure everybody succeeds at whatever level.”

Doing “*whatever it takes*” was a common theme in defining success in these schools. One teacher gave this example, laughing while making a final point:

“Because of our population of ESL kids it’s really tough for [parents] to come and support us because 1.) They may not have the educational background. 2.) They don’t have the language. So...they don’t feel comfortable because they feel they can’t contribute what they’d like to.... Teachers have more an active role in the PTA as a result.... So the T is bigger here than the P!”

A parent at that school told an illustrative story of this theme in action:

“We had one family at the beginning of the year that had a really bad case of scabies. Had no insurance. Did not speak English. We had nothing to do for them. [The principal] actually put them in his car and drove them over to the Health Department. For the entire afternoon, he was with them.”

Regarding the ways in which these schools defined success, *differently, contrary* to, or more *broadly* than those provided by others outside the school, these teacher comments were made:

“I think the mission is certainly not to have great SOL scores. I think the mission is to take any child from where they are and take them as far as you can. And make them feel good about themselves. Whatever that entails.”

“To make sure that all children are successful—that all children learn—to have a curriculum that will, on one hand, prepare them for SOLs or prepare them to be competitive, but, on the other hand, will take in the

individual characteristics of each student to make sure they go from where they started and that they always grow.”

A principal explained:

“The very first thing in my mind [about ‘success’]—because we’ve been pressed and pressed again—is test scores. That for me is not—personally—is not the major criteria. Student success for me is when the children are here and they choose to be here... and they’re working up to their potential.... As long as a child is working in that direction up to their potential, then I’m happy.”

In addition, success was *celebrated* within the schools, as illustrated here:

“For the first time, the school passed [the SOL] as a whole. Every teacher—not just the third and fifth grade teachers—but every teacher was just obviously delighted, and just thrilled for the children as much as for themselves. Knowing that the school had passed. You can tell that there was just genuine love for most of the children. I think most of the teachers really, deeply care about the children. You can tell that they want the children to experience success. The mentors, the helpers are all the same way—just elated that [the children] did well.”

Teachers and administrators demonstrated a clear sense of *individual* and *collective efficacy* in their work—the sense that their work did make a difference in student learning and development. Teachers talked about their individual use of time having changed in response to the SOL—in one school they described using “every single second,” including staying after school, and quizzing children in the lunch and bus lines. In another school, the value placed on instruction was evident. When a teacher was asked to send students to the auditorium to have school pictures taken, she replied “ok” but returned to the math discussion at hand, explaining to the children, “Let’s finish this first—they’ll wait.” One principal appeared to know his teachers quite well, with regard to both individual strengths and weaknesses. With any weakness he identified, however, he pointed out a unique strength in that individual. He also displayed a passion for striving to improve as a total faculty. One teacher described the focus of the school: “We

are always trying to think how can we make it better.” Another faculty member concurred, indicating that the staff has a very positive attitude toward working together to meet challenges.

Teachers’ commitment to their work sometimes extended even past retirement. In one school, more than one retired staff member continued to work at the school. When asked why she returns regularly to the school to substitute or tutor children through a grant program, after more than 25 years on the job, a retired teacher explained that her “car just kept coming here.” She said “Now I get to be retired and see my friends and be in the classroom—and get paid!” Another teacher said that she dreamed at night about what she was going to do the next day or what she could have done better that day—clearly a professional immersed in her work.

In at least two of the schools, expectations were posted around the building, communicating and fostering pride and shared responsibility. One teacher in another school described her role modeling of peer support among children:

“The kids like to cheer the other kids on, even if they make a mistake they’ll say, ‘come on you can do it.’ Even though I prompt them and say, (in a whisper) ‘you can do it, you can do it.’ And then the other kids will [say] it.”

One principal talked about deliberate efforts to change the mindset of students in the school. In his words, it had moved from a “woe is me” and “we can’t do” to “we *can* do.” Part of the culture of the school involved the principal telling students that “only the select, the chosen” come to this school. He explained his reasoning: “They need to be special and then when they believe that they are special—it’s a whole new mindset.” Now he hears children in the halls admonishing peers regarding their behavior, “We don’t *do* that at this school.” He further described efforts to build responsibility and a

“can do” attitude in children. Children who cannot afford to pay for a field trip are provided for through special funding. However, children take on responsibility for a “little job” in order to work for the funding. The principal explained that this was part of the “doing” atmosphere, begun by teacher initiative.

In another school, the principal clearly loved teaching, and made frequent references to the staff as a collective—“as teachers, we get to . . .”—referring to himself as a teacher, and as having the perfect role, to be able to have an impact on children and teachers. The principal was focused on continuous improvement—even after a number of years on the job, there was a sense of freshness and eagerness in his discussion about the work of the school. He had student achievement data available in the office—recently used in a parent meeting—and took the opportunity to share it during the interview. He spoke animatedly about the current discussion he was having with the faculty about parent involvement, the issue clearly going beyond a faculty meeting agenda item.

In these schools, the primary emphasis in defining success was not placed on improving test scores on the SOL, although the Standards were acknowledged and addressed. Instead, emphasis was repeatedly and consistently placed on identifying and addressing the individual needs of children holistically. A focus on encouraging progress or growth, rather than meeting standards, was prevalent. Faculties and administrations regularly went above and beyond what might be expected in their roles. They strove to do whatever it took to help students learn and grow. However, this focus was not without perceived consequence. One teacher preferred not to be recorded when explaining that *children* were taught, not the SOL—saying, however, that such a message would not be considered acceptable outside the immediate school community. The teacher also

wondered what it was that made the school work—and hypothesized that those outside the school “aren’t going to want to hear it’s the touchy-feely stuff that makes the difference.”

Teachers and administrators demonstrated an individual and shared sense that they could and did make a difference in the lives of children and their families. The faculty and staff also made efforts to model this sense of responsibility to students as well.

Theme 2: An Ethic of Care and Respect

In these schools a sense of *care* was embedded in the culture of the school, evident in daily functions and interactions. Relationships were key, involving principals, teachers, staff, parents, and children. Prevalent in these schools was the sense that the school was “special,” a “family,” a “home.” This played out in how staff addressed academic and non-academic needs of children, families, and each other. Frequent mention was made of the caring interactions among individuals. There existed a prevalent sense of shared ownership and responsibility for teacher and student learning and growth.

Noddings’ (1984) notion of ethical caring captures well the essence of the culture in these high achieving Title I schools. Care was evident in several ways. First there was an overall sense within the school that individuals cared for each other and attended to each other’s growth and development. With regard to children, care was evident in the sense of the golden rule—valuing and respecting children as partners—present in the school; putting children first; adults’ attention to special needs of children; adults serving as role models for children; through encouraging risk taking and being willing to take

risks as adults; and in the sharing of responsibility for children that extends beyond assigned classroom walls.

Caring for parents was evident in the sense of welcome that parents felt in these schools—regardless of their background or what they could contribute to the school; by professionals' accessibility to parents and engaging in active outreach to parents; and a basic respect of family circumstances and an assumption that parents were doing the best that they could. Care among colleagues was noted in their sense of family with each other, their work together as a team, as well as their concern for individual staff members in need.

One administrator captured the *sense of care* that was evident as the essential factor:

“I think it is just care and concern about children here at [this school] and about each other. The care and concern about what we have to do. That is what makes it work. That is the only thing that I can see or that I can describe in words that makes it work.”

The sense of *family* and *valuing of children* was captured in this teacher's explanation of how her school differed from others:

“I really think there's a real caring atmosphere here that you don't find at a lot of elementary schools—you know, ‘Just get them in, get them packed, and get them out...’ [At this school], although the SOLs are important to us... we really feel the child always is important to us and we try to take on a sense of family here that you don't get in a lot of different schools.”

A parent simply stated:

“It's a real family.”

A teacher in the same school explained the *golden rule* in the shared care for children:

“I think the golden rule is pretty popular around here...it just seems the team is really made of children, teachers, administrators, tutors, remediators and parents all working together. And we've just found [children] respond so much better if

you treat them with respect and they work hard to please you. If you're respectful to them they just sort of don't know what else to be back except for respectful—for the most part.”

In another school, a teacher mentioned that the “warmth” of the school was one of the reasons that students liked it there. She observed their motivation, and attributed it to the schoolwide discipline program. Parents in that school commented that the children were not intimidated by the principal—they loved him and were “always hugging him.”

During a student assembly, one of the administrators entered the room and students immediately quieted. She thanked them for their good behavior, and asked them to continue to do so during the performance. At the conclusion, she again thanked the children for their appropriate behavior, demonstrating a sense of respect to students.

Parents also perceived this sense of family and dedication to the needs of children:

“They always say [the mission] is the kids first and I think they do that very well. They do put their well-being and education first and foremost.”

Another parent in the same school described his understanding of the school's mission, reiterating a sense that the school was true to its word:

“Number one that all children can learn and that they are taken from where they come and they are going to move and progress on an individual [basis] to the best of their ability... where there is success and achievement.... I think they do have the kids' best interest in mind.”

One parent in another school described an initial concern for her special needs child, and how her child was cared for:

“One of my daughters has special needs and she has a speech disorder and it really prevents her from being able to articulate her words well as well as express herself. When she goes to tell you something it can take her a while to complete a sentence, and when she does complete it often times she is real frustrated, and sometimes it is difficult for someone to wait for her to finish and you know I was a little nervous for her. It's first grade

she was going to be learning to read this year and it really counts. And, you know, how these speech teachers going to do with her? How's her first grade teacher—how is everyone going to deal with her? Are they going to be patient with her and let her finish her thought or are they going to cut her off? Is she going to feel intimidated?... And you know everyone from the teacher to the principal have dealt with her and I even notice some of their postures, you know, they bend down to get eye level with her, they give her the time.”

A teacher described how children are viewed as *partners* in learning:

“I’ll tell you how I try to treat them. As partners in learning. Now there are lines to be drawn and structure.... But you know, I try to treat them like, ‘Hey we’re kind of in this together. Let’s see how far we can go together.’ And I think most people here try to do that. I don’t know how to explain that. It’s just like, ‘Let’s do this together and let’s have fun doing it.’”

Another teacher in the school extended the trust she felt with her colleagues to her students as well—they are allowed to get up during class time if they “have a purpose.” Students are taught to respect the school, and are treated with respect in return. In another classroom, students clearly knew the routine for independent work time and followed it, circulating quietly and productively through five stations without need for teacher intervention.

One principal explained how a sense of *shared responsibility* for children was developed:

“We have volunteers and all the volunteers have to kind of be brought up to speed about what to do, what not to do. How to react and how not to react.... It’s more on this business of how do you get everyone doing the same thing. They’re our kids, they’re our children, not mine—they’re *ours* and so every child feels responsible to every adult and every adult feels responsible for every child.”

Teachers and administrators also *encouraged risk taking* among children:

Children “are willing to ask questions and they aren’t intimidated to ask questions. I always say, no question is a bad question. You learn through your questions.”

Further, the adults were willing to *take risks* themselves, reinforcing this notion for children:

“Teachers here feel safe apologizing to students for their mistakes and sometimes the teachers are afraid to be wrong. And it’s a lesson we try to pass on to parents, too.”

School staffs demonstrated an understanding of, and sensitivity to, *family circumstances*:

“Especially if their parents are going through a divorce or we have a lot of ESL students.... I think we give them a sense of security. We have ownership of our own kids but everybody really takes in all of the kids in the school, and we know a lot about those kids in lower grades before they ever get to us—dealing with family backgrounds and that helps in the learning situation for them when we know at times there might be a situation where we really need to back off what we expect from them that day because of issues going on at home.”

Another parent identified how welcome she felt at the school:

“What was a BIG deal to me was this school from day one...made you feel like you are part of it and you are never, never—and I say this from my experience—I have never ever been put off by anybody at this school. And I dare say I never will be. And like I say, they have always had time for the parents or guardians of the children.”

These schools also appeared to *extend the sense of family to staff* as well. One teacher explained, “It’s really more like a family than a faculty.” As mentioned above, retired teachers returned to volunteer, and individuals looked out for each other’s family needs. As one principal explained in this story:

“[There] was a...teacher here last year.... [now] gone from our daily staff, ...part of our night staff but we include [the staff member] and everybody else who has been here in our social life. Whether it’s going to happy hour after school one day or it’s the Christmas party or it’s the retirement events or just silly fun. We always include everyone so it’s an ongoing situation. Nobody is ever lost.”

In another school, one teacher described her experience as a new teacher a few years earlier. She said the other teachers were so helpful and willing to share, “whatever you

need.” She contrasted this to her student teaching experience in another setting with a teacher who was experienced, but shared nothing.

In that school, as well as in the others, a sense of respect for all staff was evident as well. The principal introduced the custodian, who was equally friendly and enthusiastic about the school. The principal demonstrated respect to the custodian and praised his efforts to keep the school looking nice. While in the cafeteria, the principal mentioned that although teachers have duty-free lunch, many eat with their students. This was clearly evident as several teachers sat and conversed with students while eating. In another school, the cafeteria manager was referred to as “the dining room hostess,” simultaneously elevating her status and the image of the lunchroom with respect.

Shared trust was another indicator of the ethical care and respect in these schools. One principal communicated a message of trust in his approach to teachers. It was not a “hands-off” approach, but rather one that communicated his interest without an intention of telling teachers how to approach their work. While the principal discussed his review of pacing guides before visiting classrooms, it appeared as if he keeps his finger on the pulse of the school through conversation, talking with teachers—mostly informally—in the process of problem solving. A teacher in that school described the trust between the principal and teachers with regard to what is taught. She believed that this professional trust was then also communicated to students as well.

Care for *parents* was evident in a perception that—all in all—parents cared and were trying their best. It was also demonstrated through openness, reaching out, attending to family concerns and factors that impact on a child’s well-being, and finding

ways to involve parents in some way. One parent described the sense of care and respect displayed to all parents:

“I think it all comes down to [our principal]. I mean he takes just such a personal interest... in what is going on with everybody.... He doesn't necessarily put more attention on anybody here because they do more work in the PTA or anything like that.”

Teachers and administrators actively made themselves available and present for parents, far beyond a typical “open door policy.” In one school, for example, teachers sent home weekly progress reports and newsletters—not because they were required to, but because it was suggested and parents appreciated them. One teacher greeted a parent in the office who came to pick up her child at the end of the day, offering an explanation of the current class work. A teacher in another school explained her outreach to parents:

“I call and I like to give good calls, along with ‘bad calls.’ I constantly keep in touch with parents. I try to call at least once a month to let them know how their child is doing.... And, just basically they can call me anytime. They've got my number, my home phone number, and they do. If their kids forget their homework they'll give me a call. Just an open relationship, and I try to make them feel as comfortable as possible.”

In yet another school, this story was told with pride by an administrator:

“It is just a loving caring atmosphere. I had a parent one night that said to me, ‘you know, you all are the most obliging people at [this school].’... I took her home because her ride didn't come. I was not going to leave her sitting outside at 8 o'clock at night so I took her home.... I have heard several parents [say] ‘you all are the nicest people—I am so glad, I want my child here.’”

A creative approach to ensuring involvement of all parents was illustrated in this way, by a parent:

“I know another thing that they really have been trying to do is to get parents to participate—not necessarily by attending PTA meetings but maybe sending things in.... like ‘we would like to know if you could send some old clothes that you have,’ just so that at the end of the year the class can say ‘we have had 100% participation from every parent in the class.’ If the parent only sends a pack of paper—you know a 99-cent pack of paper to the class.... Those are some things

that they have at least tried to [reach out to] parents [that] are trying to do but they can't. They want to be there for their kids."

Involving parents was an ongoing goal for development in one school. The principal described efforts to push the staff to take ownership for increasing parent involvement:

"I want [teachers] to tell me where it is they think the parents could do something that will be things that *we* can change.... Don't just tell me the things that you envision the *parents* could do. Shoot, we could *all* do that. Tell me the things that *we* can do."

Faculty and administrators at these schools acknowledged the impact that education, jobs, and other factors had on parents' ability to be involved. At these schools, the professionals respected parents' circumstances and operated under an assumption that parents cared about their children, regardless of whether or not those parents could participate in the life of the school. This respect is illustrated here by teachers, administrators, and parents. Teachers explained:

"Parents will say 'I'm busy, I have to work,' and that's the leading thing and we know that.... Many of the homes are one-parent families and they are the sole one that has to make sure that everything is taken care of and it's very difficult.... That's just the way society has changed."

"A lot of them work three jobs, they just can't get in. I mean they care about their kids, but they just can't come all the time or help or be a resource. A lot of the parents didn't know how to help their children with their homework.... But they did care."

An administrator told this story:

"We do as many things as we can to get [parents] involved in our program. Unfortunately a lot of our parents work so during the day they cannot come in and volunteer. But whenever there is an opportunity for them to come to parent teacher conference or PTA or we have parent night or SOL night, whenever they can they come. I think the parents would love to come in and out during the day but they have to work."

Finally, a parent commented:

“I find that here it is a whole different atmosphere... just like night and day here to where [my child] was at last year. So I find that this [school] is a lot more warm and accommodating. They don't just assume you stay at home all day and don't work.”

Care for *colleagues* was evident in the way teachers and principals talked about each other as a team, working together in the best interests of children. They talked about sharing resources, skills, problem solving, celebration, and support. They valued their collective learning and development. They demonstrated trust and respect. One administrator explained:

“Some days it is very stressful but we all come together and whatever it takes to make whatever you are working on work we all come together and do it.... we put our heads together and there is not a teacher or administrator or nurse or counselor that [if] one of us needed their assistance that we couldn't get it.”

Teachers respected each other and demonstrated this through their actions, as illustrated by this principal:

“We're having problems with people xeroxing copyrighted material or using videotapes.... And [our librarian] stood up and she said 'here's what you *can* do, here's what you *can't* do. And I'm responsible for training you and if you get caught I get nailed.' Suddenly, a lot of things stopped because they didn't want her to get nailed. Not that they thought it was illegal or they were concerned if it was illegal or unethical or whatever—they stopped it because *she* might get in trouble.”

These schools demonstrated an active ethic of caring, operating under a moral assumption that the needs of children and families, as well as of staffs, must be attended to as an integral feature of their work. A sense of trust and teamwork was evident, including children and parents in the circle of care as well. Parents felt safe, and believed that their children were well cared for—regardless of family circumstances or level of

parent involvement. Active outreach by school staffs demonstrated a professional ethic of caring for children and their families.

Theme 3: Leadership

Prior research on effective schools has pegged strong leadership by the principal as a key element to the school success. In these Title I schools, the principals were respected by staff, students, and parents alike. Leadership also was shared by and distributed to others, including teachers, parents, and students. Leadership was extended through formal means—such as through teacher leader roles or student council—and also through informal means and symbolic gestures.

In one school, a teacher described the principal this way: He spends time with the children, visits in classrooms nearly every day, and invites teachers to send children to him with something positive or an improvement. She contrasted this with prior experiences with principals—one of whom was “on a pedestal,” and the other of whom “only did discipline” with students. Upon initial researcher contact with this same school, the secretary reported—more than once—that the principal was out in classrooms at the time of the phone calls. During site visits this was observed; the principal was seen throughout the building, often with a notebook in hand in which he wrote reminders to himself, such as about an upcoming parent meeting. Upon entering one classroom, he noticed that the teacher’s intercom was beeping, so he turned his attention to it, fixed it, and resumed his visit. The principal expressed that he liked to see what was happening in the classrooms, and he wanted teachers to know that he “know[s] their work,” that he was not removed from the classroom. In addition, the principal was exceedingly humble in talking about the school—he took very little credit, if any, for anything. He said that

most of the ideas in the school were generated by teachers, which he supported as it increased buy-in and the likelihood that initiatives would work. When he first arrived at the school as principal, he asked of teachers, “What can I do to support your instruction?” The response was to provide more time for teachers to teach. In response, he moved assemblies to the afternoon, protected instructional time, and removed some nonacademic programs. When teachers had an idea, they could approach him without his “principal hat on,” and discuss ideas openly.

In another school, a teacher commented that while she did not always agree with the principal, he “knows the kids” and always read the comments she wrote on report cards. Another teacher commented that she and the principal have had conflicting opinions at times, but she respects the leadership overall. A third teacher reported that the principal showed strong leadership, but also asks for teachers’ opinions, giving teachers a voice, and he listens well to the input received. Yet another teacher described the principal as very responsive and “firm, but positive.”

The total picture of leadership in these schools, however, was much more subtle—and enacted by many. Simply to call it shared leadership would be misleading, as this is among the many educational buzzwords that often carry more assumptions than meaning. Frequently, shared leadership is reduced to little more than teacher or parent involvement in name only, such as a parent advisory group that meets once a year. However, for lack of a clearer word, illustrations of the sharing or distributing of leadership in action were evident. While each school had clear formal leaders and authority structures, the drama of leadership itself was significantly more subtle and

involved teachers, students, parents, and community members in addition to the school administration.

Giving away power through acknowledging one's mistakes played out as an example of the shared leadership in these schools. Two principals, for example, talked about the importance of acknowledging mistakes. Regarding a staff member who served in a leadership role, one principal explained:

"I just want her to see all the components of the principalship because wherever she goes, they're always going to come into play—so we work real close together—we don't *try*, we *work real close together*. My philosophy to her simply says: make a decision—right or wrong, make a decision. If the decision is wrong, then we will address it when I get back. Make the decision. Don't go hemming and hawing, or whatever. Because that's what I do—I'll make it, but quickly I will say [if] I've made a mistake. 'I've made a mistake here.' I'll apologize.... I think people respect that...they *really* do respect you for that."

Another principal observed:

"Teachers here feel safe apologizing to students for their mistakes and sometimes the teachers are afraid to be wrong. And it's a lesson we try to pass on to parents, too. It's OK to be wrong."

One form of distributing leadership evident in all three schools was that those with formal authority routinely gave it away. This occurred at times in traditional ways, such as giving students on the SCA full authority to decide on schoolwide projects, despite different priorities held by the teachers or administrators. Simple, subtle gestures symbolized the giving away of power in ways that contributed to the richness of the drama. For example, one principal arrived to school each day professionally attired in a crisp suit. Upon completion of the daily opening-of-school ritual, he entered his office, removed his suit jacket, and rolled up his sleeves before returning to the halls and

classrooms to attend to the business of the day. This demonstrated a giving away of power by becoming more relaxed and approachable in his attire.

A second principal gave away power through the arrangement of his office. Upon first glance, it appeared that this principal was working in a conference room rather than his own office. No sign or nameplate marked his door or desk; in fact, no desk was present in the room. Instead he worked either at a computer table or conference table; student desks lined the perimeter of the room. The only signs that pointed to his 'ownership' of this room were his planner opened on the table, a stack of mail addressed to him, and pictures of his family on the computer table. This subtle yet dramatic difference in his office downplayed the role of formal authority in this school. In the midst of the interview, the school phone rang and was answered by the principal. He explained, "Well, this is a team effort—we all do a little of everything." The principal rarely took credit for ideas, almost always using the word "we" in his discussion of "our school," "our children." In talking about the leadership within the school, the principal pointed out that he was "not the focus of the building," further explaining that "kids need to see everyone having authority." For example, program sponsors and students led assemblies for which they were responsible, rather than the principal necessarily assuming this role.

In addition to formal teacher leader roles such as curriculum specialist, teachers assumed leadership in more subtle ways as well. One principal told this story of teachers taking initiative in dealing with their colleagues:

"We went to a meeting the other day and one teacher stood up and said, 'I'm really bent out of shape about our Social Committee.' And I thought 'Oh good Lord, I hope you shared this with them first.' And then she said 'I don't know who assigned only two people for this committee but we

need probably five on this. We've got a lot of stuff going. We need more people and I'm going to volunteer and I want at least three more people to help.' She didn't ask my opinion—didn't hurt my feelings except I was the stupid jerk who assigned only two.... Well, people feel free enough that they can voice opinions."

The same principal described another form of teacher leadership by individuals who took initiative to address the needs of a new teacher.

"[One] teacher is new this year... she was messing up pretty badly and some of the teachers came to me, and I said, 'Have you spoken with her yet? You need to speak to her before you speak to me.' And they spoke to her and because of their leadership and kindness she was able to do quite a bit of changing.... And I think that's a form of leadership."

One principal explained that a relatively new teacher was currently chair of the leadership team at the school—a role often delegated to someone more experienced. He said of her:

"All the other teachers...really respect her. That's an important factor.... They make sure it's done right...and that she's supported in all the endeavors and things she wants to put forth."

Student leadership was also evident in these schools. In one school, the student leadership group was involved in many projects, posted on a prominent bulletin board. Students, for example, negotiated a price with a local artist for painting a mural in the school. The principal explained that the students were spearheading a particular project, despite faculty preferences for another focus. As the principal explained, however, "you can't give them leadership then snatch it away." He also emphasized the importance of actively developing student leadership: "You can't wait to give them leadership until they're grown." Another principal described how students—and not necessarily those typically perceived as leaders—were given leadership in this way:

"We have peer guides ... where we identify children who actually need some social skills development themselves. They have some potential for leadership but they might be a little on the wild side... So [the guidance counselor] puts them through training to be peer guides. Meaning

that...they have been given some special problem-solving training so that if there are problems that arise on the playground, in the cafeteria, that sort of thing, you as the student...involved in the problem can look around and if you see somebody wearing one of the peer guide buttons, nice gold button, then you can approach them saying 'we are having problems, can you help us?'...[This] is a feature that we are real proud of that works very well considering we don't just pick those kids that are the real well behaved, everyday kinds of kids to do it."

In these schools, leadership was strong, positive, and enacted by more than those in formal leadership roles. The sharing of leadership went well beyond the typical gathering of input or assignment of roles and responsibilities. Leadership was distributed through formal leaders giving it away, and by others assuming responsibility. Student leadership was encouraged and fostered.

Theme 4: Appreciating Diversity and Challenge

Schools respected, honored, and celebrated diversity in the school population—where it existed—among children, families, and teachers. In the two schools with families from an array of backgrounds, diversity became a unifying force and a cherished feature of the school culture. Celebrations were held, symbols representing various cultures were prominently displayed, and a tremendous sense of respect pervaded the school.

A related theme noted in these schools was that the very nature of being a Title I school inspired a sense of teamwork, commitment, dedication, and effort that made the school a home, a special place, a warm family. It was not always evident, however, whether certain types of individuals were drawn to work in challenged settings or whether the presence of challenges inspired these professionals to work in a cohesive manner. In either case, the very nature of being a Title I school or serving an

economically challenged student population was a source of pride and strength within the school.

In one school, the diversity of the student body—a factor of the school’s identification as a Title I school—was in fact a draw to teachers, parents, and administrators. One teacher told this story:

“A lot of us that have been here for a long time have really enjoyed the diversity that we’ve had to work with.... And we used to laugh when diversity training came into being because we could probably write the course. We live it every day. [laughter] But I think that’s been a really big stronghold for us. Everybody that comes to [this school] to work, becomes entrenched in this diversity. And it’s real world- real life here.... Having to get along with all colors and shapes and sizes. Then everybody basically has the same needs and it’s just a matter of understanding what those needs are at that time. Our diversity is a very traditional part of our school.”

A parent in another school spoke about the benefits for children resulting from the diversity of peer backgrounds:

“I think that the kids need to have diverse students in their class because it teaches them backgrounds from different countries because there are a lot of kids here that don’t know anything past where they live. I mean there are kids in high school who have never been out of [this district], they don’t know what’s out there except for in pictures.”

Parents in one school spoke—and laughed—about external perceptions of their school’s identification as a Title I school:

“There are a lot of parents who don’t want their kids to come here, but then there [are] people who feel they need to do something for those desperately poor people.... Not all of us are desperately poor. [laughter] But, that’s okay, if they want to help us.”

“A couple of years ago, I had a call from another elementary school... in a more affluent area, and they were looking for somebody to expose their kids to diversity.... And then when they discovered that [a program I mentioned] was like at seven at night, they said, ‘I don’t think many of our parents would feel comfortable coming over there after dark.’ [laughter] Then, I’m not sure what to

tell you after that remark. I can tell you that we all feel perfectly safe.” (Red Parents)

The diversity of the student body became a unifying force in one of the schools, contributing to the sense of family. Teachers explained:

“If I still had kids elementary age, even though they go to another district, I would bring them here. And the reason I’d bring them here is because there’s a real sense, from our fractured backgrounds, a real sense of warmth. Because the only thing we have in common is education, so we work together so that everybody gets the best education. So, by being fractured, being from different faiths, different countries, and different languages, the education comes to the forefront. That’s the one unifying factor. And so that becomes important for everybody. If I was a kid, this is where I’d want to be. No one is going to make fun of me if I’m in a special ed class, and no one is going to make fun of me if I don’t speak English exactly correctly.”

“I think the children have learned... to tolerate so many different things. They don’t look around and think anybody is so unusual or different and I think that’s been good too. They learn from each other.”

With regard to the schools’ designations as Title I schools, a teacher in one school identified this important aspect:

“I know some schools are really bad about back-talking, but I think since we’re a Title I school, ... the teachers need each other’s help.... Whereas other schools they may not need support because they’re going to pass the SOL tests anyway, whether there’s a teacher there or not.... We need to group together and get ideas from everyone.”

In the same school, the principal described it this way:

“I feel that our teachers at this school are just a little cut above the average in terms of knowing that ‘I really make a difference with these kids’ and I think that that’s also the appeal of working in a Title I school.... There is a lot of self-satisfaction that a teacher can get from it, when he can say ‘[the child] came in not knowing how to do that. I know he didn’t have that when he entered my classroom.’”

A sense of pride, respect, and appreciation was evident regarding the diversity and/or challenges inherent in a Title I school population. The makeup of the student body and their families was viewed as a positive attribute—not a detriment—in these schools.

In one school, faculty and parents shared concerns about possibly losing the diversity due to changing community demographics. The very presence of diversity defined the school itself.

Summary of Results

In summary, these schools displayed a number of attributes that appear richly interwoven in the fabric of their culture. These are summarized here:

- Success was defined broadly and extensively and guided the actions of those in the school.
- Emphasis was placed on the development of the whole child.
- A focus on progress or growth was evident.
- Teachers and principals did whatever it took, individually and collectively, to help students succeed.
- Professionals were propelled by a strong sense of efficacy in their work.
- Responsibility and efficacy were fostered in students.
- The SOL were addressed, but were not the driving force in the culture
- An ethic of care served as the moral compass.
- A sense of family was evident.
- Principals listened to, respected, and trusted teachers; teachers in turn demonstrated the same to children.
- Parents were welcomed and respected, regardless of backgrounds, abilities, or involvement.

- Leadership was formally and informally shared by and distributed among administrators, teachers, students and parents.
- Power and authority were actively given away by principals, both in concrete and symbolic ways.
- Student leadership was developed and respected.
- Diversity was appreciated, honored, cared for, and celebrated.
- Designation as a Title I school was perceived as a positive and unifying force.

Comparison Study

It is difficult to utilize results from one comparison school in this study, and numerous cautions accompany such a task. First, a single case carries with it the potential of being an outlier among similar schools. It is possible that the circumstances present in one setting are unique to that school. Second, given the context surrounding reform efforts and pressure placed on low achieving schools, identification of a single school bears potential negative ramifications. Part of the challenge of this study was, in fact, the difficulty encountered in obtaining participation from low achieving Title I schools. In some cases the decision to not participate was made at the district level, and in others at the school level. Concerns were voiced surrounding the additional pressure inherent in participation in a study, when such schools were already deeply engaged in efforts to improve student achievement. This was true even in one school identified as high achieving. It is important to note also that the single comparison school appeared to be in transition, with changes such as new leadership, for example. This points to the challenge in trying to study a school as a static entity.

However, despite the methodological challenges presented with a single comparison site, the findings bear important points that would otherwise be lost. It was important to the governing body commissioning this study that comparison cases be examined. The goal was to discover whether differences were in fact present in schools serving similar student populations but producing the same level of achievement. Therefore, points of interest from the comparison school are included here.

In contrast with the high achieving schools, the four themes noted above were either not present in the comparison school or were present to a more limited degree than in the three high achieving schools. In addition, the prevalence of negative commentary by parents and teachers was in sharp contrast to that of the first three schools. These points are discussed below.

Defining Success.

Regarding definitions of success, one teacher at the comparison school identified her “idealistic” view of success as “whether they [students] want to come back the next day or not,” combined with their “being academically successful.” However, she noted that this was more her own definition, since, at the district level “we have to measure their success with test scores.” She explained:

“The school, as a whole, is more concerned with the individual child than just what we look like on paper. But that doesn’t always matter, I’m afraid.”

In a similar vein, another teacher communicated a lack of personal connection with how the school defined success. Throughout her explanation she repeatedly referred to “them” and “they,” meaning the administration, and did not include herself in the ways in which success was defined at this school. As she explained:

“I feel like all we do is test. I know that’s not true—I know they look at students’ happiness and their grades and how they get along with others...but I just feel like we can’t get away from [tests].... I feel like they just want to know how your kids do on tests.”

She further expressed a sense of disconnect with regard to the use of test scores, saying:

“I am not really sure who’s looking at them.... I don’t know really what’s done with all the information once I give it to them.”

A third teacher, when talking about how she defined “success,” immediately placed the definition within the context of her “extremely slow class this year.” She then explained that even if their test scores were not ultimately on target: “They’ve come further than when we started. Even if they’ve come in tiny ways.” While this definition of success pointed out a focus on progress and growth, it was couched in a deficit model of how she viewed her students.

When parents were asked how the school defined success, they immediately responded:

“SOLs.”

“Right. Exactly. Nothing else.”

“I had found with my son that they mostly look at the academic standards which, I think, are important. But I don’t think a grade is everything.”

“You know, everybody’s different and what I think we’re lacking here is that there is no individuality.”

Further, parents in the low achieving school expressed frustration, disappointment, and anger at how their children experienced learning, feared speaking up, and felt pressured.

One parent explained:

“It seems like they’re being pushed too much to succeed. And they’re losing some of their coping skills because they’re too stressed out. They don’t want to deal with the pressure.”

Another parent concurred:

“My...daughter, she doesn't like school like she used to. She used to love school. And now she is feeling so much pressure. She's getting sloppier in homework....They're expecting too much out of these kids. And the children cannot cope.... The teachers refuse today to help these kids who just needed a little bit of help. But you have to need a lot of help to get help.”

A third parent described a similar scenario:

“My son...doesn't like school because all they want to do is lecture, lecture, lecture. He says, 'We're not allowed to voice an opinion....' I think with my son it is just a shame because he loves to learn. He'll sit and he'll watch the Discovery channel or something and then come back and relay information and log in on the computer.... I mean, if the kid can learn that way, then we're doing something wrong in school. When I take him to the science museum and he can understand a concept because he saw it and did it. And they're not doing that. They're not doing any of that anymore. All those special hands-on things are being taken away. The children are lectured, lectured, and lectured with no free time. And then they want to know why they get upset. Why they fuss with one another, or why they talk out in class, or they do this. But they don't have time to be kids.”

Parents attributed problems at the school to a variety of sources. At times, specific complaints were voiced about the school as a whole, an individual teacher, a former administrator, the school division's pressure, and the pressure inherent with the SOL. One parent observed the stress under which teachers were working:

“The teachers are under terrible stress. They don't have time to do anything else [besides SOL] because they have people breathing down their necks and their stress is being passed onto the students.”

One parent complained about an individual teacher and her teaching method:

“[My son] can't write and the teacher... was speling off these five sentences that they had to write. And he couldn't keep up with her. And he wrote a note on her paper, 'I couldn't keep up with you....' And she gave him an F on the paper because he only had one sentence. And she said, 'You should have raised your hand and asked me to stop.' But these kids are afraid to raise their hand.... They want them to be like an adult but they don't want to treat them that way. In other words, if they voice an opinion or they don't think something's fair, they're being 'disrespectful.'”

With regard to a student survey that had been conducted in the school, a teacher gave this similar commentary:

“I think...that [the older students] didn’t think they were as well respected and cared about as the younger ones, but I think some of that is just their age and because of the way they’ve gotten to be and, you know, ‘it’s ok for me to be disrespectful to you but you better not sound that way to me’ kind of thing. And of course they pick up on that so...I think in the upper grades you’ll see...them feeling more like maybe they’re not as treated with as respectfully as they should be.”

A sense of personal and professional efficacy was decidedly lacking among teachers interviewed in the comparison school, especially captured in two teachers’ description of some of the programs at the school. Both teachers kept themselves removed from the school with comments such as “*they* have” and “*they* do;” not once did these teachers make comments such as “*we* have.” This displayed a sense of their disengagement from the culture of the school, a lack of professional efficacy on their part.

Teachers at the low achieving school did not display the sense of mutual, collegial respect evident in the high achieving schools. This lack of professional efficacy was further illustrated by one teacher’s commentary about her peers:

“Its frustrating because I get here early and I stay late and there are people that get here on time and leave at the time we are allowed to leave and they don’t bring anything home and it’s, like, what are you doing?”

Another teacher echoed this perception of some of her peers, saying:

“You have good and bad teachers. The teacher makes it interesting and exciting, and lets them know that learning is not boring. Learning is a good thing. And I think, yeah, a lot of teachers do that. But we also have a lot of teachers—I don’t know why they are in teaching—they don’t want to be there and they turn their students away from school. I think a lot of it depends on the person standing in front of the classroom.”

The teacher also indicated a low sense of efficacy in describing their preparation efforts in light of student motivation:

“Sometimes no matter what a teacher does there is nothing she can or he can do that is going to make a student learn something. Sometimes students if they don’t want to learn something they’re not going to. I do feel that way—if they’re not going to pay attention then you know they’re not going to—sometimes you cannot make them.”

In general, the demographics of the school were viewed as a barrier to teachers’ ability to be effective, as noted here by one teacher:

“This school in particular...we have a lot of poverty...here. And no parental support. And yet the teachers are really having to—I call it performing a miracle. And you can’t perform that miracle without them [administration] backing you up.”

Regarding other aspects often contributing to professional efficacy—curricular, material, and community support—teacher perspectives were mixed at the comparison school. One teacher, for example, explained that she felt numerous resources were available to the school. She explained:

“I do not know of anybody who has as many things to work with. Not any school system. They will find the money for us if we need it.”

Another teacher concurred, but said:

“Sometimes it’s hard to incorporate them because if you don’t know that much about some of the subjects you teach you’re not going to know how to use some of the materials. Sometimes it is overwhelming—you have too much.... I need something quick that’s like ‘here’s the information you need to teach....’ Sometimes it’s hard to know what to do with all of the information.”

School Culture.

While teachers in the comparison school felt that—for the most part—children were treated with respect, frequent caveats were interjected to counter this view, such as:

“I think, for the most part, that’s what we’re trying to do is to show them respect. Even the D and F students.”

Even though said with laughter, a comment such as this presents a view of some students as less worthy of care and therefore needing special mention. One parent commented simply:

“The kids don’t feel like they are really cared about in school.”

One teacher commented on efforts made by the school to provide for the needs of the whole child, beyond academics:

“I think this school amazes me. We make sure every child has breakfast. We make sure every child has lunch. Our early release days, we don’t leave until every child has eaten lunch. Because some of them go home to an empty house and there’s no one there.”

Similar to a teacher mentioned above, however, she removed herself from the culture of this care, saying:

“I think not only are *they* trying to take care of them in their academic lives, but are taking care of them in a well-rounded way.” (italics added)

Moments later, she expressed frustration with how much was provided for parents:

“I think the school does too much [for parents]... The school foots the bill for lunches and breakfasts. Very few parents look for a way to support the teachers, to support the child.... The majority of them, it’s like, ‘*You* take care of my child.’”

In contrast with the family sense found in the high achieving schools, a sense of care extended to parents was not generally evident in the comparison site. Some teachers expressed frustration at parents’ lack of involvement in their child’s education. Some parents expressed not feeling welcome at this school. Frustration was evident in their voices and words as these individuals spoke of the school’s lack of invitation for their participation. One parent, for example, expressed not feeling welcomed:

“And, I don’t know if the teachers here are like—I don’t know what their problem is here—but I could go over to [another school] and I am welcomed with open

arms. 'You want to help? Sure. Let's do this, this, and this.' I have sent in forms. I have sent in papers. No one from the PTA has contacted me. No one has asked for any help. I said if you need any help, I'd be more than willing to help."

Parents expressed their frustration in their efforts to help their children, when all they had to rely on for information was a child's notes copied off an overhead projector. One parent explained:

"[The children] don't have a clue about taking notes or bring them home to study. They just know, 'I have a test tomorrow. I have the worksheet.' The parents try to help them study but where are the answers? I don't know the answers. We don't have the books to help."

Another parent voiced this frustration:

"The opinionated parents are not wanted around here.... And I've had major problems with situations that would occur with my son and I had to call the school and ask them what they were doing about the situations because they had never addressed it. And two months later they wanted to come back and give my son a referral for something that happened two months ago. And I was like, 'I don't think so.'"

In line with these parent concerns, one teacher described a perspective she believed was shared among her colleagues that parents demonstrated their lack of caring by not participating in school events.

"When we have...back to school night...in the evening it's very poor attendance and you know that's discouraging because we work really hard to...teach the students and then the parents just don't seem to...care or put forth any effort...and they want to know why their child's not doing good in something. What can we do more to help them—but they're not doing their part at home. I see that a lot and just listening to my coworkers almost every day at lunch [talking about it]."

Another teacher concurred, saying this of her perceived lack of parent involvement:

"[It] impacts the student, that, hey, 'I don't have to care either.' And that's why...it's so important for that teacher to set an example...because they're coming in from homes that could care less. And if you don't show a child that you care, they're not gonna care."

While one teacher acknowledged that many of the parents themselves had had difficulty in school and subsequently “feel awkward coming in with their children,” she indicated that “we work on that quite a lot.” She felt that—all in all—the school had good parent and community support, with “a wonderful system of people that volunteer” and “good relationships” with various community organizations. Another teacher, however, argued that parents were not involved enough, saying:

“I feel like a lot of parents in this area...don’t care,... they send their kids to school and that is where their job stops. They don’t help with homework, they don’t help with home projects, they just don’t show up for conferences—you schedule a conference, you tell them when it is, they don’t show up, they don’t call you and tell you they’re not coming, they just don’t show up, and I don’t know how you can do that.”

The teacher further observed:

“I think there’s very little parent discipline at home, too. You see it in the kids—the kids are ill behaved. They have no respect for authority—tell them not to do something, they talk back to you.... They do it and they don’t think anything of it.”

With regard to interaction among teachers, one teacher explained that she felt there were numerous opportunities in which the staff interacted socially:

“I think we’re probably better at that than...other schools from what I hear, as far as doing these extra things to just spend some time together.”

Another teacher concurred that, at times, there were opportunities for social interaction and teamwork, and that:

“I think more of an effort is being made to try to improve employee morale...and make more of a closeness between us because I think that if we’re all working together, you know, things are easier and you enjoy being here more.”

However, she expressed a perceived reticence on the part of colleagues to make time for such interaction, saying:

“But it’s hard because you don’t know what some other people are doing.... And a lot of people were kind of, well, who has time for this?”

Such diverse opinions and perspectives among teachers and parents—and the frequent assignment of fault by teachers and parents alike—pointed to a lack of shared sense of purpose and teamwork in this school. In discussing the atmosphere in the school, teachers’ responses were lukewarm at best. Stress, however, was mentioned frequently, by teachers, parents, and administrators. A large component of this stress appeared to be linked to changes resulting from the SOL and pressure to improve student test scores.

Leadership/Ownership.

One teacher at the comparison school indicated that she felt she had a voice at the school, but acknowledged that “not everybody would agree with that.” She further explained that some of that difference might be due to age and experience of teachers.

Another teacher indicated that the school had “a good climate” but went on to explain:

“I mean I don’t mind coming to work everyday.... It doesn’t stress me out being here.... I can think of worse places to work.... But sometimes you do feel a sense of isolation.”

Yet a third teacher concurred:

“In the school in general, I’m not too sure they listen to us and my voice in praises or our complaints.... I think there’s a lot of legitimate things that are being voiced by teachers that are being ignored.... I think they hear me, but you don’t always get responded to. I think if they would listen more to the teachers—I mean the teachers are the ones in the classroom.”

One teacher described the demands placed on teachers outside the classroom, including professional development, meetings, and paperwork:

“Overall, [I’m] not able to be in a teacher role.... You just don’t focus as much on the teaching as you do the busy work. I would love to be in the classroom just to be a teacher instead of having to do all the paperwork and the learning and the meetings.”

During a conversation between a principal and a teacher regarding leadership development, the teacher expressed her opinion to the principal that he should be doing more to involve teachers in the leadership of the school as well. An awkward moment arose, and the comment was not further discussed.

In summary, commentary and observations in the comparison Title I school showed far less cohesion of perspective between and among teachers, parents, and administrators. While these points must be carefully considered in light of the cautions noted above, the findings from this comparison school demonstrated: disagreement about and lack of shared ownership of the school's definition of success; lower personal and professional teacher efficacy; conflicting views of professional teaming and interaction; negative views of parents expressed by teachers and perceived by parents; and a lack of shared or distributed leadership. Further, missing from this school was a sense of pride or celebration in the demographics of the school community—in fact, the poverty of the student population was viewed by some teachers as a detriment to the school's ability to be successful with students.

Although findings from one school cannot be generalized to all low achieving Title I schools, the insights gained from this school do provide some points of important contrast with the successful, high achieving Title I schools in this study. Such points provide starting points for discussion of factors in Title I schools that impact—positively or negatively—student achievement.

Discussion

There are many similarities between the literature and our findings. The list of codes developed while using this program contains many themes remarkably similar to those themes discovered in the literature. The codes also reveal new characteristics of high achieving, high poverty schools.

As emphasized in the literature, there was a clear sense that the high achieving Title I schools in our study cared—in a moral sense—for the whole child. Anecdotes such as teachers creatively involving parents, making house calls, offering after school remediation, and simply doing “whatever it takes” to help children succeed were prevalent, and illustrated that caring for the children at this school did not stop with academics. Rather, the work of these educators extended far beyond the traditional parameters of “school.” As Revilla and Sweeny (1997) explained, this notion of caring is extended to all children, regardless of background. As mentioned in the review of literature, a morally caring culture creates a family-like environment in the school that cares for every aspect of children’s well-being (Revilla & Sweeny, 1997).

This study revealed that a positive school environment was a major factor present in high achieving Title I schools in the Richmond area. In accordance with Hansen and Childs’ (1998) and Noddings’ (1992) research, successful Title I elementary schools give children freedom, accompanied by a sense of ownership, and show them respect. A sense of family and teamwork was also evident in our study, as described in Goodson, CARE, and Foote (2001). Hansen and Childs (1998) and Scherer (1998) also emphasized the need for schools to contain objects that are appealing to the eye. Our research found that participants valued the physical building characteristics in successful Title I schools.

These schools also encouraged parental awareness and met children's nutrition and health needs, similar to Poole's (1997) characteristics. Teachers also had unique styles and possessed a love for students, similar to findings by Edwards, Green, and Lyons (1996).

While excellent teaching and leadership were evident in and essential to these schools' successes, those skills and attributes were grounded in a genuine ethic of care, love, and passion demonstrated individually and collectively. Children, not academics, were taught. This focus included academic instruction as a critical component in helping students succeed, but the moral foundation for this work was a deep sense of commitment and responsibility to address the needs of children and their families. While care cannot be measured in test scores or other concrete outcomes, it is a foundational force essential to creating the conditions necessary for achievement of academic gains. Where present, it serves as a moral and ethical touchstone in which beliefs are grounded and by which action is determined.

Leadership played a clear role in successful schools in this study. In our research it appeared that principals took on a number of untraditional roles in order to achieve success. In "going above and beyond the call of duty" the principals in our study emphasized instructional leadership. They played a role in helping guide curriculum and protecting teachers' instructional time. Connell (1999) explained that this can also lead to "open-door" classrooms where principals make regular visits, stroll the halls, and save paperwork until after school hours—all of which seemed to be present in the high achieving Title I schools in our study. The U.S. Department of Education's (1999) findings that high achieving, high poverty schools often have principals that recognize the importance of instructional leadership supports our findings. These high achieving

principals also must maintain a meaningful relationship with the community. Principals in our study were known to make “house calls” when necessary, even taking a whole family to receive medical care. This level of personal attention actually goes beyond that mentioned in the literature; however, Connell (1999) did mention that maintaining an effective relationship with high poverty communities is essential for success in these types of schools.

Another recurring theme in the data analysis was the notion of shared leadership. The idea of such leadership contributing to school success was prevalent in the literature as well. Ovando and Marek (2000), Bennet (1998), Reed and Roberts (1998) and Leithwood (1995) all mentioned the need for faculty members to work together toward—and share responsibility for—a common goal.

This leads to discussion of another prevalent theme in the study—teamwork. Not only did we find that successful schools have teachers that work together on lesson plans, but there was a sense of collegiality and shared decision making among teachers and between teachers and the administration. The sense of team in these schools extended also to involved parents, students, and volunteers. These findings are supported by Allen and Hallet (2000), Bauer (1997), and Revilla and Sweeny’s (1997) research that emphasized the importance of student, parents, teachers, and administrators working together as a team.

In this study, we also identified themes associated with attending to cultural differences. We discovered that emphasizing and celebrating diversity occurred within the two multi-ethnic, high achieving, high poverty schools in our study. The Council of Diversity and Extension (1991) reported similar findings, and explained that this type of

environment leads to everyone feeling valued, establishment of integrity, and attainment of success. Bauer (1997) also expressed that it is important that every child feel he can excel. Along these same lines, we found that high achieving, high poverty schools not only showed respect for students and their cultures, but also showed respect for parents and their circumstances as well. It can be speculated that this may have led to greater parental involvement in the higher achieving Title I schools. The Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study (1996) found a similar phenomenon. By working *with* families' cultures instead of *against* them (e.g., allowing students to maintain their native language), schools can increase achievement.

During the course of this study, an unintended consequence of the SOL became evident. Frustration with and fear of retribution as a result of the implementation of the SOL emerged. While faculty, administration, and parents in these schools worked with—rather than against—the SOL, in many cases they expressed doing so out of obligation. Fear of retribution for voicing any negative commentary regarding the SOL had a significant impact on the writeup of this report. As discussed extensively in the Methodology section, substantial efforts were made to protect the identity of participating schools and individuals as a result of perceived professional concern.

As demands are voiced for increased student achievement, and as the gap widens between affluent and non-affluent student achievement, attention is focused with particular intensity on the responsibility of school principals and their faculties to address inequities and meet these raised expectations in student learning. In Virginia, the Standards of Accreditation formally place such responsibility on principals. While much of the general reform rhetoric calls for tougher standards, “no excuses,” and “raising the

bar,” it is generally assumed that this produces a focus first on improving student test scores.

A clear message evident among the participants in this study, however, was that the challenges of poverty, family structure, neglect, and limited English proficiency were not only accepted but also deeply respected and cared for in these successful Title I schools. Professionals in these schools assumed responsibility for adapting the work of their schools to address the needs of the children, and their families, who entered their doors. Students’ abilities, rather than weaknesses, were emphasized and fostered. This is indicative of what Carbo (1995) identified as a “transformed paradigm of schooling.” In the schools in this study, challenges were seen as opportunities to make learning relevant and to meet the needs of the unique population of children served by the school.

While rhetoric abounds surrounding the notion of “meeting the needs of children,” schools in this study demonstrated countless actions to support such a belief, and with a broadened understanding of what those needs might include. The primary emphasis in these schools was placed on doing “whatever it took” to help a child experience “success,” individually defined as meaningful progress or growth for that child in academic, social, emotional, and physical areas. Improving test scores became a natural byproduct of this focus, not the focus itself. This is an important finding in a time of state and national reform efforts to improve student achievement as measured by standards-based test scores. These schools were driven by their own individual and collective definitions of success, not by external pressures or expectations. Their motivation was intrinsic and interwoven within the fiber of the school community, not externally imposed.

Recommendations

Several recommendations arise from the findings of this study and are noted here. For *state and local policy makers and administrators*, consideration should be given to broader definitions of success or improvement to represent progress of students as a cohort—not performance of discrete groups of students by grade levels—from year to year. Such a focus embraces what successful principals and teachers in this study looked for in defining “success” within their schools. Examining organizational progress based on continuous improvement within each cohort of students supports the work of effective Title I schools. Central offices should engage school leaders—including faculty, parent, and student leaders—in assessing the culture of a school, and then assist—but not control—the school’s efforts to begin building a positive culture. In addition, central office staff should recognize and respect schools’ successful approaches. Supportive means of monitoring continuous school improvement should be employed, honoring what works in each successful setting. Fear of retribution for pursuing alternative approaches to student success may force positive strategies behind closed doors, thus limiting the ability of others to learn from and replicate practices of effective schools. It was evident in this study that SOL test scores can improve dramatically without a primary focus on doing so. Instead, a broader, holistic emphasis on improving student learning and development, grounded in deep respect for children and their families, can produce increased test scores as a natural byproduct.

Principals should assume the role of instructional leader as a facilitator of a team of instructional leaders. Successful principals often view themselves as teachers, and

engage in discussions about instruction and student learning. Instructional leadership can include walking the halls and monitoring the school's instructional atmosphere; being actively visible to teachers and students; making regular and meaningful classroom visits and offering support and feedback. Successful instructional leaders actively "roll up their sleeves" and "get their hands dirty" in the work of schools. Engaging in the work of the school in partnership with others communicates a team—rather than hierarchical—approach. As instructional leaders, principals can model a valuing of personal success for children based on a wide array of measures, not just test scores. Principals can demonstrate caring for the "whole child" in ways such as meeting children's nutritional and health needs, in addition to academic needs.

For principals, development of a positive, child-focused and caring culture is critical. Growing and sustaining a culture is an essential function of effective school leaders. Such leadership and development of culture should be shared with teachers and other staff members. This does not mean by merely assigning additional tasks, but by respecting and trusting the staff enough to encourage members to make leadership decisions. Providing activities for team building and development of a family focus within the school is essential.

In the work of culture building, principals must demonstrate and model respect for diversity and challenges resulting from socio-economic status of families. Working with and celebrating cultures represented in the student body and community is one means for demonstrating respect. Working with faculty to find small and creative ways to involve parents is essential. It is the responsibility of the professional staff to make it possible for parents to participate.

Teachers play an active and critical role in creating an ethically caring school environment. For example, teachers can demonstrate respect for children's abilities to develop leadership and decision making skills, by involving students in establishing and reinforcing class rules. Masterful Title I teachers involve students in meaningful decision making and provide opportunities for children to develop confidence in self-management. In the same way that an effective principal engages teachers as partners in the work of the school, so, too, do highly competent teachers work together with students to create a productive learning environment.

Teachers also can examine and coordinate scheduling of student services to reduce isolated "pull-outs." Consistent times for support services can be provided for children. Teachers should team with colleagues within grade levels for sharing of ideas and resources for meeting the needs of students. Further, teachers should collaborate across grade levels in transition planning for students. Strategies providing success for individual students each year must be shared with colleagues as children progress through the grade levels. Weaving a web of support for children—and their families—promotes a vision of continuous growth and development.

Further research is recommended as an outgrowth of this study. An in-depth examination of the curriculum and teaching methods in high achieving Title I schools is suggested. The results of the current study implied a presence of effective teaching and high personal and professional efficacy, but the study did not examine in detail the specific methods utilized by teachers within classrooms. In addition, a study of how a positive culture of care is created and fostered may provide insight for those seeking to improve the culture of low achieving schools.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that quick fixes are not available for changing the culture of a school, the philosophical beliefs of its stakeholders, or schoolwide student achievement, for that matter. However, as demonstrated by these successful Title I schools, it is possible to bring together a school community that makes it possible for students—regardless of socio-economic status, language, or family circumstances to experience success in learning. Principals, teachers, and staffs that hold students, their families, and their own colleagues in high regard and who attend to creating a positive, child-focused school culture can and do create their own success. We would do well to encourage their efforts and not stand in their way.



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APPENDIX A
Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Bibliography

Research on High Achieving, High Poverty Schools

Allen, L., & Hallett, A. (1999). *Beyond finger-pointing and test scores.* Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.

This study provided an inquiry into reciprocal accountability in six urban school districts; Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and Seattle. Reciprocal accountability was defined as strategies and systems where responsibility is shared among schools, communities, school districts and the state. These cities formed the Cross City Campaign in 1993 to focus specifically on equity and accountability. A case study approach was used for each school district. Results for the study identified school characteristics that support reciprocal accountability: high standards for all students, high expectations, democratic governance and shared decision-making at the school, strong commitment to the diversity and cultures of the students, regular and meaningful interactions with parents and the community, teachers who value working with their colleagues, professional development, site authority over hiring, budget, curriculum and instruction, and assessment.

Barth, R. (1990). *Improving schools from within.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

This book supported the belief that good schools come from good communities and that schools themselves should be a "community of learners" (p. 9). Barth explained that schools have a capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the school is to help provide these conditions. In addition, what needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpreting relationships and the nature and quality of learning experiences.

Bauer, H. (1997, July). High poverty, High performing: High hope! *Intercultural Development Research Association, 24(6), 3.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED410083)

High performing schools think of every child as one who can excel and as an asset with something special to offer society. High expectations are a must. How money is budgeted is especially important in high poverty schools. In high poverty schools, everyone must understand and support the school's mission—parents, teachers, students, and the community. Everyone working together toward the same goal leads to school quality.

Bempechat, J. (1998). *Against the odds: How "at-risk" students exceed expectations.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

This book described a six-year study of high achieving poor and minority students in order to uncover the key to their academic success. Student motivation was one of the keys identified as well as culture and context. The author recommended orienting

children to processes of learning, maintaining high expectations and standards, encouraging healthy self-perception of ability, strengthening home/school partnerships, practicing cultural sensitivity.

Carter, S. C. (2000). *No excuses: Lessons from 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools*. Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.

Through studying the cases of 21 high performing, high poverty schools, five effective practices were identified: getting parents personally invested in their children's education, hiring teachers that are "on a mission", utilizing diagnostic test scores instead of making excuses for lower test scores, making sure that basic skills are mastered at early grade levels, making the most of funds that are given to that school by spending it on effective curricula and effective teachers.

Connell, N. (1999, June). *Beating the odds: High-achieving elementary schools in high-poverty neighborhoods*. New York, NY: Educational Priorities Panel. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED441913)

This report examined elementary schools in low SES neighborhoods in New York City that had average or above average standardized test scores. Of the similarities between the 12 schools studied, the author focused on seven common characteristics: a principal who manages instruction, mastery of the curriculum by principals and teachers, a code of professional respect and caring for children, a no-nonsense communication style on the part of the principal, an "open-door" classroom policy where teachers are freely observed, parent engagement, attention and rewards for good academic performance, the report also mentioned other characteristics of high performing principals.

Education Trust. (1999). *Dispelling the myth: High poverty schools exceeding expectations*. Report of the Education Trust in Cooperation with the Council of Chief State School Officers and Partially Funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved December 19, 2001, from <http://www.edtrust.org>

This was a national study surveying top performing high poverty schools. In fall 1998, the Education Trust surveyed 366 schools from 21 states. States identified these schools as their top scoring and/or most improving schools with poverty levels over 50%. Similarities between these schools included: increased instructional time in reading and math in order to help students meet standards; devoted a larger proportion of funds to support professional development focused on changing instructional practice; implemented comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as it is needed; focused their efforts to involve parents on helping students meet standards; and put state or district accountability systems in place that have real consequences for adults in the schools.

Fashola, O. S., & Slavin, R. E. (1997). Promising programs for elementary and middle schools: Evidence of effectiveness and replicability. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 2(3), 251-307.

This article reviewed programs that are of particular interest to Title I schools and offer comprehensive approaches to having students achieve their maximum potential. The programs were evaluated based on their effectiveness, replicability, and application to low-income and minority students. Four school wide reform programs were described. The "Success for All" program was the only one that met all the criteria and was widely replicated. The "Accelerated Schools" and "School Development" programs partially met the criteria, but were also widely replicated. The "Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline" program did meet all the criteria, but was not widely replicated.

Hughes, M. F. (1999). Similar students—dissimilar opportunities for success: High- and low-achieving elementary schools in rural, high poverty areas of West Virginia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 15(1), 47-58.

The author of this study of nine rural schools found that similarities between the high achieving, high poverty elementary schools were very different from the similarities between the low achieving, high poverty elementary schools. Similarities among the high achieving schools include: low teacher-turnover with a stable, hardworking, close staff that support the instructional program; teachers that *want* to work at their school and are satisfied with their jobs; teachers that are well educated and committed; faculty, students, and staff that have pride in school and show respect for it and each other; student resilience; principal that has an open communication style and is supportive of his/her teachers; central office that pays high to moderately high attention to the school. The low achieving schools showed an opposite trend.

Johnson, J. F. (1997, July). Whatever it takes! *Intercultural Development Research Association*, 24(6), 6-7. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED410083)

After visiting many high poverty, high performing schools in Texas, the author explained that these schools do not merely teach to the test, but have used creativity and a rich curriculum to create a challenging educational environment. He claimed these schools are often successful because they recognize the centrality of human relationships. These schools treat parents as partners instead of obstacles, and treat teachers as respected educators with individual strengths and the capacity to improve. These schools work to change the quality of life for their students while strengthening community support.

Langer, J. (1998, Fall). *Beating the odds: Critical components boost student performance*. New York, NY: Center on English Learning and Achievement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED424577)

The author contended that three teaching components make a difference in student performance in English in all grade levels in high poverty and ESL schools: teachers making connections between new material and skills children have already learned; engaging the students in oral and written conversation so that they learn to use literacy to

express knowledge; and helping children to explore and analyze new material so that they can come to a more complex understanding.

**Legters, N.E. (2000, September). *Against the odds: How at-risk students exceed expectations*. Baltimore, MD: Teachers College Record. (ID No. 10497)
Retrieved December 19, 2001, from <http://www.tcrecord.org>**

This article critiqued Janine Bempechat's book, *Against the Odds: How "At-Risk" Students Exceed Expectations*. In her study that investigated parental support and student efficacy, Bempechat's findings contrasted those of similar studies. The most significant aspect of this article was that it explained that the book suggested parents, educators and researchers need to "think in more nuanced ways about the cultural and psychological contexts that motivate children toward academic success" (p.2).

Revilla, A. T., & Sweeny, Y. D. (1997, July). Low income does not cause low school achievement: Creating a sense of family and respect in the school environment. *Intercultural Development Research Association*, 24(6), 4-5, 8. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED410083)

This article began by discussing the need for a culture democracy to be developed in all schools, especially those with a high percentage of bicultural children. These children need to be given the right to learn in their native language, according to Darder (1991), and retain their cultural identity. The parents' culture must also be respected, and it is important to work with the culture than against it. The sense of *family* in high poverty schools was also addressed. Students, parents, and all school personnel must function as a team. This kind of mutual respect was a characteristic of high performing, high poverty schools in Texas. Each child was highly respected in the classroom, regardless of SES status.

Sanders, M. G. (1998). The effects of school, family, and community support on the academic achievement of African American adolescents. *Urban Education*, 33(3), 385-409.

In order to determine if significant adults involved with a child's life can affect his/her academic achievement, researchers conducting this study surveyed 827 eighth-graders in an urban school district in the Southeastern United States. A subset of the research population was interviewed to enhance data. Results showed that female students were more likely to believe in the benefits of a good education. In addition, adolescents living below the poverty line were less likely to see the relationship between education and future success. Results concluded that home, community/church, and school support can work together to help a student succeed at school. Specific qualities such as self-concept and school behavior were particularly important in this relationship.

Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study. (1996). *Case studies of successful campuses: Responses to a high-stakes state accountability system*. Report No. 2.

The purpose of this study was to explore how effective campuses with highly concentrated populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students have responded to the new expectations for performance and to identify the actions/practices they have adapted/adopted. The sampling procedure was purposeful using extreme cases from the population of all elementary, middle and high schools in the state of Texas. From the available pool of schools meeting all criteria, three sites were selected. Results for the study revealed that curriculum, instruction and assessment received high levels of emphasis on each campus; there existed a consistent pattern for professional growth and development; and issues of safety/discipline consistently received increased emphasis as students moved up in grade level.

U. S. Department of Education. (1999). *Hope for urban education: A study of nine high-performing, high-poverty, urban elementary schools*. Retrieved December 19, 2001, from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/urbanhope>

This qualitative, case study of nine urban Title I elementary schools from across the nation, provided a powerful affirmation of the strong desire of educators to ensure the academic success of the children they serve and the commitment of Title I to support their efforts. School similarities were identified in the strategies used to improve academic achievement: school leaders identified and pursued an important, visible, yet attainable first goal; school leaders created a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement; the quantity and quality of time spent on instructional leadership activities increased; school leaders got the resources and training that teachers perceived they needed to get their students to achieve at high levels; school leaders created opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together around instructional issues; educators made efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents, primarily by improving the achievement of students; school leaders created additional time for instruction.

Zarate, R., & Goodman, C. (1997, July). *Principal of national blue ribbon school says high poverty schools can excel. Intercultural Development Research Association, 24(6), 1-2, 9-12. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED410083)*

In 1993, Mary Hull Elementary in San Antonio was warned that if the scores on the TAAS tests did not improve the school would be shut down. Principal Roberto Zarate was brought in and he became dedicated to redefining the school overall. The school had become known as a remedial school, but Zarate worked with teachers and staff to make the curriculum more challenging and by having high expectations for the students. Zarate explained that the key to creating high expectations for students was to stop judging and stop making excuses. Other important criteria for student success Zarate suggested were: encourage teacher empowerment; send folders home to parents every day; and let teachers work together and take the lead.

Effective Leadership and Student Learning/Achievement

Bennet, N. (1998, April). *Creative leadership and the culture of effective schools: Evidence from English primary schools*. San Diego, CA: Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service NO. ED424679)

This paper referring to primary sources about effective schools identified two key dimensions of most effective schools as professional leadership and shared vision and goals. Bennet claimed the elements of leadership are a clear personal vision and the ability to make the rest of the organization feel they have a stake in this vision and want to contribute towards achieving it.

Bulach, C., Lunenburg, F. C., & McCallon, R. (1994, April). *The influence of the principal's leadership style climate and student achievement*. New Orleans, LA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED374506)

This study investigated the influence of leadership style on school climate and achievement in 20 Kentucky elementary schools. One of the assessment tools used was the Leadership Behavioral Matrix (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1978). This questionnaire categorized the principals' leadership styles as "Promoter," "Supporter," "Controller," or "Analyzer." There were no significant differences between leadership style and school climate and/or achievement. A reason for this outcome was that school climate and achievement both depend on so many other factors such as experience and maturity level of the staff. Although the results were not significant, the Promoter style of leadership had the highest achievement.

Johnson, S. (April, 1998). Telling all sides of the truth. *Educational Leadership*, 55(7), 12-15.

This two-year study addressed superintendent leadership and how it affects school effectiveness/achievement. The study surveyed 12 newly appointed superintendents, interviewed 300 school board members, principals and teachers. Supporting shared leadership and trust, and taking a "blended approach" were found to be successful practices.

Leithwood, K. (1995). *Effective school district leadership: Transforming politics into education*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

This book began by defining the superintendent's role as overwhelmingly a political one with his/her main concern necessarily focusing on stakeholder interests. These "politics" must be managed to reduce conflicts and are also bound to board policy, which can be unconnected to the provision of instructional services to students. Superintendents in 12 successful school districts were included in the study with the following results for their leadership characteristics: provided district direction in the areas of curriculum and instruction; provided leadership in ensuring consistency and coordination among technical case operations; monitored internal processes; and inspected outcomes.

Ovando, M. N., & Marek, S. (2000, November). *The role of the principal in achieving and sustaining academic success in high-poverty elementary schools*. Albuquerque, NM: Paper presented at the UCEA 2000 Convention.

In this study, the researchers investigated the leadership behaviors of three elementary principals in high poverty, high performing schools. The principals were interviewed using an open-ended interview protocol. In all the schools, the principals demonstrated the following behaviors: raise expectations of success for all students; foster collaboration; focus on curriculum and instruction; monitor and assess; increase communication with parents; involve parents; share power and responsibility; secure resources; plan staff development in context of the school; foster collegiality; and plan for change. For all principals, their actions and behaviors led to school success.

Reed, P., & Roberts, A. (1998, April). *An investigation of leadership in effective and noneffective urban schoolwide project schools*. San Diego, CA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED419885)

The purpose of this study was to determine if the nature of leadership in the Ohio Title I Schoolwide Project Schools deemed effective by the U.S. Department of Education differed from those not deemed effective. Specifically, the study was in line with Gardner's 1995 examination of the nature of leadership, which led him to conclude that effective leadership included both a technical and a symbolic dimension. This study explored ways to determine how effective Schoolwide Project Schools differed from ineffective project schools with respect to the extent to which the principals and the school as a whole evidenced a bifocal, symbolic, technical, or unfocused leadership orientation. All schools in the study had overall student enrollment of at least 75% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. Findings for effective schools included: evidence of clear achievement goals and high expectations for student achievement; high level of parent involvement; high level of shared decision making; and few union-related problems. Other dimensions of organizational effectiveness/goal attainment: adaptation (flexibility, innovation, growth and development); integration (satisfaction, employee turnover, conflict-cohesion, climate, open communication); and latency (staff loyalty, central life interests, sense of identity, motivation, role and norm congruency).

School Culture/Climate

Comer, J. P. (1992, Winter). Organize schools around child development. *Education Social Policy*, 28-30.

The author stated that students learn optimally when their developmental needs are being met. However, many teachers know little about child development, most schools are not organized or managed in a way to facilitate child development and parental involvement has focused on school accountability. Problem schools have students who fight, disrespect teachers, have difficulty concentrating, lack spontaneity and curiosity, and cannot get along with others. This journal article identified staff characteristics at these schools as: viewing students as "bad" or "not smart;" using punishment to try to control "bad" behavior; having low academic expectations for students; and utilizing a hierarchical or authoritarian organization and management of schools.

Goodson, I., CARE, & Foote, M. (2001, January). *Testing times: A school case study*. Rochester, NY: Education Policy Analysis Archives. (ISSN 1068-2341)

This article followed the struggles of a high achieving, non-traditional school that was fighting against standardized testing. This school was very diverse, yet prided itself on high success rates, high college acceptance rates, and low dropout rates. According to this report, parents, teachers, and students felt the school was a family/community due to the close relationship between everyone involved. The school demanding accountability and assessing knowledge has given it the privilege of graduating 20 percent more at-risk students per year than other city schools. Because of the school's unique vision and record of success, the Durant School decided to fight against having standardized tests implemented. The family style feel of this school allowed a coalition to develop and rally for the school's rights and received results.

Hansen, M., & Childs, J. (September, 1998). Creating a school where people like to be. *Educational Leadership*, 56(1), 14-17.

Schools where people like to be were identified by these characteristics: students are shown respect; school provides a safe environment; offers a place of belonging and a feeling of security; has open spaces and interesting/beautiful objects in environment to set the tone; consciously-established policies that encourage and permit rather than restrict or direct; all students are encouraged to participate; students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behavior and participate in school governance; teachers are valued; and outside resources are tapped.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R., Stevahn, L., & Hodne, P. (1997, October). The 3 C's of safe schools. *Educational Leadership*, 55(2) 8-13.

This case study of Highlands Elementary School, a successful school in Edina, Minnesota, identified the "3 C's" as cooperation, conflict resolution and civic values.

Highlands nurtured students physically and psychologically and promoted well being of faculty and staff. Before students enter kindergarten, parents must choose either continuous progress classroom or a discovery classroom. The continuous progress classrooms are multi-age, with first through fifth graders (approximately 54 students) forming a family. Discovery classrooms are single grade, self contained and use thematic instruction. Both use cooperation, conflict resolution and civic values to create a healthy learning environment for the students.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

This book explored possibilities for caring schools, which nurture students and allow them to help guide the curriculum and govern their own classrooms. Some of the suggestions to develop these schools included getting rid of competitive grading; reducing testing and using a few well-designed tests to assess whether people can handle the tasks they want to undertake competently; involving students in governing their own classrooms and schools; and accepting the challenge to care by teaching well the things students want to learn.

O'Neil, J. (1997, May). *Building schools: A conversation with James Comer*. *Educational Leadership*, 54(8), 12-18.

In this personal interview, James Comer discussed the role of measuring intelligence in schools. He believed the literature indicates that intelligence components must include cognitive, affective/emotional and expressive. When schools are influenced by only the demand to produce high test scores, they are overemphasizing the cognitive and assuming that we can adequately measure it. According to Mr. Comer, schools that aren't working have these general characteristics: poor school climate, mechanical model of teaching, teachers trying to "control" behavior of students, and few student support systems.

Peterson, K. (1998, September). *How leaders influence the culture of schools*. *Educational Leadership*, 56(1), 28-30.

The article identified two areas of interest: positive school cultures and the role of school leaders. Positive school cultures usually possess a staff that has a shared sense of purpose, and underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement and hard work, rituals and traditions celebrate student accomplishments, teacher innovation and parental commitment, an informal network of storytellers, heroes and heroines providing a social web of information, support and history, and success. The role of a school leader includes communicating core values in what they say and do, honoring and recognizing those who have worked to serve students and the purpose of the school, observing rituals and traditions to support the school's heart and soul, recognizing heroes and heroines and the work they accomplish, speaking eloquently of the school mission, celebrating accomplishments of staff, students and community, and preserving focus on success and achievement.

Pianta, R., & Walsh, D. (1996). *High risk children in schools: Constructing sustaining relationships*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book explained the need for the Contextual Systems Model (CSM) in schools, which addressed the theoretical perspective for understanding the contemporary realities in which schooling and children are imbedded. This model emphasized systems as contexts for development, and the authors argued that this approach is especially germane for present-day schools. Chapter III entitled *The Invidious Triangle* described a system that identifies and attaches blame for the lack of student success in our schools. The blame for the failure is either placed with the home or community environment, the school, or the child hi/herself. The authors proposed that systems, such as schools that work to educate children, must understand them and enter into *meaningful* conversation with children for this source of understanding.

Pianta, R., & Walsh, D. (1998). Applying the construct of resilience in schools: Cautions from a developmental systems perspective. *School Psychology Review*, 27(3), 407- 417.

The goal of this journal article was to address some of the conceptual problems underlying efforts to promote resilience and advance a set of broad principles, based on systems theory, that hold promise for school-based approaches to stemming risk. The term "resilience" focuses more on individuals and the "effective school movement" focuses more on the schools. Warnings that multiple systems are at work in the world of the resilient student including the child itself, family and schools were presented.

Pool, C. (1997, December). A safe and caring place. *Educational Leadership*, 55(4), 73-77.

The main emphasis in this article identified quality schools. All of these schools possessed the following characteristics: These schools used developmentally appropriate practices with young children, enabled and encouraged parent and community involvement, provided for health and nutritional needs of children, provided connections and easy referrals to social services, offered low student/teacher ratios, and provided safe and secure settings.

Reynolds, D., Bollen, R., Creemers, B., Hopkins, D., Stoll, L., & Lagerwiij, N. (1996). *Making good schools: Linking school effectiveness and school improvement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book addressed school effectiveness and school improvement. It defined school effectiveness as fulfilling its objectives using the appropriate resources without putting undue stress on those involved in the system. School improvement was defined as attaining educational goals through a systematic, sustained effort striving to change learning or environmental conditions. Curriculum, teacher professionalism, strong

educational leadership, and school culture were identified as keys to both school effectiveness and improvement.

Rossi, R. (Ed.). (1994). *Schools and students at risk: Context and framework for positive change*. Teacher College Press: New York.

The American Institute for Research (AIR) and John Hopkins Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students conducted a study of at risk students funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement within the U.S. Department of Education. This study developed a model for understanding academic success, which firmly grounds and takes into consideration the students in their societies, communities and home environments.

Scherer, M. (1998, September). A conversation with Herb Kohl. *Educational Leadership*, 56(1), 8-13.

This article summarized an interview with Herb Kohl, the founder of the Open School Movement. It provided descriptions of ways to create a positive classroom environment in a dysfunctional, poverty-ridden urban school district, a place where kids feel they belong and where they learn to love learning. The article described schools where teachers and staff respect students, school environments provide beautiful things as provocation, every kid is literate in math, technology, literature and language and real-world events are explored.

Wang, M., Huertel, G., & Walberg, H. (1998, April). Models of reform: A comparative guide. *Educational Leadership*, 55(5) 66-70.

This article summarized the similarities and defining features of twelve research-based programs considered effective in U.S. schools. Each of the twelve has been used for at least five years and in at least fifty schools or with a minimum of three thousand students. All of the twelve focused on these two categories: comprehensive (focus on school governance and organization) or curricular (emphasize content in one or more academic disciplines). The four commonalities of these programs were identified as use of research-based practices, increased professional role of teachers, improved culture and climate of schools, and family and community involvement.

Teacher Efficacy/Teacher Quality and Student Achievement

Darling-Hammond, L. (1998, February). Teacher learning that supports student learning. *Educational Leadership*, 55(5), 6-12.

This article discussed those things that teachers need to know, understand, or be able to do to enhance successful student learning. It is important for teachers to have extensive knowledge of the subject matter, connections across fields, child/adolescent development, curriculum and technology resources, and reflect on teaching practices and assess the

effects of their teaching. Pre/post teacher evaluations rated students significantly improved on measures of learning problems and task orientation.

Edwards, J. L., Green, K. E., & Lyons, C. A. (1996, April). *Teacher efficacy and school and teacher characteristics*. Denver, CO: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED397055)

The researchers studied 430 teachers who taught grades K-12. Of these teachers, 83 percent of them taught at the elementary level. Findings showed that teacher efficacy was significantly correlated with empowerment, conceptual level, and school culture (which includes teacher professionalism, goal setting, administrator professional treatment of teachers, and teacher collaboration). Personal teaching efficacy was related to treatment by administrators, perceived potency, and values. School administrators had the highest level of personal teaching efficacy. Schools with positive environments were shown to have teachers with higher efficacy. School organization factors that led to higher teacher efficacy were listed as: teachers working with mentors, faculty working together to make instructional decisions, when teachers know what the teachers in grades above and below them expect, and when teachers work together to coordinate curriculum.

Hipp, K. A. (1996). *Teacher efficacy: Influence of principal leadership behavior*. New York, NY: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED396409)

This study focused on the relationship between principal leadership style and teacher efficacy in two samples of Wisconsin middle schools. Phase one of the research surveyed 10 principals and 280 teachers, and phase two surveyed 10 principals and 34 teachers. Both principals and teachers were given a personal data sheet and the Nature of Leadership Survey (Leithwood, 1993) and teachers were given the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). "Model behaviors" and "provided contingent rewards" were significantly related to personal teaching efficacy and those along with "inspires group purpose" were significantly related to general teaching efficacy. A significant difference was found between general teacher efficacy ("What I think *we* can do.") and personal teacher efficacy ("What I think *I* can do."), as defined by Hoy and Woolfolk (1993). The study explained that in schools with high teacher efficacy, there was a sense of "family spirit" and community.

Moore, W. P., & Esselman, M. E. (1992, April). *Teacher efficacy, empowerment, and a focused instructional climate: Does student achievement benefit?* San Francisco, CA: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED350252)

In this study, researchers measured the perceptions of 1,802 Kansas City teachers on teacher efficacy, teacher empowerment, teachers' "perceived influence of teachers in

important decision-making activities,” (p. 5) and school climate. Of their many findings some of the most relevant were that personal and teaching efficacy are inversely related, positive school climate is due to the lack of disruptions and collegiality among teachers, and strongly related to classroom and whole school decision making ability. It is important for teachers to feel they have some kind of input into decision making, even if their position does not give them official decision-making power.

Moore, W. P., & Esselman, M. E. (1994, April). *Exploring the context of teacher efficacy: The role of achievement and climate*. New Orleans, LA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED370919)

The study focused on approximately 1,500 elementary school teachers and hypothesized that both teacher and personal efficacy were influenced by a combination of student achievement and work context variables such as school climate, teacher power, staff collegiality, and instruction impediments. The hypothesis was supported. Classroom-based decision-making authority was correlated with higher personal efficacy—that is, whether the individual teacher feels he/she can make a difference. These factors and also historical achievement performance was an indicator of teacher efficacy—whether teachers believe that children can learn and teaching as a profession can affect this outcome. Schools should improve instructional focus and climate, remove unwarranted interruptions and paperwork, and give teachers the ability to be more in control of instructional decisions. Schools with historically poor achievement tend to have teachers with lower efficacy. The study also mentions that teacher efficacy begins to decline sometime after the tenth year of teaching.

Schlosser, L. K. (1992). *Teacher distance and student disengagement: School lives on the margin*. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2), 128-140.

The study looked at 31 potential dropouts over a two-year period. Students reported that the most successful teachers helped to engage them through knowledge about the students' background and culture (getting to know students on a personal level) and knowledge about adolescents' developing needs and the role of education. Marginal students reported little interaction with their teachers with the exception of addressing misbehavior. These students were rarely held accountable for doing their work and participating in class. Teachers reported that these students hid from classroom interaction. Most of these students found it difficult to name a teacher they could go to for help with a problem. Students' behaviors are often a reflection of their interpretation of school life, and that is why it is important that this is a positive perception.

Diversity of Student Population and Achievement

Borman, G. D., Stringfield, S., & Rachuba, L. (1998). *Advanced minority high achievement: National trends and promising programs and practices.* Baltimore, MD: National Task Force on Minority High Achievement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED438380)

This document reported the previous results in studies looking at the advancing achievements of minority elementary students. It analyzed whole-school reform designs that contributed to their advancement. It also looked at individual, classroom, and school characteristics that identified successful minority students. This paper suggested that characteristics of peers, school resources, and school climate were school level variables for success for minority and low SES children. African Americans attending high poverty schools with "whole school reform designs" (p.115) learned at a faster rate than similar students in schools without these designs.

Council on Diversity in Extension. (1991, August). *Valuing differences and celebrating diversity.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED357224) Washington, DC: Author.

The council members stressed the importance for all organizations, both public and private, to emphasize diversity. Emphasizing diversity is key because it is important to develop an environment (which can be educational, but they are mainly referring to business) where everyone is valued, integrity is established, and issues are addressed that are relevant to all people. An organizational mindset that is courageous and not judgmental must be established. Council members report that valuing diversity does not mean attending one or two training sessions—it is a long process that requires long-term commitment. People need to be empowered so they can deal with the differences between people. Schools should develop a clear goal, perhaps "pluralism"—the valuing of diversity.

Resilience and Poverty Statistics

Cowen, E., Wyman, P., Work, W., & Iker, M. (1995). A preventive intervention for enhancing resilience among highly stressed urban children. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 15*(3), 247-259.

This study identified five variables that predicted group membership for either resilient or non-resilient children, including global self-worth, empathy, realistic control attributions, social problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. Highly stressed urban children participated in twelve sessions of a small-group preventive intervention designed to enhance the child's ability to recognize and express feelings, solve problems, differentiate between solvable and non-solvable problems, and self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Doll, B. & Lyon, M. (1998). Risk and Resilience: Implications for the delivery of educational and mental health services in schools. *School Psychology Review*, 27(3), 348-363.

Researchers identified Title I and the Head Start Program as best programs to overcome ill effects of poverty, family dysfunction, abuse and other adverse living conditions. These programs foster resilience through well-designed prevention programs. Individual characteristics of resilient students were identified and included good intellectual ability, language competence, positive temperament, positive social orientation, high self-efficacy, high expectations, and high rate of enjoyment in productive activities. Family-related characteristics included close relationships with at least one caregiver and access to extended family. School/community characteristics that foster resilience were identified as access to positive adult role models, connection to pro-social organizations (at least one), and access to responsive, high quality schools.

Milstein, M., & Henry, D. (2000). *Spreading resiliency: Making it happen for schools and communities*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Corwin Press.

This book defined resiliency and described the following environmental protective factors (from family, school, and peers) that contribute to it: promoting close bonds; valuing and encouraging education; having a high worth and low criticism style of interaction; setting and enforcing clear boundaries; encouraging supportive relationships with many caring others; promoting service to others; providing access to meeting basic needs; having high but realistic expectations for success, goal setting and mastery; having pro-social development of values; providing leadership and decision-making; and appreciating unique talents of individuals.

National Committee on Education, Paul Hamlyn Foundation. (1996). *Success against the odds: Effective schools in disadvantaged areas*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The British National Commission on Education identified eleven schools that have succeeded against the odds. The study found the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged was widening in regard to school achievement. Also, social class accounted for differences on SAT (Standards of Assessment Tasks) for 7-year-olds. The differences between disadvantage and educational disadvantage were discussed.

Olson, L. (2000). High poverty among young makes schools' job harder. *Education Week*, 20(4), 40-41.

This article provided recent statistics on child poverty in the United States. Child poverty has declined since 1993; however, 19% (13.3 million) of this country's children still live below the poverty line which was \$16,600 per year for a family of four in 1998. Larry Aber of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University, says there were three factors for the decrease in child poverty: a robust economy, more parents were working, and lower wage jobs were now paying better because of federal earned income

tax credit. Parents were leaving welfare; however, they were still below the poverty line and many of them were outside urban areas. Single parent families, low education levels, and part-time or no employment were the top contributing factors for lower SES. Concentrated poverty in schools was associated with lower achievement for both lower and higher SES children who attended such schools. Teachers in these schools tended to be newer and less experienced and less prepared.

Skinner, E., & Wellborn, J. (1997) Children's coping in the academic domain. In Wolchik, & Sandler (Eds.), *Handbook of children's coping: Linking theory and intervention* (pp. 387-422). New York: Plenum Press.

This article contained a description and discussion of academic coping, which was defined as how children interpret and react to academic challenges, setbacks and difficulties. One major role of the school was defined as developing student mastery versus helplessness. Children identified school activities/events as one of the top three causes of stress in their lives.

Whitaker, T., & Fiore, D. J. (2001). *Dealing with difficult parents and with parents in difficult situations*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

In their recent book, the authors discussed up-to-date poverty statistics. The authors cited that 14.5 million of this country's children still live below the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999).

Zimmerman, M., & Arunkumar, R. (1994). Resiliency research: Implications for schools and policy. *Social Policy Report: Society for Research in Child Development*, 8(4), 1-19.

One purpose of this study was to illustrate how schools promote resiliency. Data collection included life-events questionnaire, teacher ratings, peer assessments, school record data and parent interviews. The total amount of risk was measured against risk factors. Results concluded that school environments could increase the child's risk or protect them from the debilitating consequences of risk factors: school size, absenteeism, drop out, grades, and school bonding. School protective factors included promotion of self-esteem and self-efficacy by providing opportunities for students to experience success and develop social and problem-solving skills. Other school environments identified and explored were task-oriented schools versus competitive-oriented schools.

APPENDIX B
Interview Protocols



Administrators: Individual Interview Guide

- 1) **Grand-tour** (reconstruct *significant segment* of experience)
 - Tell me what a visitor would see or experience when walking through your school for a day for the first time.
 - What would a typical day for a student in your school look like?
 - How do you define 'student success' at your school?
 - Would parents want their child to come to this school? Why or why not?
 - Would a student want to come to this school each day? Explain.
 - What do you expect from students? Teachers? Staff? Parents?
 - What is the mission of this school in your own words?
 - How would you describe the climate of the school?
 -
- 2) **Mini-tour** (details of more *limited time span* or of *particular experience*)
 - Tell me about the teaching in this school.
 - What kinds of supports are available for student learning?
 - What role do parents play in student learning in this school?
 - Are there any traditions that are important to your school's culture? If so, what are they?
 - Are there particular programs, or clubs, or events that happen at this school? Tell me about them.
 - Have any changes occurred at the school that have made it a better place? Tell me about them.
 - Have any changes occurred at the school that have made it a worse place? Tell me about these.
 - What would you identify as the top (three) keys to student success in your school?
 - What is the school's relationship to the community?
 - Is there a mission statement for the school? If so, what is it?
 - From your view as an administrator, tell me about the SOLs.
 - Are teachers prepared to teach the SOLs? How?
 - How adequately are teachers at this school teaching the SOLs? Is it the same for all the subjects?
 - Do students learn anything else besides the SOLs? Tell me about this.
 - Are the teachers helping students prepare for the SOL tests? What is occurring?
 - Tell me what it's like for students during the weeks before testing.
 - What goes on in classroom or in the school after testing is finished?
 - Has the school climate changed as a result of the SOLs? If so, how?
- 3) **Experience**
 - How would you describe your role in the school?
 - How would others describe your leadership?
 - When you visit or observe in a classroom in this school, what are some examples of what you notice?
 - Are students important in this school? if so, how?

- Do the teachers and other school staff like children? How do you know?
- Do the adults at this school work well together? Can you tell me about this?
- What is the teachers' role? Students? Parents? Community?

Teachers: Individual Interviews

- 1) **Grand-tour** (reconstruct *significant segment* of experience)
 - Tell me what a visitor would see or experience when walking through your school for a day for the first time.
 - What would a typical day for a student in your school look like?
 - How do you define 'student success' in your classroom? at your school?
 - Would parents want their child in your classroom? in this school? Tell me about this.
 - Would a student want to come to your class each day? school? explain.
 - What kinds of expectations do you hold for students? Administrators? Parents?
 - What is the mission of this school in your own words?
 - Describe the climate in your classroom. In your school.

- 2) **Mini-tour** (reconstruct details of a more *limited time span* or of *particular experience*)
 - Tell me about the teaching in this school.
 - What expectations do you have for student learning in your classroom?
 - Are all students expected to learn the same things? Explain.
 - Are there any traditions that are important to your school's culture?
 - Are there particular programs, or clubs, or events that happen at this school? Tell me about them.
 - Have any changes occurred at the school that have made it a better place? Tell me about them.
 - Have any changes occurred at the school that have made it a worse place? Tell me about these.
 - What would you identify as the top three keys to student success in your school?
 - What kinds of supports are available for student learning?
 - How is leadership provided in this school? by whom?
 - How would you describe your principal's leadership?
 - What is the school's relationship to the community?
 - Is there a mission statement for the school? If so, what is it?
 - From your view as a teacher, tell me about the SOLs.
 - Are teachers prepared to teach the SOLs? How?
 - How adequately do you feel you are teaching the SOLs? Is it the same for all the subjects?
 - How adequately do you feel other teachers in your school are teaching the SOLs? Is it the same for all the subjects?
 - Do students learn anything else besides the SOLs in your classroom? In other classrooms? Tell me about this.
 - What do you do to prepare students for the SOL tests?
 - Tell me what it's like for students during the weeks before testing.
 - What goes on in your classroom after testing is finished? in the school?
 - Has the school climate changed as a result of the SOLs? If so, how?

3) Experience

- How would you describe your role as a teacher in the school?
- What is it like for you to come to work each day?
- Are students important in your classroom? In this school? if so, how?
- Do students get to help make the rules in the classroom or in the school? explain.
- Do you have a voice as a teacher at this school? Tell me about this.
- Do the teachers and other school staff like children? Describe this.
- Do the adults at this school work well together? How can you tell?
- What is the students' role in this school? Principals'? Parents'? Community's?

Parents: Focus Group Interview Guide

- 1) **Grand-tour** (reconstruct *significant segment* of experience)
 - Tell me what you often see or experience when walking through your child's school.
 - What would a typical day for a student in this school look like?
 - How does this school define 'student success'?
 - Does your child want to come to school each day? Why or why not?
 - What reasons might parents give for wanting their child to attend another school? This school?
 - Does anyone at this school have high expectations for students? Tell us about this.
 - How would you describe the mission of this school in your own words?
 - What is the climate like in this school?

- 2) **Mini-tour** (details of more *limited time span* or of *particular experience*)
 - Tell me about the teaching in this school.
 - Are there any traditions that are important to this school's culture? Tell me about them.
 - Are there particular programs, or clubs, or events that happen at this school? Tell me about them.
 - If one or two key things were to change in the school that would have a negative impact on student learning, what would those be?
 - What would you identify as the top three keys to student success in this school?
 - What kinds of supports are available for student learning?
 - How is leadership provided in this school? By whom?
 - How would you describe the principal's leadership?
 - What is the school's relationship with the community?
 - Do you know if the school has a mission statement? If so, tell us about it.
 - From your view as a parent, tell me about the SOLs.
 - Has the school helped you feel comfortable with SOL testing? Tell me about this.
 - How do you feel the teachers are doing with teaching the SOLs? Is it the same for all the subjects?
 - Does your child learn anything else besides the SOLs? Tell me about this.
 - Are the teachers helping students prepare for the SOL tests? What do you see?
 - Tell me what it's like for your child during the weeks before testing.
 - What goes on in your child's classroom or in the school after testing is finished?
 - Have any changes at this school made it a better place? Tell me about them.
 - Have any changes made it a worse place? Tell me about them.

- 3) **Experience**
 - How would you describe your role as a parent in this school?
 - Are students important in this school? if so, how?
 - Do you have a voice as a parent at this school? Tell me about this.
 - Do the teachers and other school staff like children? Describe this.

- Do the adults at this school work well together? How can you tell?
- Do you feel welcome at this school? Tell me about this.
- What is the teachers' role? Students? Principals? Community?